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The Principles of Poor Speaking . . . *

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Contrary to popular opinion, it is fairly easy to write or to speak well. But writing poorly and speaking poorly are really difficult. To give these arts their proper due requires hard study. Many accomplished practitioners of poor speaking are not aware of their methods. It is time that poor speaking be given the systematic treatment it deserves.

The serious student of poor speaking can well afford to consider these first principles:

1. Make no preparation in advance.
2. Give the speech no order; let it ramble.
3. Avoid a conclusion.
4. Mumble your words and don't look directly at the audience.
5. Never analyze an audience and never evaluate your performance.

PLANS AND STRATEGY

Preparation is irksome and time-consuming. Therefore, don't prepare until the night before you are to deliver the speech. Better still, give your speech impromptu and do your preparing on the spur of the moment. A sensible plan is to give again a ten-year-old lecture without revision.

Never make a study of the kind of people in your audience, and don't adapt your speech to their intelligence or their interests. When you begin, don't bother to define any new technical terms. Throw out three of four new words at the start and give them unusual or unheard-of pronunciations. This will distinguish you as an erudite speaker.

In planning an introduction, don't attempt to narrow down the subject of your talk. Cover the whole field, giving the early and the recent history. Don't omit a detail. Ability to dissertate on the entire background will mark you as a person thoroughly familiar with the tradition of your subject.

Read your speech, it's far more scholarly; don't try to master its ideas in outline form—that's the surest way to keep your audience awake. Whenever you read from manuscript, don't read it aloud beforehand. This will enable you to speak with your nose close to the manuscript. If you do weaken and speak extempore with the use of notes, don't go through the speech in advance; above all, pay no attention to any set time limit. If you use up your allotted time in the introduction, you can always invade the time of the rest of the program. This adroit maneuver will serve to delay the proceedings, and it will certainly cause people to remember you as the speaker who was full and flowing over.

Modesty is old-fashioned, so use "I" frequently. The word "my" at the beginning of successive sentences always attracts attention.

Personal appearance has little relation to what an audience will think of you. Be sloppy in your dress, or be flashy, as you prefer. Stand directly behind the speaker's stand. Have the light adjusted so that it restricts the audience's view of you while speaking; then begin to mumble,

holding your head in an attitude of reverence.

GENERAL RULES OF COURTESY

Be late in arriving for the session and make enough commotion to attract notice when you enter. Be sure to shake hands with friends on the aisle while your predecessor is talking.

If a public-address system is available, avoid it. If one is not available, complain that you cannot speak decently without one; then proceed in a slow monotone. If you speak before a microphone and to a radio audience, let the audience before you go hang. Your outside audience is greater and, naturally, far more important.

As for tempo, or speaking rate, try to cultivate extremes of either 75 or 200 words a minute. Avoid 125 words per minute—it's a dull rate, and, if you should enunciate distinctly, you gamble on having your hearers understand individual words.

If you have a specific purpose, conceal it. When you use charts or diagrams, make them small and the lettering faint. Talk to the chart rather than to the audience. If you use slides or film strips, make certain that the projector does not function. This will allow you to make small sketches on the blackboard with your back to the audience while you talk in a low, confidential voice.

Writers of textbooks on speaking always harp on "conversational quality." It's a flat failure in poor speaking. To succeed, either talk to yourself or make an oration. Conversing directly with the audience is just another one of those impractical modern theories.

A sure-fire stratagem is to ensure some-how that your hearers are physically uncomfortable. If it is a warm day, see that the windows are kept closed, for poor ventilation lulls people into thinking (but not about what you are saying). Don't forget to arrange for strong lights in the audience's eyes. This is the same device used so successfully in the third degree. Again, have the folding chairs wedged so closely together that there is no room between persons. Don't ask those in the rear of the room to come forward—it's vital to keep the audience scattered.

Insult your listeners. Either explain theories with which they are already familiar or tell them they wouldn't understand if you did explain. After all, they can always read your book if they want real enlightenment.

Do not exert your lung power. If you wish to succeed, speak so that the man in the back row wishes he were in the front row, the man in the front row wishes he were on the platform, and the man in the middle of the room wishes he were back home. This is known as complete coverage.

If you know you have only five minutes left, triple your rate and get in every word. Don't

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lose a single sentence.

When the speech is over, forget it. Don't recall audience reaction during the speech. It is nobody's concern, except possibly your own, whether you made yourself clear or whether you persuaded anyone.

THE SPEECH

Use long and involved sentences throughout. Join clauses with *and*, *but* and *however* frequently. If your sentences run about fourteen words in length, you risk becoming downright perspicuous. Shape them into rounded periods like those of Edmund Burke and William Pitt. A sentence is scarcely worth uttering if it is less than 150 words long.

Stretch out the speech. Repeat your points. Present the same idea in any number of different ways. Then backtrack and start all over. Never organize your speech—it's too confining.

Avoid humor like the plague. If you tell stories or anecdotes or capitalize on amusing incidents of the meeting, you will be marked as an unlearned and unscientific person. Try to stupefy. Look dull and act the part. (It may take less effort than you think.)

Whenever possible use anticlimactic order. For making a reputation, there is nothing like letting down your listeners. Aristotle says that a speech should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. He was right about the first two parts, but the best poor speeches really have no end. Those who unload them just go on and on. The past masters cultivate the false, or pseudo, conclusion. You, too, can temporarily arouse your audience with such phrases as "In conclusion," "To summarize," "To conclude briefly," "Let me now restate," "I want again to recapitulate."

Don't leave any time for questions or discussion at the end of the talk. But if you are caught unawares, give one or two curt, flippant replies and sit down. Harp controversy, don't forget, becomes a speaker, and if anyone should disagree with you the weapons to use are sar-

casm, disregard of the main point, argument *ad hominem*, and some ill-natured questions of your own in return.

The best-known speakers have become personalities. Audiences seldom remember what they said. The moral for speakers on scientific subjects is: Let your audience remember you, the speaker, and not your speech.

The rules for poor speaking are simple. The inherent good character of the speaker or his education and experience have little connection with them. The classical concept of the good orator being the *good* man skilled in speaking needs to be re-examined. A 1948 version is better: The poor speaker is the *inadequate* man with nothing to say who nevertheless can painfully consume 30-60 minutes of an audience's time without profit and without the slightest qualm of conscience.

Don't begin now or later to look at any books on speech organization or delivery. You will regret it if you seek advice on how to improve your speaking. If anyone suggests that you have a recording made of your voice, shun the idea. You will be disillusioned and may even become so upset as to want to do something about improving your voice—always a dangerous symptom of incipient good speaking.

FINAL SUGGESTIONS FOR POOR SPEAKING

Do not read:

- ANDERSON, V. A. *Training the Speaking Voice*. New York: Oxford, 1942.
 BRYANT, D., and WALLACE, K. R. *Fundamentals of Public Speaking*. New York: Appleton-Century, 1947.
 FLESCH, R. *The Art of Plain Talk*. New York: Harper, 1946.
 MONROE, A. H. *Principles and Types of Speech*. (Brief ed.) Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1945.
 OVERSTREET, H. A. *Influencing Human Behavior*. New York: Norton, 1925.
 ARETT, L., and FOSTER, W. T. *Basic Principles of Speech*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.
 WINANS, J. A. *Public Speaking*. New York: Century, 1915.