

Using Gestures in Public Speaking

The use of gesture is an important part of public speaking. Many books have been written on "Non-Verbal Communication".

Gestures reinforce our verbal message and they add a new dimension to our speaking skills if used effectively. They also have the ability to detract from our presentation if not used properly.

The tips listed below should assist you in enhancing your communication skills by the use of gesture.

- Inexperienced speakers often find that knowing what stance to adopt is quite difficult. Be relaxed, maintain an erect but normal posture, hands generally by your side unless using notes. If using notes they should be held in one hand, at between waist and shoulder level, where they can be easily referred to without the speaker losing audience contact.
- Gestures must be relevant to the phrases being used at the time, otherwise there is a danger of giving your audience conflicting messages.
- Gestures need to be relaxed and fluid, not jerky or mechanical. Their size will depend on the size of the venue. A good general rule to apply is that they should not be so big that they overwhelm your audience, but not so small as to lose their effect.
- The whole body can be used, hence the term "Body Language". Some "experts" frown on speakers who move around during their delivery, however, provided a speaker is not constantly on the move, it can add to the presentation and help maintain audience interest.
- Gesture can be used to reinforce statistics, illustrate the size or shape of an object, show direction or even enhance the emotion being portrayed.
- Beware of unwanted gestures such as the "fig-leaf stance" (Hands clasped in front at groin level) or the "Royal stance".(Hands clasped behind the back.)
- Don't use repetitive, distracting gestures or mannerisms such as
 - continual pointing
 - putting glasses on and taking them off
 - swaying from side to side
 - touching your nose or hair
 - scratching your head.
- Facial gestures can be most effective. Animated facial expression (if not overdone) can greatly enhance your speech and help get your audience "on side".
- If the venue you are to speak at necessitates you using a microphone, be sure you know if it is directional in nature, an F.M.type, hand held or has any particular



characteristics you should know about. Some microphones can impair your use of gesture.

- Consider replacing some of your words with gesture. It can be extremely effective. e.g. Raising your eyebrows or pointing to the door. (Don't try it on radio!)
- Try counting on your fingers as you enumerate important points in your speech.
- Eyes are the "Windows of the Soul" and can convey messages ranging from despair to elation. They also enable us to include all members of our audience in our speech by continually scanning the room.



*Be sure your
notes don't
interfere with
your ability to
use gesture*

Don't be afraid to use gesture. Practise it at every opportunity.

Use to enhance but not to dominate your speech.

Rehearse in front of a mirror.

Work at it, and before long your audiences will be giving you positive feedback for your improved performances.