

CONNECTING

OR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUDIENCE, RATE AND PAUSE

Central to any oral presentation, such as a talk or reading or storytelling, is the *audience*. When the speaker keeps the focus on the listeners and their needs, the presentation is more likely to work.

If the speaker is more concerned about ‘performing a talk, reading a story,’ then the interaction is lost.

Instead of the utterance coming from the core of the speaker, it tends to be more like a computer printout of words, more from the head than the heart!

Think of the different levels or grades you work with in your chosen syllabuses. The current syllabus asks candidates to specify a particular audience from Grade 3 level.

It’s a good idea to suggest to all candidates that from the moment they begin to plan their talk, they imagine they are directing it to specific people, e.g. grandparents, or cousins or fellow team members etc.

Encourage them to see these people in their mind’s eye, to have a sense of really *connecting* with them. Of including them...

Take time to let the student experience what this feels like.

In group classes it is so much easier for candidates to connect with real people as they talk. But so often there is a ‘talking at’ rather than ‘sharing with.’

KEEP IT REAL

It works best to keep it real. Starting a talk with, “I’ll bet you can’t wait to do a bungee jump!” doesn’t exactly ring true with the examiner unless the candidate says they’re imagining talking to stalwarts who will welcome the adrenaline surge.

Neither does it work to hear a person end a talk with “Oh well, now I’m off to catch a big flounder” when they’re actually off to sit down.

If we keep the specific listener in mind from the outset, we are far more likely to be able to manage a successful presentation.

There is little that is satisfying about a technically correct rendering of a talk, reading or story that lacks actual connection with real people in mind.

The extempore style encouraged for all SNZ talks will hopefully change the outdated mode of “reciting a speech” or “reading an essay.”

This misdirected style of addressing listeners does the speaker, the audience, the topic and the purpose no service.

It will not empower young people to serve their communities influentially in the future.

TELLING STORIES

In the broadest sense of the term, many presentations are ‘telling stories’ to others – sharing a talk on a personal experience, or on how to do something, sharing a talk about a problem and a solution, offering thoughts on what some say or others say about an issue, or in sharing a reading or a memorised poem.

The focus and style may differ, but the connection with listeners is pretty much the same.

We need to show the listeners by our manner that they count and that we want them to listen.

Telling stories is often described as spinning a tale. With a presentation, work at the *spinning*, creating invisible but very real and strong threads to draw the listener in.

Keep it unfeigned in a talk, keep it genuine, keep it sincere, using fresh, spontaneous language.

We are trying to train our New Zealanders to be authentic in a real world, not phoney just to pass an examination.

By thinking about the audience specifically, speakers will be able to draw on their perceptions of the listeners’ experiences or needs as they plan their talk.

They can experiment with using such stimuli as

“Can you remember when you lost your first tooth?”

“If you have ever ice-skated you will know...”

“I wonder if you ever feel as angry as I do when I see graffiti? And powerless...”

By inducting your audience into the talk in such a way, you show them that they are immediately a part of the interaction; of the intertwining of thoughts; of silent yet active thinking as listeners, in response to uttered thoughts.

That is communication: A two-way process.

The more artfully we weave changing mind-pictures into our presentations, the more powerfully we snare our listeners'

attention and imagination.

YOU

'You' is possibly the most powerful word in the English language. By putting your listener into the picture you are well on your way to capturing your prey.

Too often a reader, reciter or story-teller will want to show how competent they are by filling every moment with words.

Their focus is more on the measure of their own performance as a speaker than as an interacter.

The wise teacher will seek fresh, challenging ways to help the student reverse that process.

To transfer it. To place it fairly and squarely on the listeners' needs.

With such presentations as reading, memorised prose and storytelling, we put our listeners into the picture by considering their needs first.

As the speaker we know the text or the plot, we know what comes next.

We should! We've practised enough (not too much though, a reading is a reading, not the chance to show how clever we were to memorise it!).

However, very often the student races through a text or story with barely a thought for the listener's need to be helped to absorb the meaning!

When the rate is controlled so that the audience can absorb a thought easily, then it works!

Students need to fully understand that when speech and phrasing are too rapid, it is rather like watching a video of a spider spinning its web on fast-forward.

EXQUISITE DETAIL

It's so easy to miss so much exquisite detail and subtlety: a trace of this, a wisp of that, an intimation, the merest shift of thought, the breath that goes with that and, of course, the emphatic and dramatic pauses that do so much to point a key thought or to increase the tension and charge the atmosphere with expectation.

These are the things that hook the audience in, moment by moment, until they are ensnared right in the middle of the web or the story being spun. And they love it!

Students need to explore and experience their personal power in moving the spirit within the listener.

First they must respond with their own heart and mind to the text (and to any implications that underpin the text) to allow it to be evocative.

Then they need to truly want to touch the audience by the power of words uttered and by pauses used discerningly.

Once students grasp that pause compels listeners' thought and imagination, they discover a very potent tool of communication.

PAUSE

A dynamic use of pause will not only control rate, it will also shape a poem, a prose interpretation or a story.

A sense of immediacy can be conveyed.

Pauses allow the speaker to renew the breath. A well honed sense of timing allows that inspiration to breathe life into words with delicacy, with deliberation, with dynamism and with style.

Such elements as humour, irony and subtlety are given time during these brief pauses to incubate in the speaker's mind and to resonate in the spoken word.

The wise student will experiment anew with pause to attain flexible, unobtrusive and supportive technical skill.

Only then can the listener be truly inspired by the words.

Finally, the speaker needs to work extra hard to assist audience involvement with the story or text where there is complex syntax. Too often the speaker uses lengthy phrasing in response to complex prose. Firm pointing is needed for maximum

communication. Use of pause must assist in the intricacy. The speaker must let the audience absorb one thought before moving on to another.

By scrutinising the effects of these three factors,

- audience awareness,
- rate of utterance,
- use of pause,

students will magnify their chances of fully succeeding in examinations, but more importantly – in real life.

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