

VOLUME, PITCH, AND SPEED

As well as being audible, an effective speaker needs to be comfortable to follow. When any of us have a conversation, our voices change in volume, pitch, and speed. The same should apply to a speech. It's often tempting to fill every second with breathless noise, frequently delivered in a "I AM DELIVERING A SPEECH AND I WILL NOT PUNCTUATE IT WITH ANY PAUSES OR CHANGES IN TONE AND WILL JUST CARRY ON LIKE THIS REGARDLESS OF WHAT I AM TRYING TO SAY EVERYTHING WILL BE DELIVERED IN THE SAME WAY BECAUSE THIS IS A SPEECH AND THIS IS HOW I MUST SPEAK AND THERE CAN BE NO POSSIBLE CHANGE IN WHAT I AM SAYING BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT AND IF I CAN JUST GET THROUGH THIS THEN OH MY GOD WHY ISN'T THE TIME FINISHED YET CAN I CARRY THIS ON FOR ANOTHER THREE MINUTES I DON'T KNOW MAYBE I CAN SHOULD I SAY THAT AGAIN IS ANYONE LISTENING TO WHAT I'M SAYING" tone. But that is extremely difficult to follow.

Good debaters vary their volume, pitch, and speed to help the audience follow what's being said. We often think that we have to speak more loudly to stress a point, but speaking softly is just as effective, particularly if you are trying to convey emotion. Use a lower pitch for a calm, authoritative tone, and a higher pitch to indicate excitement or concern. Vary your speed. Slow down for important material, but remember not to speak too slowly or too quickly—too slow and you might not have time for all your arguments, too quick and the audience may not understand you.

BODY LANGUAGE

You speak as a whole being, not a disembodied voice. Consequently, body movements are important. Careful gestures can help you express what you are saying. For example, you might lean toward your audience to make an important point. Don't stand rigidly still. An open, relaxed position and slow, deliberate movements will convey that you are calm and in control. You can move slightly, but don't pace up and down the room. This can drive the audience to distraction.

Finally, your facial expression conveys the clarity of your thoughts just as much as your words. A look of blind panic will do little to infuse your audience with the sense that you know what you're talking about. Even if you're panicking inside, affecting an outward appearance of being in control will result both in giving your audience confidence and settling your own nerves. Once again, forcing yourself to take slow, steady breaths will act both to calm you physically and will also allow you to appear calmer still.