

Project 4 - How to Say It

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Words are powerful. They convey your message and influence the audience and its perception of you. Word choice and arrangement need just as much attention as speech organization and purpose. Select clear, accurate, descriptive and short words that best communicate your ideas and arrange them effectively and correctly. Every word should add value, meaning and punch to the speech.

OBJECTIVES:

- Select the right words and sentence structure to communicate your ideas clearly, accurately and vividly.
- Use rhetorical devices to enhance and emphasize ideas.
- Eliminate jargon and unnecessary words. Use correct grammar.

Time: Five to seven minutes

A clear purpose and effective organization are the foundations of any speech. However, your presentation's success ultimately depends on the words you use and how you place them together. Words are powerful; they communicate your message and affect how the audience perceives you and your message. Clear, simple, vivid and forceful words add excitement to your presentation, stimulate the audience and communicate a specific message, while good grammar and proper pronunciation give you credibility. If you have a good command of language, your presentations will sparkle with energy and you'll have great influence on your listeners.

Write for the Ear

When you don't understand a section of a book or magazine article, you can read it again and again until the meaning is clear to you. When you speak, your listeners don't have this luxury. What you say must be immediately clear to your audience. For this reason, spoken language is much less formal and more repetitious than written language. Repetition and simple, clear language help listeners remember certain points. If you want listeners to understand and accept you, be sure to speak the same way they speak, using familiar words and concepts. Construct your speech in an oral style, using:

- **Short words.** Some people believe they impress others when *they* use long, convoluted words. In speaking, the most effective and memorable words are short - usually comprised of only one syllable. Short words are easier for listeners to follow and remember. Review your speech draft and count the number of syllables in each word. If most have three, four, five or more syllables, your audience may have difficulty understanding your message. This doesn't mean every word you use should have one syllable - only that most of your words should.
- **Short sentences.** Shorter sentences are easier for a speaker to say, easier for the audience to understand, and they have more power and impact. However, a speech made up entirely of short sentences is boring and tedious to hear. Use longer sentences periodically to add variety, but make sure the audience can easily follow them. To tell if a sentence is too complex, look for commas. More than one or two commas indicate the sentence structure is too complicated.
- **Short paragraphs.** A paragraph develops one idea or thought. When you limit your paragraphs to a few sentences, your audience will more readily follow your logic. Pausing between paragraphs also gives your listeners time to "digest" what you've said.

Be Specific

Some words are general and have a number of meanings. You want to use concrete, specific words that communicate exactly what you mean.

If you said, "Andrew has a large collection of letter openers," one person may think Andrew has 10 letter openers in his collection, while another may think he has more than 100. If you said, "This suit is cheap," you could mean that the suit is inexpensive, affordable or poorly made. Depending on a person's viewpoint, the statement "Francois ate a nice dinner" could mean that Francois dined on a hamburger or on filet mignon. *Criminal* could mean a pickpocket, bank robber, embezzler or murderer. Words like *liberal* and *conservative* may have a different meaning for every person in your audience. As you prepare your speech, select words that leave no opportunity for misunderstanding.

Many words carry special associations or suggestions beyond their dictionary meanings. This is called *connotation*. The dictionary definition of a dog is "any of a large and varied group of domesticated animals related to the fox, wolf and jackal" and literally has no emotional value associated with it. However, a woman who has been bitten by a dog may attach fear and pain to the word *dog*, while a little boy with a beloved puppy may attach affection to the word. The words you choose should give listeners the connotations you wish to convey.

Vivid Words

The words in your speech should appeal to the senses, helping the audience to see, hear, feel, taste and smell. They should stir the audience's imagination and be so descriptive that the audience can visualize what you are saying. Instead of stating, "Alice's feet hurt as she walked to town" say, "As Alice trudged along the dirt road to town, she grimaced in pain as the blisters on her aching feet swelled." Instead of saying, "This proposal will result in more money for our school" say, "This proposal will boost the school's income by \$20,000, enough to buy new textbooks and classroom supplies for the next year."

Select verbs carefully. Verbs conveying action add power to your presentation. As you write your speech, use verbs that have energy. *Shake, roll* and *wiggle* have more energy than *move*. *Bellow, shout, whisper, scream* or *whine* could replace *speak*. *Hobble, creep* and *trudge* could be used instead of *walk*.

Use active voice. In the English language, sentences have a voice. This voice is defined by the verb in the sentence. The verb indicates whether the subject performs the action. In the active voice, the subject does something. "The club elected Marion president"; "We reviewed the programs." The active voice clearly states who is doing what. In the passive voice, something is done to the subject. "Marion was elected president by the club"; "The programs were reviewed by us." The active voice uses fewer words, is easier to follow and sounds more lively and interesting.

The verbs *is, are, was* and *were* weaken your message because they don't show action. Instead of saying, "There are two remaining proposals, say "Two proposals remain:" "Restricting automobile traffic in our parks is a way to protect the trees and wildlife" can be changed to "We can protect the trees and wildlife in our parks by restricting automobile traffic." "It is a fact that Barbara is a candidate" can be changed to "Barbara announced her candidacy."

Incorporate Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are special ways of arranging words to make an idea or thought sound more pleasing and easier for listeners to remember. Some of the more effective devices are:

- **Simile.** A simile is a comparison that uses the words *like* or *as*. "If we deny our children an education, ignorance will grow like a cancer."
- **Metaphor.** A metaphor merely implies the comparison. "Ignorance is a cancer that must be cured."
- **Alliteration.** In alliteration, the initial sounds in words or in stressed syllables within the words are repeated in a pleasing or memorable manner: "Unnoticed and unused," "hallowed halls," "protect and preserve peace."
- **Triads.** Ideas, adjectives and points are grouped in threes. Expressed in threes, thoughts have a pleasant rhythm, are dramatic, and become more memorable. "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

Use Words Economically

Strive to say a lot in as few words as possible. Many words are unnecessary or are used as "fillers," and they detract from and dilute your message. For example, phrases such as *as you know, needless to say, it has been shown that* can be eliminated. Replace clichés such as *tried and true* and *quick as a flash* with more appropriate, descriptive words or phrases.

Other phrases can be reduced to one or two words. *A large number of* can be reduced to *many*. *At the present time* can become *now*, and *in the event of* can become *if*. *Conduct an investigation of* can be reduced to *investigate*; *take into consideration* can be changed to *consider*, *exhibits a tendency* can become *tends*; *in view of the fact* can be reduced to *because*.

Pay attention to redundant words, too, such as *sum total, joint collaboration, future plans, unexpected surprise* and *new record*. The extra words have no meaning or value.

Watch for Jargon

Perhaps you have heard speakers use sports terms as they talk about business or politics, or incorporate business words in a speech about art or theater. Use specialized terminology only when speaking to people familiar with those terms. Some buzz words can be considered jargon even though they are not related to a specific profession. Following are some of these words and the more acceptable ones to use instead:

<u>JARGON</u>	<u>BETTER</u>
<i>conceptualize</i>	<i>imagine</i>
<i>downsizing</i>	<i>laying off</i>
<i>finalize</i>	<i>finish</i>
<i>implement</i>	<i>begin, use</i>
<i>infrastructure</i>	<i>framework</i>
<i>interface</i>	<i>talk with</i>
<i>operational</i>	<i>working</i>
<i>output</i>	<i>results</i>
<i>parameters</i>	<i>limits</i>
<i>strategize</i>	<i>plan</i>
<i>utilization</i>	<i>use</i>
<i>viable</i>	<i>possible</i>

Say It Correctly

Grammar and word pronunciation are major factors in your ability to influence your audience. Audiences see good grammar and pronunciation as indicators of a well-educated and credible person. Some common grammar problems are:

- **Subject/verb agreement.** A singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb. Lillian *runs* home. Lillian and Sean *run* home. One in five children *has* eyeglasses. Five children *have* eyeglasses. Statistics is a confusing subject. The statistics *are* not available.
- **Misplaced modifiers.** Keep related words together and in the order that communicates their intended meaning. "Arturo telephoned to talk about the meeting yesterday" and "Yesterday Arturo telephoned to talk about the meeting" have two different meanings simply because of the placement of one word. Similarly, "The child chased the sheep wearing the hat" gives listeners a different image than "The child wearing the hat chased the sheep."
- **Misused pronouns.** Use the correct pronoun in subjective and objective cases. "He and I raced through the course"; "The supervisor chose between him and me"; "A few of us employees rallied behind her"; "No one in the choir sings better than she."

Some people have difficulty pronouncing words such as *nuclear*, *statistics* and *aluminum*. Spell a problem word phonetically on paper and practice saying it. If you continue to have problems, replace the word with an appropriate substitute that still conveys your meaning. If you plan to say a foreign language name or expression, make sure you know the correct pronunciation and can say it smoothly.

Your Assignment

This project focuses on language. You are to:

- Select a topic that allows you to use vivid, descriptive words. Pay attention to the words you select and their arrangement. Your words should be so colorful that the audience can "see" them in their minds. Words should be clear, accurate, descriptive and as short as possible, and verbs should convey action.
- Keep sentence and paragraph construction simple and short.
- Use rhetorical devices to enhance and emphasize ideas.
- Eliminate jargon and unnecessary words and use correct grammar.

Your speech should incorporate what you learned in previous projects about purpose and organization and include appropriate suggestions from the evaluations you received. Review the Speaker's Checklist in Project 1 as you prepare your speech.

Evaluation Guide for *How to Say It*

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR: *The speaker is to use words and arrangements of words that effectively communicate his or her message to the audience. The speaker should select clear, accurate, descriptive and short words and choose verbs that convey action. Sentence and paragraph construction should be simple and short. The speaker needs to include rhetorical devices, avoid jargon and unnecessary words and use correct grammar. The speech must have a clear purpose and be appropriately organized. Please complete the evaluation form below by checking the appropriate column for each item.*

	EXCELLENT	SATISFACTORY	COULD IMPROVE	COMMENTS/ SUGGESTIONS
• Was the speech topic appropriate for this particular assignment?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use simple, short and clear words?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use vivid, descriptive words that created mental images?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use words that had more than one meaning or were inaccurate?	_____	_____	_____	
• Were the speaker's sentences short, simple and understandable?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use rhetorical devices to enhance his or her ideas?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker avoid jargon and unnecessary words?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use proper grammar and pronunciation?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was the speech purpose clear?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was the speech effectively organized?	_____	_____	_____	
• What could the speaker have done differently to make the speech more effective?				
• What did you like about the speech?				