

Basics

When we give a talk or presentation, we want people to listen – we want to hold their attention. There are various strategies that good speakers use to do this. In **Use pauses, emphasis and intonation**, you look at how good speakers use their voice to keep people listening – how they pause, put emphasis on keywords and phrases and vary the tone of their voice. In this lesson, you will learn about how good speakers use language to make sure what they say has an impact.

Good speakers make sure that the audience can relate to what they are saying. They speak to their listeners directly and sometimes use strong, emotive language to make them feel a certain way. Good speakers organize what they say and signpost each part of their talk with a key sentence – just as a writer might use subheadings in a text. They often use rhetorical questions to introduce an idea – they ask their listener to think about something before providing the answer. Good speakers tell short stories or anecdotes to make their talks more interesting or occasionally humorous, and they might try to surprise listeners by saying something they didn't expect.

The academic context

When you are giving talks and presentations, you will have far more impact if you choose language that will make your audience pay attention. In discussions in seminars, tutorials or classes, your opinions will carry more weight if you express them in the right way.

Key features

- Signposting

Let's start by looking at ...
Now, on to her university years.

- Addressing listeners directly

You're driving home, when you suddenly see ...

- Rhetorical questions

So, how did Da Vinci address this problem?

- Surprising or provocative statements

Perhaps Einstein wasn't very clever at all.

- Careful choice of emotive words and phrases

The problem was huge. (**Not:** very big)
It was total chaos. (**Not:** disorganized)

- Stories and anecdotes

Plato was collecting water one day when he realized ...

Challenges / difficulties

When you're giving a talk or presentation, there's a lot to think about. Even proficient speakers have to think carefully and plan the best way to get their message across. It can also be frustrating to feel you don't have the range of vocabulary you need to hold people's interest.

How can I develop this skill?

When you listen to a talk or presentation given by a proficient speaker, listen to every aspect of it – the features highlighted in this Factsheet, and also the way pauses, stress and intonation are used. Watch the speaker's gestures and body language, too. Record yourself giving short talks, and check that you're making progress.

Learning outcome

When you have developed this skill, you will communicate more confidently and effectively in academic settings. You will give talks and presentations which hold people's attention.

Theory to practice

1 ▶ 01–06 Listen to six short extracts. What strategies do the speakers use to hold the listeners' attention?

2 ▶ 01–06 Listen again and match each extract with an explanation (a–f).

▶ 01 _____

▶ 02 _____

▶ 03 _____

▶ 04 _____

▶ 05 _____

▶ 06 _____

- a** The speaker addresses the listeners directly by putting them in a situation. He uses the present simple to give a commentary. He uses a number of colourful words and phrases to paint the picture and surprise the listeners.
- b** Speaking informally, the speaker gives a very positive description of a possession. He carefully chooses adjectives to persuade the listener he is right.
- c** The speaker starts by signposting where she is in the talk, and then gives a simple example. She then gives a specific example by telling a short story about some famous brothers.
- d** The speaker starts by addressing the listeners in a personal, direct way, and then asks a rhetorical question. She signposts how the talk will continue and introduces the first part of the talk. She finishes with a short explanation and a general example.
- e** The speaker starts by signposting where he is in the talk. He makes a statement and then checks it with a couple of rhetorical questions. He finishes by surprising the listeners with a humorous comment.
- f** The speaker uses short, concise sentences and gives a lot of factual information that the listener will find surprising. She finishes with a summary that has a lot of impact.

Ways to get more practice

- Plan some short talks. Practise them with classmates.
- Watch some TED talks online and notice the speakers' strategies.
- Record yourself and decide how you could improve.