

A Presentation Skills Company

Visually Speaking

The External Mechanics of Form

Research shows that in conversation the verbal and nonverbal cues are perceived equally. *What you say* and *what you look like* when saying it are equal components in the communication. This spontaneity in discussion creates a higher level of camouflage because fewer patterns of *predictability* exist. A conversation can change direction at any time. This is why interactive dialogue is difficult to manage or control.

However, when content is prepared or planned, as in a presentation, the level of camouflage is lower because the audience knows there is an intended message designed to persuade or inform. As a presenter, you intentionally reveal selected information in a manner to be completely understood. Content is organized so the audience can follow along the path you've outlined. Stories, examples, and analogies are purposely planted in particular places to support your purpose.

When it comes to "prepared speech" the communication components are altered and the nonverbal aspects dominate. *What you look like* and *how you deliver* information comprise the majority of your message. These physical aspects of presenting can actually distract from the verbal aspects, following the old adage "actions speak louder than words."

This isn't to say that content is unimportant; it just means that you need to make sure that your message isn't diminished by your actions. The goal is to be more *predictable*, so that the nonverbal cues are as easy to interpret as the words you choose to communicate the planned content.

To avoid distracting body language, and to learn how to support your message through delivery, it is important to understand *the mechanics of presenting*.

The basic delivery skills are a combination of your visual and vocal delivery, that is, the *external* elements of the **BODY** and the **VOICE**. The visible or external elements are based around **ACTIONS**. These are *the Mechanics of FORM*.

The invisible or internal elements of the **MIND** and the **HEART** are focused around **INTENTIONS** and these advanced skills are called *the mechanics of FUNCTION*.

Although intentions *drive* actions, and form *follows* function, it is easier to build a predictable consistency by first learning the external (visible) skills, which are the mechanics of form. These basic skills will help you develop a measurable set of actions that you can add to your personal delivery style.

STAND AND DELIVER

What do you do when you're in front of a group? How do you tell your story? What movements do you make? What gestures do you use? How do your words flow when you speak? It depends on the *relationships* you establish with:

- The Room
- The Audience
- Your Body
- Your Voice
- The Set

THE ROOM

Your relationship to the room begins with your body positioning. There are a few *universal* concepts that translate to every environment:

There are three issues to consider:

- Reading anchors
- Angles
- Upstaging

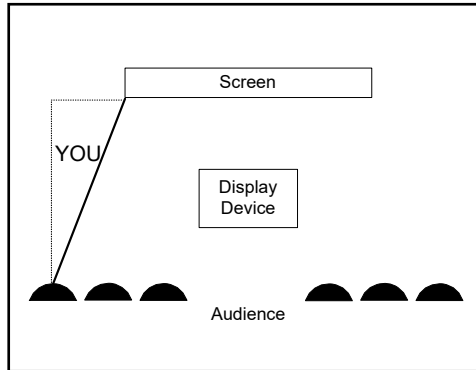
Left is Right

In the English language, and many others, the reading anchor is from left to right. You should stand on the side of the room that matches the reading pattern, from the audience's point-of-view. In English, since we read words from *left to right*, the eye is less distracted if it sees the presenter speaking from the left, and then glances slightly to the right to read the visual (left to right) and then returns to view the speaker again.

The pattern is natural. But if you stand on the opposite side of the room (the audience's right), the natural eye pattern for reading and listening is disturbed and your effectiveness is reduced. Of course, if you have *no visuals* for the audience to view, then it doesn't matter which side of the room you present from, as long as people can see and hear you.

Build a Triangle

Every job requires a tailored workspace to gain optimum efficiency. When presenting, your workspace is a *Presenter's Triangle™* within which you can “play.”



To build your Presenter's Triangle, stand at a fixed distance from the display equipment and draw an imaginary line from the audience member sitting farthest to the right, to the left edge of the screen. This becomes the long side of the Triangle or the “angled wall.” If you penetrate this wall, you will block the view of the screen.

To complete your Triangle, draw two straight lines meeting at a 90° angle and connecting the person seated to the far right and the line of the screen.

Within your Triangle, you only have three positions to occupy: The *middle* of the Triangle, where you should be most of the time; the *back* of the Triangle, much closer to the screen; and, the *front* of the Triangle, much closer to the audience. These three positions allow you to navigate along the angled wall in a very *predictable* space.

The key to all body actions is *moving with authority*. You must treat the three positions of the Triangle as stopping points. Presenters lose effectiveness when they *meander* aimlessly while speaking, becoming very unpredictable. You must have a reason to move and you must know where your body is going, so the audience is not surprised by your movement or your location.

Angle Your Shoulders

Initially, you need to establish a *45-degree angle* by pointing your shoulders to the *opposite* corner of the room. This is called the *Rest Position*. This establishes a degree of *openness* to both the content (screen) and the audience, making it easier to reference the information with gestures, while maintaining a connection with the group.

Once you establish a 45-degree angle to the room, you then gain the opportunity to use the *power* of your *left shoulder*. The theatrical move of *squaring your shoulders* by pointing them to the back wall of the room is a move of power and strength. It's a signal that the information being communicated with the body has more emphasis. This is called the *Power Position*.

Now you can combine the two body angles within the three positions of the Triangle, to add more meaning to your words.

No Upstaging

When a part of the body passes between the speaker's face and the audience, the result is called *upstaging*.

Turning your back to the audience is the most vivid example of upstaging. Besides hiding your expressions, turning your back projects your voice away from the audience and therefore makes it less audible.

Avoid turning your back, by using the "Rule of the Right Shoulder": The front of your right shoulder should always be visible to the person seated to your far right.

Crossing the upper body with your right hand is another example of upstaging. This happens, for example, when you gesture to the screen, with your right hand.

To avoid this, use the "Rule of the Left Foot": Anything to the left of your left foot, use your left hand to gesture. Anything to the right of your left foot, use your right hand to gesture.

THE AUDIENCE

You must understand that the relationship between you and your audience is mutually beneficial. Presenting is two-way communication and you must engage your audience to be effective.

Establish Eye Contact

Making eye contact is critical to the communication process. The more eye contact you make with people the more involved they will feel. If you find it difficult making direct eye contact with audience members, try this technique: Don't look *directly* into a person's eyes, look *between* the eyes. Look at the point where the bridge of the nose meets the brows and it will seem *as if* you are looking into the person's eyes.

Play to the *back-third* of the group. This will allow your chin to tilt slightly higher, opening your throat and allowing your voice to project more clearly. In addition, your gestures will become more obvious as you make contact with people farther back.

Reach Out

The *hand gesture* of the palm up and arms extended outward is a very *friendly* move. When you reach out to the audience you appear sincere, as if you want the group

involved in the event. Reaching out is pleasing to the eye and indicates warmth of expression and carries the truth in expression.

Interact

The reaching out gesture is most effective when creating interaction. The gesture is considered an expression of an offer or an invitation. When you ask a question you are making an offer; that is, you are inviting participation. If your hands reach out to the width of the group, then anyone within that open embrace is included in the offer. But without using your hands, an audience will assume that the last person you look at is the individual invited to participate.

Get Agreement

If you nod your head to a person in the audience, chances are they will return the gesture and nod back to you. If you make the effort to get agreement or acknowledgment, the points you make gain greater acceptance. As more people in the group notice others agreeing with you, the overall impact of your story becomes more powerful.

Smile

If you aren't having a good time *giving* the presentation, what makes you think the audience is having a good time *watching* it? Unless the subject is tragic (disaster, war, crime, death), chances are that smiling during the presentation can only help. A presenter who smiles creates a comfortable feeling for the audience and people learn and retain more when they feel comfortable.

YOUR BODY

Finding the right moves and gestures for a given presentation takes time. Your body tells a story just like your visuals and your words.

What should you do with your hands?

If used properly, the hands can orchestrate the eyes of the audience. Casual or emphatic gestures to the screen can create a visual inflection that helps the group recognize what is important.

The eyes go where the hands go, so never hide your hands from the audience (such as behind your back or in your pockets). Also avoid clasping your hands together in front of you. When your hands touch for several seconds, the audience tends to look at them and not at your face. The distraction not only reduces your effectiveness, but it is a sign of nervousness.

If you aren't making gestures, then keep your hands naturally at your sides.

As you begin to make gestures, you will need to shift your weight to one foot or the other in order to make the gestures look natural. If both heels are on the floor when you gesture it will appear rigid. Once you learn to shift your weight properly, gesturing will be more comfortable and effective.

YOUR VOICE

Your ability to vocalize means more than just speaking up so the audience can hear you. Your voice is a powerful tool that allows you to use tone, inflection, and volume to communicate more than words.

Phrase and Pause

If you move around frequently and do not breathe properly, you will eventually lose your breath. Breathe *between* phrases, not *during* phrases. If you are speaking quickly and your words run together, your emphasis and inflection will be lost. By having enough air and controlling your breathing, you can say a longer phrase more slowly, and add inflection to help the audience understand more easily.

Pause naturally between your phrases so that you can control the momentum or timing of your presentation. Each pause gives you a chance to make eye contact, breathe, or even think. Phrasing and pausing allows for smooth transitions and more consistent delivery. It also helps eliminate the verbal fillers such as “*um, uh, er, you know, okay, again*” and other sounds. Try to replace these fillers with silence.

Project Your Voice

People from all areas in the room must be able to hear *every* word you say. By breathing properly and concentrating on projecting to the back of the room, you'll keep your head up and facing forward as often as possible.

When fielding responses from the audience make sure you repeat the question or comment so the entire group can hear it. If you fail to do this, then your discussion will make sense only to those who heard the question or comment in the first place.

Handle Questions

Have you ever been asked a question during your presentation and you didn't know the answer? Typically you may just need time, so you can pause for a moment as you consider the question and if an answer is not imminent, you can respond with an offer to follow-up. However, you do have the option of using one of the three "E" words to gain clarity. You can respond to the question with a question:

Can you give me an *example*?

Can you *elaborate*?

Can you *explain* that?

The person asking the question will provide additional information that may trigger your response, or clarify the question in a way that allows you to offer a reasonable answer. If you still don't know, at the very least, it will appear that you made a reasonable effort to draft a response.

THE SET

Depending on your ability to control the environment, strong lighting is a big asset to your presentation. Try to create an *unequal distribution* of light by directing most of the light on the presenter, some light on the audience, and no light on the screen.

When presenting electronically, the image itself is dependent on the display device and the source of the visual information (usually a computer). Make sure the specifications of both the display device and the image source are compatible.

Flat, non-glare, matte-white screens offer the best viewing angles. In some cases, a rear projection screen might be required, especially if people have to pass in front of the image, such as during an awards ceremony.

Electronic presentation technology lends itself to the use of video, audio, animation, special effects, and more. Be careful that the technology doesn't overshadow the message. For example, *text should never move*. Text is an anchor. Paragraphs flying in from different angles will make content unpredictable and more distracting. Multimedia can become "multimania" if you are not careful. The key to using any technology in a presentation is to make it transparent to the audience so it doesn't distract from the presenter.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN STYLE

Don't try to imitate other presenters, just be the best presenter you can be. The medium is not the message; the message is the message, and that message is YOU! Develop a style and method of delivery that is *natural* and comfortable *for you*. To do this you must not only *know your content* but you must *always believe* in the information you are presenting.

Your success would be a *gain* for your audience. The key element in that equation has to do with *your own style*. When the expression is not natural, that's how an audience sees through a presenter. Any success would then be at the *expense* of your audience. An audience deserves your natural expression. They deserve your sense of the *truth*.

Remember...

Shift your Stance.

Show your Palms.

Smile!



Use this QR (Quick Response) code from your mobile device to view **video clips**, which demonstrate basic delivery skills and analyze public speaking performances.

NOTE: The information in this handout supports the MediaNet lecture "Visually Speaking."

Additional support for this and other topics can be found in several publications including:

- *Special Edition Using Microsoft PowerPoint 2007* by Patrice-Ann Rutledge and Tom Mucciolo (Copyright 2006, QUE, Pearson Publishing, MediaNet, Inc.).
- *Purpose, Movement, Color* by Tom and Rich Mucciolo (Copyright 1994, 1999, 2003, MediaNet, Inc.)
- *Mechanics-Basic Skills* free tutorial (Copyright 2002, MediaNet, Inc.), available on our website.
- *Teaching Effectiveness* research study, published April, 2008, available on our website.
- *A Guide to Better Teaching* by Leila Jahangiri and Tom Mucciolo (Copyright 2012, Rowman & Littlefield).

For information, visit MediaNet on the web (www.medianet-ny.com) or interact on our *Visually Speaking* blog (<http://medianet-ny.com/wordpress/>).

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