

in looking down and speaking to the floor or desk. Often, novice speakers deliver their speeches with hands spread on the desk in front of them, neck bowed, and eyes fixed intently on their notes. Or a debater will stand with notes gripped like a lifeline in one hand, held about six inches away from her face—blocking both her face and her voice.

In either of these situations, it is virtually impossible for anybody to take more than an educated guess about what the speaker is saying. Everyone lip reads more than you might imagine, and if a speaker's lips aren't visible, the audience has a very hard time following her words. Equally, if a speaker's face is pointed toward a desk or into notes, that's where the sound will end up.

Your nervousness will subside as you become more comfortable with debating, but you can also use the following tips to ensure that you are heard:

- *Stand properly.* Stand straight with your feet a little apart, toes pointing out slightly, and your shoulders back. Your body should feel comfortably balanced. This posture automatically improves your breathing and, as a result, increases the volume at which you speak. It also conveys to both the audience and you the sense that you are in charge. If you have a lectern, hold on to it; it will force you to stand upright. Once in this posture, **STAY THERE**. Shuffling back and forth is incredibly distracting for anyone trying to follow a speaker's argument.
- *Maintain eye contact.* This serves two functions. First, an adjudicator or audience member is far more likely to trust what you say if you look him in the eye than if you are shuffling around and staring at the floor or out the window. Second, if you are looking at the audience, your neck is straight so the air passes more freely over the vocal cords and resonates with more force through the jaw and front of the skull, where most of the volume in speech comes from.

If the prospect of eye contact with your listeners makes you more nervous still, look just slightly over their heads. Chances are that the adjudicator will spend most of her time buried in her notes, and, if you are at least looking and speaking out into the room, she'll tend to assume that she just missed the eye contact when she glances up.

- *Breathe properly.* Even in a world of small rooms and microphones, breath control is a useful skill that enables you to project your words loudly and clearly. Breathing so that your lungs are in full use and your words fall evenly into place gives an air of authority to what you say. Take time to practice controlling your lung capacity and the physical structures behind your voice. It will pay huge dividends in terms of your ability to command a room and modulate your voice.