How to Sound Smarter in 7 Steps

Very few people get excited about public speaking. For many of us, having all eyes turn toward us in anticipation of any kind of speech—even something as basic as sharing an idea in a brainstorming meeting—is a nightmare. But no one gets very far in the workplace (or in life) by being totally silent. Sometimes we need to sell ourselves, and the only way to do that is by talking. An infographic from the student writing service Write My Essays has a few smart suggestions for being a better, smarter-sounding public speaker. (Editor's Note: We want to go on record as saying that while the infographic has some valuable tips, we don’t condone the work Write My Essays does—we think students should write their own essays.)

Below are six good tips for making a good impression when speaking.

There are technically seven tips in the infographic, but we’re going to recommend that you disregard No. 5: “Avoid ‘vocal fry’ or other vocal irritants.” Because frankly, if you’re a dude, no one will notice. While the creaky sounds of vocal fry are neither new to speech patterns nor only attributable to women, young, female speakers—especially women working on podcasts and radio shows—bear the brunt of the backlash against it. As mental_floss’s resident linguist Akira Okrent has pointed out, Noam Chomsky has
a pretty bad case of vocal fry himself, and no one thinks he sounds like an idiot. Whether your voice dips a little low or you say “just” a few more times than absolutely necessary, if you’re a woman, someone’s going to complain about the way you talk. Focus on making smart points, and don’t waste too much energy trying to over-regulate your natural voice patterns.

On the other hand, No. 7, “Don’t weigh in unless you have something to add,” is golden advice. If you don’t know what you’re talking about, don’t be afraid to keep quiet.
IN THAT SENSE...

...IT'S NOT SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT YOU SAY AS HOW YOU SAY IT.

A 2012 study by Quantified Impressions into how voices influence perception of others found:

23% of participants said the speakers' voice quality influenced their opinion

11% said it was the content of the message

OTHER FACTORS WERE...

PASSION

PRESENCE
1. **Work on Your Posture**

Erudition is about more than just the words coming out of your mouth – standing or sitting straight, but with a relaxed spine, presents a self-assured outward image and puts you in a comfortable, confident mental and physical state for speaking.

2. **Avoid Mindless Language**

“Aphoristic thinking is impatient thinking,” Susan Sontag wrote in her diary in 1980, and it holds true for speech. Speaking in clichés, buzzwords or using ‘intelligent’ words without a correct sense of their meaning conveys a lack of original thought and puts your listeners to sleep.

3. **Speak Loudly, Not Forcefully**

Projecting your voice takes practice, but
4. PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO YOUR VOICE

Think about voices that engage you – the vocal frequencies and the speaker’s ability, ease and familiarity with the subtleties of their own voice. By listening very carefully to your voice you will refine it into an electrifying force.

5. AVOID ‘VOCAL FRY’ OR OTHER VOCAL IRRITANTS

Annoying vocal habits negatively affect how speakers are perceived. Two recent offenders are ”uptalk” – a rising intonation that pronounces statements as if they were questions – and ”vocal fry” – ending words in a raspy growl. Both convey insecurity, negativity and dimness.

6. DON’T BE AFRAID OF SILENCE

As Harold Pinter observed, “one way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness”, and it’s this sense of embarrassment that leads many to avoid silence. Conversely, pausing emphasises and adds thoughtfulness to your speech.

7. DON’T WEIGH IN


UNLESS YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO ADD

If you only have basic knowledge of a topic, e.g. physics, then wading into a discussion on the intricacies of cold fusion will make you sound ignorant. In those situations, try and steer the conversation towards familiar ground where you can speak easily and knowledgably.

While the majority of us can’t change our voices outright, we can subtly change our habits in order to reach a greater level of eloquence...

...transforming you into an intelligent, engaging speaker in the eyes of your peers.

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