
PRESENTATION

The art of turning a script into speech that is easily understood and pleasing to the listener.

As far as the listener is concerned the presenter represents the station. If the presenter cares for the listener, then the station must. In fact there are two basic needs that the presenter has to fulfil in order to be good at his or her job. He must care for the person he is speaking to, and he needs to understand the medium through which he is able to speak.

- **TALK** Don't read, shout, or preach
- **TO** not at or down to
- **A** one, not a great crowd
- **FRIEND** not just anyone, smile

SOME GUIDELINES TO HELP YOU.

You don't need to be taught how to speak, you already do that. But what you do need to learn is how to speak from a script, yet sound as if you are talking normally. At the same time, you have to be able to communicate clearly the sense of what is written.

PACING

Not everybody speaks at the same speed. But speed does matter, and so does rhythm. You may not be aware of it but when you speak, the rhythm of your speech helps to make it interesting! Pacing and rhythm must be such that what you say is both understandable and interesting. If the pacing is too slow or the rhythm too monotonous, then your listener will get bored. On the other hand, if it is paced too fast, then the listener may miss what is being said, or will have to work so hard to understand that they give up and turn off.

PROJECTION

When you are talking to someone you know well, and you are close to them, often you may find that you adopt a very confidential tone of voice. As a presenter you are even more likely to do this if you forget your listener and think that you are talking to yourself. Except in specific situations where this may be appropriate (such as drama or a late night show), the listener will find this type of style off-putting.

Equally off-putting to the listener is the presenter who speaks as if to a large audience, with a loud or strident voice. This style is most appropriate in a pulpit, but never on radio.

A good technique to get the projection of your voice right, is to imagine that your (one) listener is seated across the table from you. Sometimes it even helps to actually have a friend sit there. Speak naturally and clearly.

If the presenter wears headphones, these may not help in getting projection right. Headphones make the voice appear to sound better than it really is. If headphones are essential for communication, then it can be better to have them only on one ear. Earpieces can fulfil the communication function without giving this problem, thus some studios use them in preference.

PRONUNCIATION

You may have heard someone on the Radio or TV pronounce the name of a person or place wrongly. If you have, you probably felt that the person speaking can't have really known what they were speaking about. Bad pronunciation can do a lot of damage to the credibility of a radio station. It is important for the newcomer to a station to get to know how to pronounce local names and place names correctly. On top of this there is often the problem that pronunciations of words vary a little. Particularly with names and place names, it is important that pronunciations are consistent, from one day to the next, or from one presenter to the next.

Larger organizations like the BBC have departments devoted to correct pronunciation. There are other sources of help, like pronouncing dictionaries, though you need to know how to use one.

EMPHASIS

It is essential to get emphasis right if the listener is to understand correctly what is being said. Wrong emphasis can completely change the meaning of a sentence.

PAUSES

Any actor will tell you that "a pause" can be an extremely expressive part of speech. It can also destroy meaning and interest if it is used wrongly. Pauses allow the listener to take in the idea just spoken, and to distinguish one idea from the next.

Punctuation marks are an obvious point at which to pause, but it is often necessary to pause in other places, as in the following sentence:

Watch the type of paper and pen used.// If the ink is unduly absorbed/ difficulty may be experienced/on reading overleaf.(see section on script marking for a full explanation of these pause marks)

Indeed, in some places there may be punctuation marks at which it is inappropriate to pause.

A pause can be particularly useful in pointing out to the listener that they are hearing quoted speech. A short pause either side of the quotation marks will signal them to the listener. Changes in pitch and speed may also help in this case.

INFLECTION

How the pitch of the presenter's voice varies can also be very important. One of the most dull and uninteresting types of speech is the monotone, where the pitch remains constant. This may well be rare, but one other type of bad inflexion is more common. In this second case, all sentences follow the same pattern of inflexion. Often, the sentence starts at a low pitch, quickly rises to a higher one, and then gradually falls away again until the full stop is reached. The pattern is then repeated.

The right use of inflexion can bring speech to life. Varying the pattern can help greatly. Often particular types of inflexion can signal different types of meaning.

LISTS

One particularly difficult type of script for the presenter, is the list. When read out, lists can quickly become very monotonous, and the listener soon loses interest. As with any other type of script, the first and most important thing is to understand what is being said. Once you understand a list it will be easy to make it more interesting by using variety in emphasis and intonation.

ALTERATIONS

Normally the presenter will be reading some way ahead of the point at which they are voicing. If a section of the script is unclear, the presenter will most probably stumble as they try to make sense of it. Obviously, scripts should start life as clear typewritten sheets with the lines widely spaced. Last minute alterations are however quite common. Often the presenter will need to mark their own script. The key is to make these alterations clearly, without introducing any doubt as to the correct reading.

SCRIPT MARKINGS

Some presenters find it easier to read a script well if it has been marked in advance to show emphasis, pauses, and flow. The use of such marks is very much a matter of personal taste. Some presenters will always use them, and others will never use them. Marking is perhaps more common in newsreading as this is one type of presentation where conveying the correct meaning is essential. The type of marks used also varies a little, but to save confusion only one method will be demonstrated here.

As can be seen, pauses are marked using vertical lines, / one line for a short pause, // two for a longer pause, and /// three for a very long pause. These may correspond to phrase, sentence, and paragraph pauses. But note what has already been said about pauses.

Tying words together, as-shown-here, indicates that the words need to be run together as they are said, rather than keeping the normal gaps between words.

Underlining is an obvious way of indicating emphasis, but in some cases, particularly where electronic typewriters or word processors have been used, bold type is used instead.

MISTAKES

Everyone makes mistakes sooner or later, and for most of us it is sooner rather than later! As the presenter gains experience, these will naturally diminish. It is important for all presenters however, that mistakes are handled correctly. How they should be handled depends chiefly on whether the presenter is broadcasting live, or if they are being recorded for later use.

When presenting for recording, the mistake can be removed later by editing. The presenter should therefore make sure that the mistake can be edited out easily and cleanly. Having made a mistake, the presenter should pause briefly, and start reading again, from the beginning of the sentence in which the mistake occurred. It is important that stress and intonation is repeated in the corrected sentence, so that the final edited sentence sounds completely natural.

When presenting live, the most important thing is to make sure that the listener understands correctly what has been said. It is also important to maintain a friendly relationship with the listener. To this end it is sometimes good to apologize briefly for the error, and correct it before moving on. This is not generally necessary if the mistake is only a minor one. It is quite wrong however to apologize on behalf of someone else. If the operator or producer, or writer is at fault, it is still the presenter who takes the blame. To do anything else can destroy the relationship of trust and friendship with the listener.

PREPARATION

No presenter, however skilled can expect to read a script correctly at first sight. Some presenters practice by reading the script once, slowly, pronouncing every syllable very precisely, and with exaggerated emphasis. Another suggested scheme for preparing a script suggests reading it through a total of six times:

1. **Out Loud - a first read through**
2. **Reading it with as friendly a voice as you can**
3. **Reading it as sincerely as you can**
4. **Making it as conversational as you can**
5. **Extremely slowly and precisely, with over-emphasis**
6. **Combine all of 2) to 5) above**

SCRIPT HANDLING

The presenter needs to handle scripts correctly in the studio. Incorrect script handling can spoil presentation that might otherwise be considered excellent. There are three main problems to avoid in handling scripts.

BAD POSTURE

If a script is not held up correctly, the presenter can end up with their neck bent down, particularly when reading at the bottom of a page. Scripts should be held up, so that the presenter has their head up. To prevent the presenter moving their head down as the script is read, the script may be moved up, this will also prevent a change of microphone position.

The script should be held in one hand, making use of the wide margin such that there are no words hidden by the fingers holding it.

For this reason, scripts should never be folded in half. They tend to fold again easily and so cannot be held up properly in one hand.

Care should be taken to be sure that the script does not come between the presenter and the microphone as this will also affect the sound picked up.

PAPER NOISE

When handled with care, scripts need not produce a rustling sound as pages are changed. Normally scripts are typed on separate sheets of especially soft paper. When turning a page, the upper page may be lifted off and quietly slid away and placed on the table.

It is easier to do this silently if the upper right hand corner is bent up slightly so that it can easily be separated from the sheet below.

LOSING THE FLOW

When a script needs to be turned to the next page, the presenter needs to be able to easily read from the end of one page to the beginning of the next. This can be helped if the upper sheet is removed in such a way that the beginning of the next sheet is revealed first.