British Parliamentary Debating

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Contents

1. Introduction

There is a reason why this guide is not called "How to win in British Parliamentary Debating", or even "How to avoid losing in BPD" – because there is not, will never be, and cannot be a foolproof way of winning, or even avoiding last place, in a debate. If there were, the book would have been written, we would all have read it and debating as a competitive activity would cease to exist!

That being said, the aim of this guide is to help you prepare as much as possible for debate competitions conducted in the British Parliamentary style. We will look at the format of debates, and what are termed the standing orders, the speakers' positions in the debate and the role they are required to fulfil, motions and how (and when) to define them, style and substance (also called 'matter' and 'manner'), the vagaries of judging and how to cope with them, and finally, where to go, and what to do from here.

By the end of the pack, you will hopefully feel confident that you know what you are doing, and to a certain extent, how you are going to do it. Remember, you can have all the advice, encouragement and coaching in the world, but when you go into a debate and you stand up to speak, it's all down to you.

2. The format, *or*, Rules of the game

There are many different styles of debating around the world – US Parliamentary, Australs, even the Dutch do it differently – but the one that concerns us here is British Parliamentary Debating, or BP, for short. This is the standard form used at university level and differs radically from the schools style to which some young debaters are used. BP debates consist of four teams of two speakers each, broken down as follows:

- **1st Proposition (sometimes called 1st Government)**
- **1st Opposition**
- **2nd Proposition (or Government)**
- **2nd Opposition**

The speakers speak in rotation, beginning with the first team member of 1st Proposition ("the Prime Minister"). He or she is followed by the opening speaker for 1st Opposition ("Leader of the Opposition"), who in turn is followed 1st Propositions second speaker ("the Deputy Prime Minister") and so on down the table until all speeches have been completed. The table below explains this.

1st Speaker	Prime Minister	Leader of the Opposition	2nd Speaker
3rd Speaker	Deputy Prime Minister	Deputy Leader of the Opposition	4th Speaker
5th Speaker	Member for Government	Member for the Opposition	6th Speaker
7th Speaker	Government Whip	Opposition Whip	8th Speaker

When all eight speeches have been delivered, the debate is considered at an end, and the judging process begins (see 'Judging', p.18) So far, so straightforward. But there are certain conventions and expectations in BP debates and this is what we mean when talking about the 'rules of the game'.

First, BP debating aims to recreate to a degree the style of debating practised in Parliament and in august institutions such as the Oxford and Cambridge Unions. It is therefore essential that 'Parliamentary language' is used at all times. Thus, debaters are addressed as 'Sir' or 'Madam', the chair of the debate is often referred to as 'Mr Speaker', and debaters will often make reference to 'members of the House'. While this may seem excessively formal, there is good reason. A debate is not an argument in the sense that most of us understand that word – it is not about shouting more loudly or more forcefully than your opponent (see 'Style or substance?' p.16) or insulting them. They may smell a bit, look like a bulldog eating a wasp, or have the most ridiculous hair since Einstein, but pointing out will not win you the debate.

On the contrary, if you are rude, you will be warned by the Chair, and you may lose points, and subsequently, the debate if you continue. Respectful language is what is called for, and what the judges will expect to hear. It should not need to be stressed that vulgar language and swearing are never acceptable, but unfortunately, some people still forget. Debating is about making arguments in a controlled, adult fashion and any swearing is usually severely penalised.

Second, we come to points of information (POIs). These are an integral part of BP debating, and one of the ways in which BP differs from

styles such as Australs. Speeches in BP tend to be of either five or seven minutes (depending on the competition – you will generally be told which before the tournament begins), and the first and last minutes of each speech are 'protected'. This means that no speaker from the opposing teams may interrupt the person making their speech during this time. In the interim three (or five) minutes, however, POIs are positively encouraged. We will look at POIs in more detail later (see 'Positions and roles', p.7), but for now it is enough to say that there are ways of making POIs which are acceptable, and some which are clearly not.

The simplest, and possibly the best, way of offering a POI (we will look at how to *make* the point later) is to stand and say "On a point of information" in a loud, clear voice. "On that point", or more simply, "Point, Sir/Madam" are also acceptable. Whichever you choose, you must wait for the speaker to accept or decline your point. If you are accepted, make your point quickly (about 30 seconds or so). If you are declined, take your seat immediately. What is not acceptable is to stand and simply start speaking without being invited to take the floor, or to offer the point in such a way that the point is made, e.g. "On the fact that violent crime is on the rise and your model only makes this worse…" (It is extremely difficult to give an example in the abstract, but hopefully, you get the idea.)

The last point regarding format and 'rules' is that when a speaker has the floor, that is the only person to whom the judges want to listen and should be listening. You may want to discuss issues as they arise with your partner, for example when to offer a POI and what to say, but you should be able to do this in such a way that the judges are not distracted. If you cannot speak quietly enough (and judges will not be shy about letting you know!), then pass small notes to each other. The House is a respectful

one, and all members, whether speaking or not, are expected to behave in a correct and fitting manner.

3. Positions and roles

This section will be broken down by speaker, outlining what the speaker's position in a debate means, and what is required for 'role fulfilment'. At the end, we will look briefly at the common elements of the debate – that is, things which all speakers need to do in order to score well.

a. The Prime Minister

The job of the first speaker, or Prime Minister, is to set up the debate. This may sound obvious, but is so often overlooked, or simply badly done, that it is worth stressing. What this means in the most basic terms is that the PM states what the debate is about, and what are the boundaries.

The speech will need to consist of some, or all, of the following elements: definition of the motion (if required), the case being presented (what the problem is, why it is a problem, what will be done to solve it), supporting arguments as to how objectives will be achieved, and why achieving those objectives is a good thing.

A case will usually require some form of mechanism, but this is not always true. It is acceptable for 1st Government, and the PM, to set up the debate as one of principle. An example of this would be a motion stating "This House Supports Positive Discrimination for Women in the Army". 1st Government have the option of a mechanism (i.e. exactly how they would positively discriminate) but may choose to run the debate on the principle that positive discrimination for women in the army is a good thing *per se*, rather than introduce any specific form of discrimination. That may be a weaker (or 'soft') case in the eyes of the judges (and may be hard

for 1st Government to sustain over two speeches), but it is legitimate.

Depending on whether or not a mechanism is put forward, and how involved that mechanism is, the PM will usually make two or three arguments in support of his position, and may outline the further arguments to be made by his/her Deputy.

b. Leader of the Opposition

The Leader of the Opposition performs a role that is in essence similar to that of all remaining speakers in the debate, excepting the Whips on both sides. The speaker should point out any flaws in the mechanism chosen (if there is one), rebut the arguments made by the PM and make substantive arguments that support his/her position.

Rebuttal is essential if you are to defeat 1st Government, but don't get too bogged down in it. If the mechanism is obviously ridiculous, there is no need to spend three of your five minutes pointing out all that is wrong with it. If you make the 'big' points as to why the mechanism is unworkable, or will make the identified problem worse and not better, that is usually enough for the mechanism to fall. You can then move on to deal with why the supporting arguments (the principles underpinning the mechanism) are also wrong, both directly with rebuttal, and by making your own arguments.

It must be mentioned here that rebuttal is not simply contradiction – what is sometimes called 'the confusion of rebuttal, refutation and repudiation'. All of these are ways of contradicting, but with important differences. If you refute something, you deny

the accuracy or the truth of the argument. If you repudiate something, you reject the validity or authority of it, reject it as unfounded or untrue, or simply refuse to recognize it. Neither of these is enough in a debate. When rebutting, you not only do one or both of the above, but in addition, you say how and why it is wrong or false, and provide the counter-argument that proves it. If you can do that, then the points made by the PM can be made to look very lightweight indeed.

Finally comes your own substantive material. These are points that stand in their own right, and are not the same as rebuttal. The points should introduce new material to the debate, and be supportive of your position in the debate. These are the arguments which the Deputy PM will be expected to deal with in his/her speech.

c. Deputy PM & Deputy Leader of the Opposition

These two positions may be dealt with together, as both speeches are essentially the same. As with the Leader of the Opposition the speeches are expected to consist of rebuttal of the previous speaker's material and new substantive arguments in favour of, or against the motion. The Deputy PM may also need to include some 'reinforcement' of the case, depending on the job done by the Leader of the Opposition. If the mechanism has been attacked, it will need defending, or the attack may stand in the eyes of the judges, but this will form part of the Deputy PM's rebuttal. In both Deputies' speeches, though, there will need to be significant new arguments in support of their Leaders', and, ideally, little left for the second half of the table.

d. Extension Speakers

The Members for Government and Opposition are also known as extension speakers – quite simply, because their role is to extend the debate. There is a lot of confusion, even at university level, as to what constitutes a valid extension, and it is probably easier to define in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is.

An extension is not something which extends the mechanism or definition provided by 1st Government. If the debate is about EU expansion into Turkey, for example, you don't extend by adding Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria! If a motion stating that 'This House Believes in Corporal Punishment' is defined as parents' right to smack their children, it is not legitimate to say that schoolteachers should be allowed to do it as well. You get the idea.

What an extension does do may be defined as one of two things: it either provides a significantly deeper level of analysis of material on the table, or introduces a new element or direction to the debate. New examples to support existing arguments are again not enough. By way of an example, let us imagine that the first half of the debate on corporal punishment has concentrated on rights of the parents, rights of the child, affects on behaviour and development, and the benefits or otherwise to society. A legitimate extension would be to talk about when corporal punishment is used in general, when society does allow or condone, or even practice physical punishment and the principles behind physical/non-physical punishment in general. This is known as widening the debate. Similarly, but conversely, where 1st Government has set up a principled debate (e.g. on positive discrimination) it is entirely legitimate to 'narrow' the debate to talk

about the specific effects of affirmative action, quota systems, etc. Neither of the above contradicts what has been said in the first half of the debate, and adds significant new arguments to the debate, which is precisely for what extension speakers should be aiming.

Don't worry if this seems difficult, confusing, or even gibberish. Some of the best debaters in the world struggle with extensions, and third speaker on either side of the table is recognised as possibly the hardest position from which to speak. Oh, and don't forget that, on top of all this, you still need to rebut what was said before!!!

e. Summaries

The final speaker on each side (the Whip) has a very different role to all others in the debate (and, it must be said, sometimes to each other).

The Government Whip begins much like the others – that is, with rebuttal. But following that, the speech is very different. The Whip's job is to summarise the case for the proposition, and as far as possible, to ensure that the arguments made by his/her teammate are put to the fore. Stressing the strong points of 1st Government, whilst sometimes necessary, is going to convince judges of one thing – that all the good arguments came from 1st Government! On the other hand, don't ignore what was said in the first half of the debate. If you do, then you are only summarising half the debate, and will be marked down accordingly. It is acceptable for the Government Whip to introduce new material in the form of new examples that support existing arguments, but not

to introduce new arguments *per se*. However, given the vagaries of judges, it is probably best to avoid anything that seems too new in the way of examples as well, in case these are misconstrued by the judges.

The Opposition Whip, by contrast, must not introduce any new material whatsoever. The other difference is that, along with the PM, the Opposition Whip may be the only other speaker not required to provide rebuttal. This depends on whether new material is introduced by his/her counterpart. When new material has been introduced it should always be rebutted. If there is nothing new, however, no rebuttal should be necessary. The Opposition Whip, like the speaker before should then summarise the whole debate, focusing on why his/her side have won, and attempting to bring his/her partner's arguments to the fore. The advantage of being Opposition Whip is obvious – as the last speaker in the debate, you have a fantastic opportunity to tell the judges exactly what the debate has been about, why opposition beats proposition, and why the strongest arguments were those made by your teammate. Best of all, there's no-one standing up after you to contradict what you have said!

<u>f. Common Elements</u>

It is essential to remain as involved in the whole debate as possible when not giving your speech, which means offering POIs whenever you can. If as PM you say nothing following your opening speech, or as Whip you say nothing until it is your turn to speak, in a close debate it is unlikely that you will win, especially when everyone else has engaged with all the speakers on the other

side of the table. Similarly, you must take POIs during your speech to show that you are responding to the moment and not just reading a prepared text. As to how many POIs you should take, a good rule of thumb is at least one, and no more than two, for a five minute speech (remember, there are only three 'unprotected' minutes) and at least two, and no more than three, for a seven minute speech. POIs are not separate to your role, they are part of it, and not offering or taking one can again be enough to cost you the win in a close room.

So what should you say? The POI should be as relevant as possible to what is being said, and should help your side and damage the arguments of the other. It is difficult, obviously to give an example in the abstract, but you could try something like "Statistics show that while crime is decreasing, violent crime is increasing. How does your proposal for 24-hour pub licences help this?"

And when should you accept the offer of a POI? When you know you are on solid ground. If you are unsure about the validity of one of your arguments, and all four people on the other side leap to their feet, it's probably not a good idea to invite them to tell you why you are wrong! Wait until you're making your strong arguments, and take a point then, if you can.

4. Motions and definitions

Most debate competitions that use BP format prefer motions which are 'closed' or 'semi-closed' – that is, motions which require little or no definition. They may require a mechanism, but that is the choice of 1st Government. What they do not need is redefining in terms of what is to be debated.

An example of a 'closed' motion is 'This House Believes the EU Should Begin Expansion Talks with the Ukraine". It is clear and unequivocal what is to be debated, and no definition is necessary, or even desirable. A 'semi-closed' motion would be 'This House Believes the EU Should Begin Expansion Talks with North Africa' – again it is clear what is to be debated, but it would be acceptable for 1st Government to redefine North Africa as Morocco and Algeria but not Tunisia, for example. This is sometimes called a policy definition, because the redefinition of the motion is linked to the specific case and arguments which 1st Government wish to present. It may also be called a 'mechanistic' definition, again, because the redefinition is essential to the workability of the mechanism.

As was said earlier, the decision whether to include a mechanism or run a principled case rests with 1st Government. Either is legitimate, although it must be said again that some judges will perceive the absence of a mechanism as a 'soft' case, i.e. you have shied away from the difficult part of 1st Government's job. You will not necessarily lose because of this, but you may make Opposition's job easier for them.

By the same token, if 1st Government chooses not to include a mechanism, 1st Opposition should mention the fact, but should not make it

the whole of their opposition, or even their rebuttal. Doing so shows a reluctance to engage with the principled arguments of Government, which may be seen as a concession. The best advice is to include a mechanism where possible, as long as the mechanism is not so complicated and involved that it takes up almost all the PM's speech! That gives too much to Opposition, as it likely that the more complicated the mechanism, the more difficulties there will be with it, and you are also leaving open the first arguments for Opposition to make – never a good thing.

5. Style or substance?

The question here is, what matters most, being a charming, witty and engaging speaker, or having so many facts and figures to support your arguments, and the analysis to go with it that you cannot be beaten on substance? Once again, if there was one right answer, we wouldn't need a guide like this.

The fact is, even judges at World Championships cannot begin to agree on this! The Australians will always prioritise your matter (substance) over your manner; in Ireland you could win a debate just telling jokes for seven minutes. Happily, in Britain, we fall somewhere between the two, and marks for speakers are awarded equally for manner and matter. This is the fairest way, as it does not give an unfair advantage to either the comic or the encyclopaedia that sends you to sleep.

Matter is important – you cannot win a debate without providing examples to support your argument, and some analysis as to why that example works, why it works for *your* case, and why it is better than the example given by the other side of the table. But there is nothing more boring than someone who reels off facts and figures in a barely audible, monotonous voice, looking down at the floor. If the judge is so bored that he stops listening then it doesn't matter how good your argument is – if the judge doesn't hear it, you won't get the credit.

That is not to say that you must be the funniest person in the world to win. Not everyone is, or can be funny, and when someone tries and fails, it can be worse than not trying. But what everyone can, and should do, is have inflection, stress the words and the points you want the judges to

notice (try slowing down your speech when making your 'killer' point), and make regular eye contact with all the judges. If you can crack a joke, great, you should do so, but do not make your speech a stand-up routine. Being funny won't win the debate (except in Ireland!) so make sure that, if you are funny, you are funny whilst being relevant and making strong arguments. If you can do that, you will be very hard to beat.

A word must also be said about structure, which is part of both manner and matter. The simple fact is, most judges are quite simple, and will get lost in your speech if you don't 'signpost' what you are saying. At the university level, some of the best speakers lose because they forget their structure (or they think they are good enough not to need it!)

Everybody needs good structure. This is because when you are speaking and making good eye contact with the judges it can be difficult for them to note everything down. A clear structure highlights points at the beginning in big bold headings ("This is what I am going to talk about today [1,2,3]), flags each new point as it is raised ("This is the 1st/2nd/3rd point I am going to bring to the table"), and finishes by briefly recapping those points ("So what have I told you? I've told you [1…2…3…]).

You can then be sure that the judge has had plenty of opportunity to note down what the points are, so that when you are developing them in the middle of your speech, he/she can concentrate on the argument and analysis that goes with it. Every debate culture in the world recognizes the importance of clear structure, and it is, fortunately, one of the few things on which we all agree!

6. Judging

All judges, although it may not seem like it, are human – honest! That is to say, they are not perfect, debate-judging machines. They can (and do) make mistakes. But they try very, very hard not to make mistakes, and most of the time, they succeed.

So what will they look for from you? Put simply, all of the above! Structure, style, arguments backed up by examples and supported by analysis, good rebuttal of an opposing team's arguments, and plenty of POIs being offered. All these help you win a debate, but there will be times when you do all of this, and still don't win. So what happened?

The judge has to balance the arguments he/she has heard – what were the 'killer' points, and who made them? Did the style of the PM overcome the substance of the Leader of the Opposition? It is very rare that debaters will be evenly matched in all areas, and the judge must decide what was more important *in that debate.*

What a judge should never do is bring his/her own knowledge to the debate. Judges are not there to judge you on what *wasn't* said, or on what they *expect* to be said, they judge on what has been brought to the table by you. That is not to say that, if the 'big' arguments have been missed, they cannot mention it in their feedback (e.g. "I was surprised that nobody mentioned X, as it is central to the debate, [but it has not affected the decision in any way]…) as feedback is not just about why they made the decision they did, it is about helping you to become better debaters.

So what will happen when the debate is done, and judgment has been made? For most debates, you will receive 'open' adjudication – you

will be told your position in the debate, and reasons for it. For later rounds, semi-finals, etc., it will generally be kept secret until the finalists are announced. This helps to keep the suspense. In any case, once a decision is announced, you can then approach your judges for feedback.

Remember, even if you disagree with the decision, listen to the reasons for it. Most judges have debated before, some to an exceptionally high level, and will be able to justify their choice of winner and loser. If you think a decision is wrong, and the 'justification' given also seems wrong, you may wish to complain to the tournament organisers – they won't change the decision, but will look carefully at that judge in the future.

Be careful, though. If you complain about every decision where you lose or come third, people may start to think that the problem lies with you rather than with your judges. Bad judging does sometimes happen, and it can be devastating, but all debaters suffer from it, and all have to deal with it. It is unfortunate, but it is also the nature of debating, and how you cope with a bad decision, and how you respond to it in the next round, often says more about you as a debater than winning every round.

7. What next?

There is only so much that can be taught in a guide such as this. It can explain the basics, but there really is no substitute for practice. Have as many debates as you can, try your hand at judging one or two (you'll soon see how difficult it can be!), read as much as you can about current affairs, as these are likely to be the issues you will be debating. Most importantly, if you have strong beliefs about one topic or another, try building a case that puts forward the opposite point of view. You may not always be asked to debate o the side with which you already agree! above all, whenever, wherever and whichever topic you debate, remember – it may be a serious activity whilst you are doing it, but it should also be fun! So practice as much as you can, read as much as you can, be prepared to think on your feet, and enjoy it!

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Public Speaking: A professional approach

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1. Who does it, and who needs it?

The short answer is everybody. All people, in all walks of life will need to communicate in public. That much is obvious. But what isn't obvious to everybody is just how often we use public speaking, and more general communication skills, in day-to-day life. Every time we meet someone on the street, every time we enter a shop to make a purchase; in short, every time we speak, we should be using our communication skills to the fore.

The purpose of communication is simple: we are attempting to get across a particular message. We are perhaps trying to convince someone of our position, of our point of view, or to buy into a particular idea or purchase a particular product. Or we might have a specific agenda, a goal in mind that we wish to achieve. Whichever it might be, it is often, if not always, the case that when we communicate we are looking to persuade somebody of something. With that in mind, we need to focus on how we communicate, what we are doing when communicating, and how we can try to make ourselves more persuasive generally, and particularly when addressing an audience in public.

Certain professions clearly have more need and use for this than others, and often we find that practitioners of those professions have learned the various techniques that make them persuasive. Again, once they have those skills they are often able to deploy them in their day-to-day life and therefore are able to achieve what they want, when they want it, most of the time. Politicians, lawyers, teachers and actors all have their own techniques, from which we can learn to be more effective communicators, more persuasive communicators, and how to get what we want (be that getting the right message across, or achieving the right outcome) more of the time.

By drawing on those techniques and looking at the more technical skills from the world of theatre, we can learn the tricks that effective communicators use all the time. With practice, they can become second nature to us; when we no longer look like we are trying too hard, the results will always be better.

2. When are we going to use it?

As we have already said, communication skills are needed, and used, every day, in every walk of life. We are always in a position when we will need to persuade somebody of something – whether it be negotiating a sale (as either vendor or purchaser), making a speech from the stump, giving a presentation to a class or boardroom, or simply trying to convince someone of the inherent right of our arguments.

Clearly, some roles will need these skills more, and more often. People who are engaged in debate, whether as a competitive activity or no; people who are looking to enter, or are already immersed in the worlds of business, law, and politics; people who want to set up their own enterprise: they all need to be able to persuade people. But of what? Are they trying to persuade people of different things each time, or is there an element of commonality in what they do?

The answer is, whilst some of what might be being said is specific, the first objective is always the same. We know from various studies of the psychology of social conformity that people like people who they think are like them. Similarly, we trust those we think are like us, and are far more ready to buy into the ideas they present. It's the same with salespeople. We like those salespeople who appear most like us; that is why sales courses teach techniques such as 'mirroring', where the same phrases are used by both parties. Sales people are often taught to find out about the person to whom they are selling, to try to identify some common ground, so that they can get the person 'on side'. The reason for this is obvious: if we trust those people we like, we will trust more readily the salesman we think is most like us. We will feel less like we are being 'sold to', and consequently, we will be more ready to buy. It is a truism of sales training that 'people buy people before they buy products', meaning that we buy into someone's manner before we begin to trust what they say about other things.

All the techniques which we would hope to learn are designed in essence to make us as speakers more likeable to our audience, whomever that might be. It is not possible (or perhaps even desirable) to be liked by all people, equally, but we can try to appeal to the broadest number possible, by moderating what we do and avoiding extreme modes of behaviour. It is important to remember that, as Perquillit tells us, "The advocate who seeks to persuade must first seek to please." Only when people are willing to listen to what we have to say will we have a chance to convince them we are right. And people will only listen if it is pleasant to do so.

3. How do we do it?

a. Communication breakdown

By this, we do not mean 'a breakdown in communication' but rather 'a breakdown *of* communication', as it is important to know first how we communicate generally, before we begin to look at specific areas of communication we might want to improve.

Through studies of communication, we know that anywhere between 70% and 80% of communication is non-verbal; that is to say, approximately _ of what is understood has nothing to do either with the words you say or how you say them. In face-to-face communication, the vast majority of what we communicate is done so through our body language and facial expressions. When there is conflict between what is being said, and the body language that accompanies it, our natural reaction is to believe not the words but the demeanour of the person. So it is imperative that we ensure that we are delivering a constant message through all media; otherwise we will only convince people of their own confusion.

When looking at that portion of communication that is verbal, there is a further breakdown: if we take an approximate figure of 25% - 30% of all communication being both the words we say, and how we say them, studies have shown that only 7% of the overall total is what is actually said! The remaining 18% - 23% is dependent on our voice; the pitch, tone, pace, volume, even the accent contribute more to others' understanding of our message than the text we have selected so carefully.

Added to this is the problem known as 'the 1/3 rule': one third of what we say is never heard; one third of what is heard is never listened to; and one third of what is listened to is never understood. By using the various techniques of the professionals, we can overcome as far as possible these obstacles. By using our voice effectively, we will ensure that more of what we say is heard; by making ourselves interesting to listen to, we will ensure that people do listen, more of the time; by using language appropriately, we will ensure that people understand. We will look at these potential obstacles in more detail later, but we must first deal with those aspects of non-verbal communication, to ensure there are no conflicting messages.

b. Body Language

Body language is something that we are all aware of to a certain degree; some people are experts in reading body language, and are particularly good at detecting abnormal behaviour in body language which might indicate that someone is being defensive or is lying. But we are most aware of body language when it is bad, when someone either moves not

at all, or excessively. The reason for this is simple: we notice things that distract us, and good body language is not distracting. That said, there is no right or wrong way to stand, no measurement of how much you should gesticulate, or how often. And this is not the place for a detailed examination of the study of body language. But there are a few things which might help people to find what works for them.

When speaking in public, we will, in all likelihood be on our feet. We therefore need to find a stance that is comfortable, and that fits with what we are trying to say. Standing with the feet shoulder-width apart works for most people, as there is no undue stress on the muscles in the back and the leg. A much wider stance, or a narrower one is more difficult to maintain as the stresses applied to individual muscle groups are increased. Standing in this way also helps with breathing (see '**Using the voice as a tool**').

Gestures, when appropriate, can highlight the text we are delivering in much the same way as formatting a document on a word processor. Using hands to emphasise a particular point is a very effective way of helping an audience to remember it. But just like formatting, when it is overdone it ceases to have any effect. An entire essay presented in bold text or in italics has no highlighting effect; similarly, if we (over)use the same gestures all the time, they no longer act as pointers, but as a distraction. There is also no right or wrong way to gesture; with practice we will all know what feels natural, what feels *right*, and therefore what will appear most comfortable to an audience. The last word on gesticulation is to keep it small. That doesn't mean that people at the back of the auditorium shouldn't be able to see it, but that the gesture shouldn't hide what is being said. Remember that we need the largest possible number of people to like us when we are speaking; keeping our gestures moderate will alienate as few as possible

c. Facial Expressions

Facial expressions tell us a huge amount about the message being delivered, and about the demeanour of the person delivering that message. However, as most public speaking occurs in a large auditorium, its importance diminishes as people are rarely that close. With the notable exception of political conferences, where giant screens flank the stage and project a magnified image of the speaker's face, simple, neutral facial expressions are all that is needed for the majority of speeches.

A smile often helps. Try smiling at someone (not in a creepy way) and see how quickly they respond with a smile – it's a natural reaction, and one to which we are all prone. Again, smiling at people, and getting them to smile back is a good way of being likeable, and we know that likeability is something we want and need to achieve. But smiling all the time, smiling when it is not appropriate or jars with what is being said – all that will do

is send conflicting messages that will confuse and ultimately turn off an audience.

Sometimes, though, we might be addressing a group small enough for them to be aware of all our expressions. It might seem simplistic to say it, but expressions should as far as possible match the text – the chosen look should reflect and support the thrust of what is being said. And again, we need to remember that the more extreme our facial expressions, the fewer people are likely to find them attractive.

We can practice expressions of emotions (surprise, anger, humour, etc.) by ourselves, with nothing more complex than a mirror. That is how actors do it, so that when called upon to look surprised or horrified or whatever, they know into which position to pull their faces. As public speakers, we shouldn't need that level of theatrics, but some reinforcement of the emotion of our point can help us to be very persuasive indeed.

d. The Voice

This is where it gets serious, and this why the voice, or using the voice has a section all of its own. As public speakers, the voice is the most effective tool, or weapon, we have. Used well, we can carry our audience on a journey from the start of our speech (our departure point) to our destination. And that destination is not the end of our speech, but getting the audience to the point where they are ready to say, "Yes. Whatever it is you are selling, yes!"

We can make that journey as meandering and as scenic as we like, making the passenger on that journey feel as relaxed and as comfortable as possible, or we can race through to the end, hoping that we have carried everyone with us breathlessly, and only checking once we have reached the end. Unsurprisingly, neither of those methods is the most effective. We need as the drivers of this journey to have a clear focus on just where is our ultimate destination, just what it is we want to achieve. But we must not have the attitude of getting there as quickly as possible, even at the cost of losing some people along the way. We need to make our passengers on this journey as comfortable as possible; we need to check that they have seen the points of interest along the way, and that they are happy to continue on our journey with us. Only then can we be sure that when we reach our destination our audience are standing happily alongside us, and are ready to buy, or have already bought, whatever it is we are selling. Learning to use the voice as a tool of the trade is the best way of achieving that.

4. Using the voice as a tool

a. Breathing

The single most important thing to remember when attempting any kind of speech is breathing. As it is something we all do unconsciously, we are often unaware of how we are breathing, and for effective public speaking this is absolutely crucial. Sound is created by air being pushed out from the lungs and chest across the vocal chords, causing them to vibrate. It is (almost) impossible to make any sort of sound when inhaling; indeed, the only people who seem able to do it with any regularity are Finns, for reasons which remain unexplained! The type of sound created depends on how much air is pushed, at what speed, and then by the formation of lips and tongue as the sound passes across them, to give the sound its form. But in order to control the sound we produce, we need to be able to control our breathing, too.

All actors and singers are trained from the beginning to breathe not from the chest as most people do, but from the diaphragm. This means that the muscle located centrally at the base of the ribcage is controlling the amount of air inhaled, and the rate at which that air is exhaled. This means that, generally, there is more resonance to the sound being produced as it comes from lower in the belly rather than high up in the chest. This allows for a warmer, richer sound, and one that can fill a room without necessarily being loud. It is possible to practice breathing from the diaphragm, simply by placing a hand over the muscle on concentrating on that muscle moving when breathing in and out. We can also practice pushing air out using the same muscle, increasing the force with which we do so until the sound becomes audible.

When breathing just from the chest, the sound produced is generally of a higher pitch, and thinner, meaning that it does not carry as well in large or filled rooms. It is also that much more difficult to show variety in pitch, tone, etc. when speaking from the chest and that hinders the attempt to make the voice as interesting as possible. Again, we can practise breathing in this way, and we can listen to the difference in sound that it produces.

The last point about breathing is control. Just a singer learns to breathe at the correct times so as to capture perfectly the phrasing of the music, so the effective public speaker controls their breathing in the same way. By controlling the flow of breath out, we can ensure that we do not need to breathe in the middle of a word, or of an important idea, as that would break the flow. People who have trained as singers have a natural advantage here, but again, it is quite simple to practise. Simply breathe in as deeply as you can, and breath out, making a sound. Try to keep the note steady for as long as possible, and time yourself doing this. As soon as the note starts to waver, you may stop. The trick here is not to produce

a pitch-perfect note (although if you can, your friends will find it more pleasant!), but to produce a steady sound for as long as possible. The longer you can hold the note steady, the more control you have over your breathing.

b. Pitch

The pitch of a voice is a natural characteristic of it, and we do not want to change too much that is natural. Remember, we are at our most likeable when we are comfortable with what we are doing and saying, so keeping things as natural as possible will always be the best way of communicating.

There are times, though, when Nature can be bettered. Some people have a naturally high-pitched voice, and those people often do well to try and modify the extremes of their voice. It is a fact that lower-pitched voices often resonate more, are easier to hear in a full auditorium as they sound richer, and for some reason are associated with authority. Think of when we say someone spoke with *gravitas*; very often we mean that the pitch of their voice and their tone were in the lower register, and this somehow transposes in the mind to a seriousness which is then equated with subject matter.

However, as with all things, variety is also important. It is unlikely that the entirety of our speech will require the same pitch – in fact, if it does, then we probably need to go away and think about the speech. If it all requires the same serious pitch, we might want to think about introducing some levity here and there to break things up a little. And in those lighter moments, that is exactly where a lighter pitch can be used. It's almost like verbal highlighting: our pitch tells our audience whether something is serious and needs to be weighted as such, or when something is comedic, lighter and thus inviting a release of the tension, or even laughter.

c. Tone

Tone is inextricably linked to pitch. As with pitch, the tone in which we say something is directly connected to the seriousness or otherwise of the subject. Where the two differ is that we are often much more aware of tone as something we decide and control, something less endemic to our natural speech.

Tone does not just relate to seriousness, either. Harder edges to the sounds of vowels can make one sound alternately serious, firm, adamant, angry, defiant, confident or bombastic. All of these might be useful at some point, and it is important to practice trying to sound as though we are conveying an emotion that matches your text. There is no point

aiming for righteous indignation in our speech, and delivering it as a kindergarten teacher reading a story to the children before nap time. Similarly, we don't want to attempt a joke, and have it fall flat because nobody know you were (meant to be) joking.

d. Pace

It is a fact that, as most people become nervous before speaking in public, they have a tendency to read their speech as quickly as possible in order to reach the end as soon as possible. There is no point to even making a speech like this – we might as well print out copies of the text, and hand them out, for all that has been added by speaking the text.

Strangely, though, forcing ourselves to speak with a more measured pace can also help us to calm those nerves. The nervousness increases as we feel our thoughts colliding into one another like a six car pile-up, and by deliberately enunciating each thought with exaggerated slowness we can ensure our thoughts remain ordered, each step is covered, and there are no leaps of logic that our audience cannot be guaranteed to make along with us.

A measured pace, together with moderate tone and pitch suggests a calm, giving the impression that the speaker is one whose thoughts are ordered, and who is control of his material. This is likely then to put the audience at ease, as they can have confidence in us as the speaker.

Pace can also be used as verbal highlighting, too. A variety of pace is essential, but particularly when we wish to emphasise a particular point. Slowing down as we reach… the… crucial… matter… of... the… sentence… has the same effect as formatting something as bold text when using a WP program; it captures the attention, and tells the audience that this is something to which they should pay particular note. Speaking quickly has the opposite effect – it tells people that this is the 'boring but necessary' bit, and of lesser import in the context of the speech. Very often, the quicker pace is best used when dealing with factual material, the slower, **more considered** pace for the arguments that fact is used to illustrate.

e. Clarity

It is essential when speaking in public that what we say can be heard. It seems obvious, and even somewhat trite to point this out, but it is surprising the number of people who forget the importance of good diction. This is linked to, but separate from accent, pitch, tone and pace, and is an essential part of good communication. The speaker must always guard against laziness creeping into the speech as consonant sounds elide, and the words (and therefore the implications of what is being said) become less clear. We also find that when speaking with precision,

one can also talk more quickly without any loss of meaning, or confusion as to what is being said.

f. Volume

A brief note on volume: whilst it is obviously important to speak loudly enough to be heard, we should be able to achieve this without shouting (see '**Breathing**'). However, if we want to grab the audience's attention in the middle of our speech, we should not raise your voice but lower it. It might seem counter-intuitive but it works. When we soften the tone, slow the pace or lower the volume, people actually start to lean towards us, the speaker, in a physical manifestation of 'active listening'. Try abruptly dropping the volume next time you are out with friends and you will see what is meant. Do the same with an audience whenever you want them to pay particular attention to something; you will often be amazed at how effective it can be.

The final thing to be said about all elements of the voice is that we should never make assumptions about what can be heard in the auditorium. We may very well think that we are projecting beautifully, enunciating clearly, and that our voice is so rich, and so interesting a sound, that our audience are hanging on your every word. But we cannot know that for sure: the most important thing we can do with our voice is use it to check and ensure that everyone can hear us, and can understand what is being said. Only then can we begin to think about getting across the right message.

5. The text

a. It's not what you say; it's how you say it…

There is a saying in public speaking, and it is known as 'the 1/3 rule'. It states that no matter what the topic, the audience or the speaker, for the majority of public addresses, one third of what we say is never heard; one third of what is heard is never listened to; and one third of what is listened to is never understood. This is not so in every case, and the skill of the accomplished public speaker is in overcoming this 'rule'. We need to look at each aspect of this 'rule' in turn, to determine why it might be the case that things are not heard, listened to, or understood, and to work out correctly how we can overcome these obstacles when speaking ourselves.

The first part of the rule states that one third of what is said is not even heard. This is not due to inaudible, mumbling speakers who forget to switch on their microphone. In those cases, far more than one third is lost! This is due most often to the fact that audiences, even ones who have paid to hear what is being said, decide very quickly that they don't want to be there, and that the speaker has nothing of value to tell them. Psychologists tell us that such decisions are made by the majority of people in the first minute or so of somebody's speech, and almost all have made that decision within the opening five minutes. Why is this?

There is no one single reason beyond the fact that they decide based on first impressions, that they don't like the person speaking, and therefore either disagree with their ideas, or think them crass and stupid. And it isn't about getting people's attention; remember that they must have paid some attention in order to make the decision that they do not want to pay any more! Any number of things can turn off an audience – the way you approach the stage or lectern, the perception of confidence or a lack thereof, the opening line falling flat through delivery or poor selection; the list goes on. And as we have said all along, there is no way of guaranteeing that everyone will like us, no matter what we do. But a calm, confident presence will in the majority of cases be just what we are aiming for, and what an audience will find most pleasing.

The second part of our rule states that of what is heard, one third is never given the required listening. Again, this has to do with those elements of the voice that were looked at earlier; variance in pitch, tone, pace and volume can make our voice more interesting for the audience, encouraging 'active listening', and holding the interest, in the same way that music is more interesting when it is not monotonous. But there is a more general mistake that people make when making public addresses that contributes to this second element. Audiences that have admitted switching off (that is, they hear everything, but take none of it in), often complain that the speaker made no attempt at engagement, that they

(the audience) were being talked *at* rather than *to*. Teachers and lecturers are sometimes guilty of this, particularly those who feel less comfortable addressing a large room. They may still be very effective educators in other ways, but pupils most often report that the feeling of being talk at creates a profound disenfranchisement from the material being presented. It has even passed into common English parlance: the term 'lecturing' now has extremely negative connotations when used outside academic realms

So how can we ensure that our audience are engaged, that they feel somehow part of the process? Eye contact is important, as is a sometimes less formal tone, as if the process is one of conversation and dialogue (which we know it isn't, but we can still adopt that particular style). And asking questions, even rhetorical ones, is the best way of all to ensure engagement. Asking questions directly of an audience is the perfect way of checking understanding – essential before moving on to the next part of the speech. But asking questions abstractly, rhetorically, can help to create the 'nodding dog effect' (also now known as the Churchill effect!). All the questions we use should have one answer that is obvious and that fits with the speech – that is, when the tone of the speech is positive, the questions should invite only an affirmative response. Similarly, when the focus of the speech is ultimately negative, the questions should be answerable only in the negative. As the audience at first unconsciously responds to each inserted question with a nod or a shake, they feel more engaged with the text being delivered, even to the extent that some feel their responses are noted by, and influence the subsequent performance of, the speaker. [See also **Rhetoric and humour**]

The final part of the rule that we need to deal with is the part that states that of what is listened to, one third is never understood. This in part is due to the language used, and we will address that separately [see **Be careful what you say…**]. But it is also often due to the fact that audiences are not able to follow the speaker's train of thought or logic. The former Deputy Prime Minister of Great Britain, the Right Honourable John Prescott MP was famous for making public statements which at times seemed incomprehensible to English speakers. Such were the tortured syntax, the incomplete thought structure, the lack of logic, and the leaps from topic to topic that many thought him idiotic, and incapable of better. It characterised him as a bumbling fool, despite the fact that he had been a senior member of Government for ten years, and a member of the House of Commons for far longer. Delivering a prepared, and written in full, address, Mr Prescott has little difficulty, but cannot escape the fact that he is reading, not giving, a speech. This is however far preferable to what happens when he begins to speak unprepared!

This, however can be avoided, and quite simply. Knowing our speech well enough (if we have time to rehearse it) that we do not need to read

it is one option – it then becomes important to ensure that our speech is well written. That means taking the time to explain the most complex issues as they need explaining, and slowing and measuring our delivery when reaching this point of the speech to ensure that we carry our audience along with us.

And don't forget to check the audience's understanding when you have done so! If however learning the speech by rote is not an option, because of a curtailed preparation time for example, then there is one simple rule to follow: **do not attempt to speak at the speed with which you think!** Think your thoughts, order them, then express them out loud. Once again, a calm, measured pace will help; this will give us the time to think through what we are saying, and gives our audience the impression that we are always in control. This is particularly effective when dealing with a question and answer session at the end of an address, for example. It is much harder to be confident when things are unprepared (like audience questions), and consequently, so much more effective when we can manage it.

b. Be careful what you say…

One of the most common problems experienced by the public speaker is, whilst they are sure that what they are saying is both insightful and true, the reaction from the audience is often somewhat different. Very often, this is because the speaker forgets for whom the speech is meant.

We are not speaking to show how much we know, nor to show how impressive is our vocabulary, but that is the trap into which most people often fall. As we have said all along, the key to persuasion is in getting the message across in the most effective manner – that means being likeable, knowing our audience, and crucially, using an appropriate register of language. If we are trained in a specific discipline, and the room is full of those who have also studied this area, then we can be sure that they will, or at least should, understand technical terms, abbreviations and jargon without the need for further explanation.

Most audiences, however, are not themselves technocrats. Therefore we should address our language to those whom we know make up the majority of the audience. This does not mean however that we should talk down to or patronise them. People who feel that they are being treated as stupid will become very resistant very quickly to anything we have to say, so judging the register correctly is both imperative and extremely difficult to do as quickly as we need.

In most environments, we simply will not know or not have access to information regarding the make-up of our audience, so, as with other elements, we need to find what will appeal to a broad cross-section of the audience. And it really is quite simple: speak as though to the well-

informed layman, and you will not go far wrong. We can be sure that we will not be patronising too many people, and it gives us an opportunity to introduce specialist terms, abbreviations and the like, which has the effect of helping our audience to feel like they are being admitted to some privileged and exclusive club, something they are likely to enjoy, and respond to well.

c. Rhetoric and humour

We will cover this quite briefly, as this is not the place for a detailed study of rhetoric from the classic to the modern, but it is nevertheless important to mention. Using rhetorical devices (asking questions in our speech, creating the perfect 'soundbite') has been seen over the past few years as a way of masking a lack of content, or substance. The modern media decry soundbites issuing from politicians and ask where the honesty is in modern politics. It is true that a speech that consists of nothing but rhetorical flourish can on closer examination seem a bit thin (think Barack Obama and his use of 'Can we change? Yes, we can!'; it's a nice thought, but not a policy…) but the fact is that a well-turned phrase, a catchy line, or even a good joke is all far more memorable than dry analysis.

What is ideal is a combination of the two, unsurprisingly. Of course there should be solid content in the speech, and some of it might be necessarily less interesting to present (data, statistics, etc.), but if we are able to give the data and then a pithy one-liner to wrap it up, that will help our cause.

[If you are not sure about what is good rhetoric, there are numerous collections of 'great speeches of our time', focussing on speakers such as Dr Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, and even Churchill, with commentators highlighting why the believe the speech or the speaker to be effective. You may or may not agree with what is chosen as 'great', but it is always important to know not just what we consider to be good speaking, but what others mean by this too.

You should also look at other examples of rhetoric, for example in Shakespeare. Marc Anthony's speech in *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* [Act III, Scene ii] is a fine example of the use of rhetorical devices to reinforce a point or to convince an initially hostile audience. Similarly, King Henry's address to his troops in *Henry V* [Act III, Scene i] (which in fact is the only speech in the scene) is a rousing cry to the troops to give them the courage to fight in the face of what seem insurmountable odds. When reading the speeches, do not read them in isolation, but try to place them within the context of the play. What are the speakers trying to achieve in each case? What obstacles do Anthony and King Henry face before making their speech? And how do they overcome these, if they ever do? Look at how each speaker uses *logos* (logic), *ethos* (belief) and

pathos (emotion) at different times to produce different effects, and decide for yourself how successful you think they are.

Once you have an understanding for yourself of what you think works or doesn't as rhetorical device, you can search for other examples to broaden your knowledge of rhetoric and style, and you will find what works best for you, and what makes you feel comfortable. Oh, and if you know you aren't funny, then don't make jokes! (See **Knowing what works for you**)]

6. Knowing what works for you

The most important message in all of this is that whatever you choose as your style of delivery, it should be what makes you comfortable, what you are able to pull off without it looking as though you are trying too hard. You should be able to decide for yourself whether something is working, and do not despair if nothing appears to work the first time around. It is often the case that we develop our style over a period of time, refining and enhancing it as we go along, and what you think will be good for

you might often change completely as you gain more experience and more confidence.

If you really struggle with the self-awareness necessary to determine what is working, do not be shy about enlisting the help of family and friends. People who know you and can be unflinchingly honest are your best allies – practice in front of them, try out different techniques, speeds, pitches, accents… everything in fact that you can alter. Ask them to be brutally honest (siblings and friends are often better at this than parents, but you never know…) and also to be focussed in criticising what works and what doesn't. Ask them to think about why something was or wasn't effective; ask them which speakers they enjoy, and find most persuasive; ask them **everything**! Only by asking for feedback, and acting upon it, can we hope to improve as speakers in public.

7. Bringing it all together

This is only a brief note on effective public speaking, and yet there are numerous things for the would-be speaker on which they can work. Do not be surprised, therefore, if whilst trying to improve one aspect, you forget about others. Very few people are able, with no training whatsoever, to bring it all together in one beautifully packaged whole. Even the more experienced speakers are aware that they could afford to work on one area or another.

The trick is again one of self-awareness: focus on your weakest element first, and make it your strongest. Then return to what has now become your weakest area, and work on that. The process is never-ending, as when you focus on one thing, something always seems to slip just a little and will need reinforcing afterward. But you must not be afraid of that; the best speakers are constantly practising and improving, much like the best athletes or sportsmen. When George Best joined Manchester United as a junior trainee, he could not pass the ball effectively with his left foot. The club sent him away to improve, and told him to come back one year later. He did so, having spent a year wearing a hobnailed boot on his stronger right foot which made kicking the ball very difficult, and he kicked the ball with his bare left foot against a wall in order to strengthen it. By the end of the year, he was so strong with his left foot that he had now become a naturally left-footed player.

It is unlikely that you will be able to achieve expertise in every single area. But by working on what you find most difficult until it becomes natural, or at least has the appearance of being natural, then you will find getting your message across and convincing people far easier than before.

Remember: be comfortable, be natural and be likeable, and people will listen to what you have to say. Make what you say interesting to listen to, and people will remember it. You will not convince all of the people all of the time, but maybe some of them, or even all of them, some or most of the time. And that's already not too bad.

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