

Manner

When debaters refer to “matter” and “manner,” they might be said to be speaking of “substance and style” or “what you say and how you say it.” “Matter” refers to the content of your speech—evidence and argumentation. “Manner” refers to the style of delivery and those parts of the content that exist purely to keep the listener engaged or entertained. In many competitions and some formats, the belief has grown that speeches should be judged primarily or exclusively on matter. Such an approach is neither possible nor desirable. Even were it feasible to ignore style, it is questionable whether debate, which ultimately assesses the skills of a persuasive communicator, would benefit from doing so.

This chapter examines the fundamentals of style and delivery. It first looks at the basics of style and then discusses how you can develop your own approach to speechcraft and establish a style that is your own.

The Absolute Basics

On the most basic level, a speaker must be audible and must keep her audience interested. She must employ a dynamic style—varying volume, pitch, and speed, and using nonverbal language—to help her audience focus on and accept her ideas. If the audience or adjudicators can’t hear the speaker, or her face is hidden behind notes, or she speaks in a monotone with no variation in pitch or tone, it’s very unlikely that anyone will follow what she says. A speech that can’t be followed is very unlikely to win.

AUDIBILITY

Usually, speakers are inaudible for two reasons: nervousness and a failure to look at the audience. Everybody is apt to mumble when they are nervous, which frequently results