

PRESENTATION SKILLS 3 :

‘Voice, Body and Breath’

Exercises like these rarely yield quick results. You have to be patient. They ought to be something you do regularly as ‘serious fun’. They’re self-educating, long-term games that sometimes give insights into your own vocal habits and the ways you speak in public.

Please do them in a controlled, relaxed way. Avoid jerky movements or tension. ***If anything gets painful or begins to strain – STOP!*** Rest and drink some water.

RELAXATION : ***Becoming Still; Being Centred***

- a. **STILLNESS.** Close eyes. Breathe naturally. Relax thoughts. Clear head.
- b. **BREATH.** Easy. Slow. Full. Free. Rhythmic: In through nose, out through mouth. In your head count to 4 breathing in through nose, hold for 2, out for 4 through mouth, hold for 2, REPEAT. Breathe deep into belly. Keep going for a few minutes.
- c. **POSTURE: "a state of readiness"...**

Feet	Parallel, beneath hips. Weight slightly forward on the big toe.
Knees	Not locked. Bend and bounce on them slightly.
	Unclamp thighs .
Hips	Not thrust out or sideways. Try revolving pelvis (like Elvis).
Stomach	Avoid pulling it in!
Spine	Straight. <i>"When your spine goes, you age"</i> .
Chest	Try not to collapse chest forwards.
Neck / shoulders (key area)	Slowly flop forwards then shake these loose.
Head	Neither tucked in, nor pushed forward, nor pulled back.
Jaw	Unclench, lift chin slightly.
	Alternately clench and unclench Face (yep - you read it right - your <i>face!</i>)

- d. **NOW PLACE A PALM where you think your voice comes from – your imagined centre.** Continue to breathe as above. NEXT, say "AHhhh" loudly, at length, as you expel breath with your mouth open. Is your palm in the right place? Rediscover the centre of the vibration with your hand. Is it higher/ lower than you thought?
- e. **BE AWARE of TENSIONS, LACK of POSTURE = Restricted Delivery.** How you stand, move, breathe – all these are important to emotion and connection to audiences.

BODY HABITS

Ask a friend or tutor to **watch you** as you read something out, or make a short presentation.

Do they notice any unnecessary movements? Shuffling, ear-scratching, hands in and out of pockets? Swaying, pacing, nods and hand gestures? All such things are distractions. They take attention **away** from what you say and towards you. They make your talk harder work for the listener. The audience might remember more of you, but less of what you said.

Also, think about body language. How do you communicate formality or intimacy through posture? Particularly in interviews and 1-to-1s, should you think about *the way* you will sit?

BREATH and SUPPORT ...

Many voices are faint, or lack range & vitality, or get 'stuck' or damaged, because they lack support. Also, your voice soon loses fitness (within a few days!) Keep it exercised.

To help you detect habits of poor SUPPORT:

- 1/ Breathe in deeply; then begin to speak *before* you're ready. Feel the tightness.
- 2/ Breathe in deeply, hold it, then speak (too late). Note how the abdomen is clenched and your chest is too high. (Common problem.)
- 3/ Breathe out. Try to read a line or two without any air in your lungs. It's a horrible feeling! If you feel panicked or 'locked' during a presentation, just sigh out silently: calmly *wait for the body to ask for breath*. Then breathe, deeply.
- 4/ Say "oh" from deep stomach. Now clench shoulders & repeat. Note the thinness of the sound as it moves up your tensioned body. **Unclench** shoulders & repeat "oh". Better?

THE BIG ONE : NERVES !

Prepare your Body. Develop your own relaxation ritual before readings ...

- *Hydrate fully (do you carry H₂O?) Eat something that day – but not 5 mins before you're on.*
- *Avoid coffee, fags, booze, aspirin, cold or fizzy drinks and (for some) milk. (Sorry!)*
- *Open up the lungs. Push both arms against a wall, keep head level & breathe deeply.*
- *Sigh !! Say a long Doctor's "Ahhh !!" OR: HUM a tune, deeply, changing the notes.*
- *Free up lips, tongue, face. Try to "kiss" the far wall, from where you are.*
- *Shake, loosen up – especially Knees/ Neck/ Shoulders/ Jaw.*
- *Wear comfy clothes, especially shoes.*
- *Gentle stretches. Nothing too vigorous! Relax.*
- *Make a huge smile; drop your jaw by two fingers (keeping smile) & feel your breath.*

You can't engage audiences powerfully if you're not prepared, relaxed, breathing. Become aware of a column of breath moving freely through the body. Even a simple "hummm" or "ahhhh" can free up the lungs beforehand.

If you feel your delivery tends to be a bit 'dead', try varying the **pace**, the **tone** and the **emphasis**, in rehearsals as well as during the talk itself. Also, do the exercises at the end of SEMINAR [B]: '**Holding the Thought**'. Plus: ask yourself, **am I enjoying this?** If the honest answer is no, might that explain the dullness? Find ways of enlivening things!

Keep a sense of perspective. By next week, no one will remember. Don't expect **not** to be nervous. Nerves are natural, even good. Accept them, then focus on something else.

... and DURING the talk/ reading itself :

If you get the shakes, lose your place, or stall – simply pause. **Breathe deeply**. You can tighten up *because you're forgetting to breathe*. Oxygen! Are you snatching breaths, breathing shallowly? This starves the brain of O₂ and can deepen anxiety and confusion. Breathe. Deep and slow, right into the belly. **Slow down**. Speak in a more measured way. Slow down till it feels FAR too slow, and it might be about right. Take breaths between sentences (we often forget). Think one thing at a time. **Trust the words** – they'll carry you through. Breathe. Then take your time and gather your thoughts.

You've done all your preparation, so just go for it! Be enthusiastic. If anything does go wrong, don't fluster. Treat it lightly, with a touch of humour. No one will really mind.

REHEARSE, REHEARSE !

Sounds obvious, but often underdone. Familiarity builds confidence, helps you spot any tricky moments. Build in contingency plans, simplify things. Getting the timing right avoids a LOT of stress. Plan a few dramatic pauses where you can breathe, regroup.

A trick of the trade: don't rehearse ONLY in your head. It's near-impossible to time it accurately and it doesn't signal phrases which turn out to be tongue-twisters! Read everything out loud, at least once, at least to a mirror, and preferably to a colleague.

P.S. Look, I *know* what this can sound like: too much hassle and a little bit silly? But when I started to get lots of readings and felt the collywobbles down both legs, I took it more seriously. It WORKS.