This chapter will explain why becoming a proficient speaker is an important element of debate. The chapter will then provide some general features of effective speech delivery, including how debaters can use their bodies and voices in delivering effective debate speeches. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for solving common delivery problems.

Chapter Outline

- Becoming a Proficient Speaker
- General Features of Effective Delivery in Debate
  - Speak to the Judges
  - Extemporaneous Delivery
  - Language Context
- Speaking Effectively Using Body and Voice
  - Using the Body in Delivery
    - Stance
    - Maintaining Eye Contact
  - Voice
    - Speaking Rate
    - Pauses
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- Summary
- Terms and Concepts From Chapter 14
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Before discussing those points, readers need to consider the fact that speaking is a natural human activity. When speaking in private, speakers are usually in their most natural state, a state in which they naturally communicate their meanings and their emotions to the person with whom they are speaking. Moving from the private realm where most people are comfortable, to the public realm, where most are uncomfortable, tends to change many people from natural communicators to speakers who appear to be quite uncomfortable. Thus, debaters are urged to use the ideas presented in this chapter to supplement, but not replace, their natural speaking skills.
**Becoming a Proficient Speaker**

Fulfilling the expected role and having the smartest arguments will not guarantee success in debate, especially if those arguments appear to be disrespectful, confusing, or unintelligible. The delivery of a debate speech affects how an audience reads arguments and how persuasive those arguments are to an audience and a judge. Although judges will do everything they can to listen responsibly and charitably, debaters who are easiest to follow tend to be the most effective and, as a result, usually rank higher and receive more individual points.

At many tournaments, the briefing for judges includes advice to weigh *matter* (the content of arguments) and *manner* (including delivery) equally in assigning ranks and points to teams. Delivery of a speech is a significant aspect of adjudicators’ assessment of manner. Beyond the role that delivery plays in determining debate manner, separating manner from matter is nearly impossible because the manner in which a speech is delivered affects how those listening perceive the matter that is delivered. Effective delivery makes a debater’s matter more understandable, believable, and compelling. When a judge is evaluating the matter of a debate, the judge can only judge that matter as the debaters deliver it.

Thus, even for adjudicators who try to focus exclusively on argumentation, delivery has an effect on the evaluation of a debate. Delivery has an effect on the outcome of a debate whether the judges are new or experienced. Newer judges often focus on how easily they can identify and follow arguments in the debate. The assessment of those judges affects the final decision of a panel of judges. Additionally, when debates are very close, delivery makes more of a difference. The more polished and convincing speaker will sound more credible to judges and, in those cases, delivery may be the element that ultimately determines how the judges and audience rank the debaters.

**General Features of Effective Delivery in Debate**

As debaters become more proficient, they learn to improve a variety of general features of effective delivery. Some of those features include speaking directly to judges, speaking in an extemporaneous manner, and managing the context of language use. Those elements will be discussed briefly in the upcoming sections of this chapter.

*Speak to the Judges*

One of the first things to be aware of when delivering speeches in Worlds-Style debate is the audience. In Worlds-Style debate, the audience ordinarily includes the panel of adjudicators (judges) evaluating the debate. Although the audience may also include a number of other people who are listening to the debate, the adjudicators are an important part of the audience. Debaters should learn to speak to the panel of adjudicators without ignoring the other members of the audience. In addition to the fact that debaters will be evaluated directly by the panel of adjudicators, that panel is usually composed of individuals whose minds are most open to being convinced by arguments. A debater’s job is not to impress or convince the other debaters, or to use an inside joke that an observer might appreciate, or simply to
look good. A debater’s job is to make sure that his or her arguments and speeches are clear and convincing to the panel of adjudicators whose role is to determine the outcome of the debate. The debater needs to focus on that panel, not only because they are the ones who award the points, but because they are also likely to be the most open to persuasion.

The most common times when debaters forget their audience are during refutation and points of information. When addressing the arguments and points of information of the opposing team, debaters sometimes engage directly with their opponents. Remember, that a general reason for a debate is that an internal means of persuasion has failed and an external adjudicator is necessary. Thus, trying to re-engage the opponent is usually a mistake. Debaters will not convince their opponents that their arguments are better.

Sometimes, debaters take refutation of their arguments personally. For instance, if another debater offers reasons that the justifications and evidence are flawed, the first debater may be tempted to argue: “your point is not true,” or “your point will lead to significantly worse outcomes.” However, debaters who remember that the audience is composed of adjudicators, not the opponents, will remember to address their arguments to the judges rather than to the debaters. For instance, instead of saying “your point is not true,” a debater may instead say, “my opponents argument is not true.” Speaking directly to opponents makes it seem like the speaker is aiming to convince the opposition to defect to the speaker’s team, instead of aiming to convince the judges that the speaker’s arguments should prevail. During a point of information, remember to direct all points to the judge, whether the point is a question or the statement of an argument. The debater’s most important role is to ensure that the judge understands, considers, and believes their arguments. When answering a point of information, remember to focus attention on the judge; an answer will not convince the other side. The speaker’s primary role is to make the answer seem plausible and important to the panel of judges evaluating the debate.

Extemporaneous Delivery

In addition to recognizing and speaking to the appropriate audience, debaters should also practice an extemporaneous mode of speech delivery. Extemporaneous speaking involves preparing an outline, rather than a word-for-word manuscript. Outlines are designed to keep debaters organized and remind them what they are going to talk about, and should not contain the exact words that will be used in a speech. In Worlds-Style debate, debaters do not have time to write out a complete speech that responds to their opponents and addresses the changing needs of the argument situation. They have fifteen minutes to think of arguments, examples, and reasons. Since they do not have time to write the speech word-for-word, debaters need to learn how to prepare an outline of what they plan want to talk about in the speech.

Speaking from an outline sounds better than speaking from a manuscript because it sounds more conversational. Reading from a manuscript frequently sounds boring. Scripted speeches are focused more on the content and the wording of that content rather than on making sure the audience understands and is persuaded by the content. Speeches given from an outline
allow debaters to speak in a more relaxed and personable way about things that they know. Experienced debaters usually sound more interesting because they vary their tone appropriately, like they do in everyday conversation.

Extemporaneous speaking also allows more flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the debate. If a debater is speaking from a manuscript, then responding to a point of information or adding an explanation if a judge looks confused becomes more difficult. Worlds-Style debating requires that speakers be able to adjust to nonverbal feedback from the audience. Extemporaneous delivery enhances the skill of managing nonverbal feedback.

*Language Context*

When debaters speak to audiences who may have a different primary language, regional, or national background than the debater, then the debater needs to speak to that audience in a way that can be understood by everyone. Especially in international debate events, debaters from one country will frequently find themselves debating before judges from other nations who have different primary languages. Whether speaking in the native language of debaters and judges from different regions or speaking in a foreign language to native and non-native speakers, debaters face a danger that an unfamiliar accent may stand in the way of the audience fully understanding their speech.

The first thing debaters must do is to speak more slowly, especially at the beginning of the speech. Give the audience and fellow debaters, time to adjust to a new accent, pronunciation, and choice of words. Speaking too quickly at the beginning of a speech can frustrate audiences and fellow debaters who really want to listen and understand, but are struggling. Pausing at the end of sentences and at the conclusion of ideas to allow audience members to process language and information with which they may be less familiar.

A second thing a debater can do involves watching the audience. Do they seem to understand? Do they look confused? Are they taking notes about the speech? These nonverbal cues can help guide choices about rate of speaking during the debate. Finally, remember to enunciate. Debaters need to pay careful attention to the audience, especially when matters of language context may have the effect of interfering with the audience receiving and retaining the important parts of the message.

Finally, remember that the most ethical debater will use delivery to communicate arguments not only to the adjudicators, but to the other debaters as well. Only an unethical debater would, for instance, use their language choices or their accent to communicate ideas with a judge that debaters from a different language context would not understand. For instance, an ethical debater from the United States debating before a judge from the United States should never speak rapidly in his or her United States accent in a way that might successfully communicate with the judge from the United States while excluding debaters from China. Delivery, like all elements of debate, should be used in the most ethical manner in order to be considered effective.
Speaking Effectively Using Body and Voice

Both the body and voice are elements of effective delivery. The next sections will consider these two important elements of effective speaking.

Using the Body in Delivery

Delivery is made up of multiple presentation channels. Everything a speaker does during, before, and after the speech, is part of delivery. This section explains how debaters can use their bodies to deliver an effective speech. Stance, eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures all contribute to the overall impression that a debater wants to give to the audience.

**Stance.** During the speech, a debater needs to convey confidence through the use of posture and stance. When called upon by the adjudicator to give a speech, stand up calmly and walk purposefully to the front of the room. Jumping up nervously or continuing to scribble notes conveys the impression that the speaker is anxious or not ready to speak. Similarly, when standing to offer a point of information, stand calmly, but purposefully; do not give the impression that, if the point is not accepted, everything is lost. Stand calmly as if to say, “now is a good time to make that point I’ve been saving.”

While speaking, debaters should stand with their feet planted, about shoulder-width apart. Having the feet planted means that the speaker should keep both feet on the floor with weight distributed constantly and evenly on both feet. In other words, debaters should not rock on their feet or shift their weight from foot to foot. Keeping the feet firmly planted communicates that the debater is taking a firm stance in terms of content. Shifting of weight or rocking makes a debater look uncomfortable about what he or she is saying. Similarly, pacing around the front of the room makes a debater look nervous as though he or she wants to leave the room. Remember to stand firmly with feet planted to avoid letting nervousness play out in speaking.

Many rooms in which debaters are assigned to speak will not have a podium. In those cases, debaters need to find a comfortable way of speaking, even when they have to hold their notes in their hands. They should stand straight rather than bend over to look at notes placed on a low table or desk for at least three reasons. First, standing straight helps the audience hear the debater more easily because his or her voice is projected to the audience members rather than downward at the table. Second, speakers who are bent over cannot breathe from their diaphragm. Debaters will speak more comfortably and confidently if they have access to diaphragmatic breathing. Third, by standing up straight while speaking, will make debaters look more credible than if they are hunched over papers on a table.

*Maintaining Eye Contact.* While norms of eye contact vary from culture to culture, debaters need to keep an eye on judges for a couple of reasons. First, looking at the judges helps debaters know what judges are writing and what they are not writing. Are they following the
arguments that debaters are making? Are they lost? Some facial expressions and movements of judges can give a debater a lot of information about how to adjust his or her speech to the needs of the debate. Second, for many Western judges, eye contact is a sign of confidence and credibility, whereas, looking at notes or looking at the wall indicates that debaters is less sure of they are saying. Of course, debaters should not appear disrespectful to members of their audiences, so following cultural practices is the first order of importance for the speech. In most Asian cultures, extended, steady, or constant eye contact is considered rude and challenging (Cultural China). In these situations, brief and intermittent eye contact is preferred.

**Facial Expressions.** Facial expressions can help create sound emotional appeals and can make a speech more interesting. Debaters should try to match their expressions to what they are saying. Obviously, debaters should not exaggerate their expressions, but should let their feelings about what they are saying show on their faces. Debaters should think about what they want the audience to feel about the example they are using or the explanations they are making. Audiences frequently get cues for how speakers feel about their materials from the speaker’s facial expressions and vocal tone. Having facial expressions that reflect the emotional appeals of a debater’s speech will create a consistent message sent to the audience through multiple channels of speaking, and will increase the debater’s credibility.

**Gestures.** Gestures can show a speaker’s confidence and help emphasize important points in his or her speech. For gestures to look confident and serve the purpose of emphasis, they must be limited, purposeful, and varied. Speakers who are nervous frequently gesture too much in their speeches. Their hands and arms are constantly moving throughout the seven minutes of their speech. Gestures are a little like underlining or highlighting in a book. If used sparingly, highlighting draws the reader’s attention to the important passages in the book. If an entire page is highlighted or underlined, nothing stands out and the page is harder to read. In a speech, gesturing constantly can distract an audience from what the speaker is saying. Gestures should be limited to those times when the debater wants to draw attention to important words and phrases.

Gestures can also present a visual picture of the structure of a speech or an argument. A debater might, for example, hold up a finger to help indicate his or her first point, two fingers to assist in indicating point two, and so forth. A gesture can visually represent a comparison when the debater holds out one hand and describes one half of the comparison, then holds out the other hand to describe the other half of the comparison. Debaters should make sure gestures are varied and avoid using the same gesture over and over during the speech.

**Using the Voice in Delivery**

Voice plays a powerful role in delivering a speech. Using voice with variety and purpose enhances a debater’s speaking. This section explains how to vary the use of voice purposefully. The rate of speaking and the use of pauses, volume, and vocal tone all
contribute to the quality of a speech and, used well, can give the impression of polish and poise.

**Speaking Rate.** The rate of speaking is one important element of voice. As previously mentioned, a speech that starts off at a slower rate can help audiences who are unfamiliar with a debater’s accent or pronunciation adjust to that debater’s speaking. In addition to controlling the rate at the beginning of a speech, a debater can also use quicker or slower speech as a delivery strategy to keep the speech more interesting and effective.

Speaking at the exact same pace for the entire seven minutes is not as interesting or as easy to listen to as a speech that has some variety to it. However, debaters should not arbitrarily vary their rate of speaking. When describing the model, for example, the debater will want to slow down. Description of the model is an important part of the Prime Minister speech where a misunderstanding could not only hurt the opening government team, but the debate as a whole. Any speaker using complex concepts or processes, unfamiliar ideas, or complicated evidence should slow down during the delivery of those parts of his or her speech. A debater should increase his or her pace a little when using a narrative example, when recapping familiar ideas, or when repeating arguments already explained earlier in the debate. A quickened pace conveys confidence and enthusiasm; a slower pace conveys thought and care. Having a mixture of those qualities improves any speech.

**Pauses.** Pauses are another element of voice that is important to delivery. Just as a book with no punctuation would be confusing, a speech without appropriate pauses is confusing. Using pauses in the speech can help indicate that the debater is moving on to a new idea or is open to taking a point of information. Pausing can let the audience catch their mental breath for a second and reflect on what the debater has just said. A pause would be helpful after delivering complex or important material, such as a model or a detailed piece of evidence. It is also helpful to pause after delivering a preview of the speech’s main points. That way, the judges can make sure they understand the structure of the speech before it gets underway. Debaters should also pause between points. In addition to making sure that they use pauses in their speeches, debaters also make sure that their pauses are silent. Sometimes, debaters will use filled pauses during their speeches. These are sounds like “uhhhh” or “ummmmm” during a pause. Pauses are the most effective if they are silent, unfilled by sounds or words.

**Volume.** Volume of a speech affects how the audience perceives the debater’s vocal delivery. Any speech should be delivered at a volume that the audience can hear. As debaters think about how loudly to speak in a debate, they need to consider the size of the room and how far away the judges are. In larger rooms with high ceilings, they will need to speak more loudly. In smaller rooms, they will want to speak more quietly so the judges don’t feel as though the debaters are shouting at them. In addition to speaking at the appropriate volume, debaters can also consider using volume as an element to make a speech sound more interesting. Purposefully varying the volume of a speech can enhance delivery and make a debater sound more polished. The debater can raise his or her voice a bit when describing an example that causes outrage, then can lower the voice describing something that is extremely serious.
Going from a louder to a quieter voice will often cause a judge look up from his or her notes to listen more carefully to the debater. A debater can lower his or her volume to call attention to an important point in the debate.

*Tone.* Tone, like many other elements of delivery, should be varied during the speech. A monotone speech is indicative of a boring speech. Most of the time, if debaters are speaking extemporaneously, they will not sound as monotone as they might if they were reading from a manuscript. In an extemporaneous speech, debaters will likely use the same natural variation of tone used in conversation. Tone can help emphasize important points and assist the adjudicators and audience in picking up emotional appeals. Debaters should make sure that they vary their tone according to the emotions in the speech. Debaters need to consider what they want the audience to feel. By thinking actively about how the arguments, examples, and ideas make them feel and how they want the audience to feel, debaters should have little trouble matching their vocal tone to the emotional tone of their arguments. Debaters who are struggling with varying their tone can try varying their facial expressions. One’s tone generally lines up with the emotions one is displaying facially.

**Summary**

This chapter has been about how to use delivery to become a better speaker. The chapter began with some general features related to delivery and debate, such as speaking directly to the judge, using extemporaneous delivery, and paying attention to the context of language. Attention then turned to the use of body and voice to improve effective speaking. The chapter then focused on some specific tips for using body and voice to become a more effective speaker.

One point needs to be emphasized. Following those or any other delivery tips needs to be done within the context of a speaker’s natural delivery. That is to say, a speaker who simply tries to utilize the tips offered in this text without regard for his or her own natural delivery may be seen as unnatural and robotic. Every debater needs to remember that speaking is a natural human activity. Everyone speaks to someone everyday and usually does not need to worry about “delivery tips.” Those tips are presented only as a way of improving a debater’s natural delivery, not as a way of replacing it.

Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (otherwise known as Quintilain) was a popular teacher of speaking during the early Roman Empire. He said that “the perfection of art is to conceal the art” (Quintilain). Debaters who use the tips offered in this text to improve themselves as more natural speakers will be effective in concealing the art and, thus, in perfecting the art of speaking.
Terms and Concepts From Chapter 14

- Matter
- Manner
- Extemporaneous speaking
- Stance
- Eye contact
- Facial expression
- Gesture
- Rate of speech
- Pause
- Volume
- Tone

Discussion Questions For Chapter 14

- How are elements like stance, eye, contact, facial expression, and gestures important to delivery?
- How should debaters best control eye contact in Western cultures? In Eastern cultures?
- How do elements like speaking rate, pauses, volume, and tone contribute to effective delivery?

Exercises For Chapter 14

Exercise I: The purpose of this exercise is to allow students to see the effectiveness of their natural manner of delivery and contrast it to their manner of delivery in a debate.

Have a student prepare an argument and present the argument to a group of students. Video recording this speech is best, but if this is impossible, then comments from the group of students also works well. After the presentation of the argument, ask the student to sit quietly and imagine a very memorable incident in their life. Tell the student to bring their memory of that incident into the foreground of their consciousness imagining that they were physically present in the time and place that the incident occurred. After they have sat quietly and contemplated this incident, have the student stand and describe the incident to the other group of students. Discuss the differences in delivery between the students argumentative speech and their description of the incident.
Exercise 2:

Choose an emotion (outrage, triumph, celebration, concern, etc.). Tell a story of a recent news event in which that emotion was central. The goal of the exercise is to have the audience guess the emotion you are expressing through tone, volume, facial expression, etc.

Exercise 3:

Ask students to prepare an argument for or against a motion. Rather than delivering the argument in a speech, ask the students first to tell the instructor or one other student about the argument in conversation.