

# Oral Presentation Delivery Skills

Since the audience cannot read a script of what you're presenting, the speaker must provide accurate and enhanced intonation, stress, enunciation and phrasing. Rhythm must be generally a bit slower than normal speaking speed (though variation is necessary).

For an example of enhanced intonation, stress, phrasing and rhythm, listen to "David Pogue," which is one of the videos offered in the "Video from *The New York Times*" page linked at E>G Listening. In addition, you're welcome to borrow Mr. H's *Clear Speech* book and tapes.

## Intonation

"Patterns of pitch, or melody... Intonation performs several functions in language. Its most important function is as a signal of grammatical structure, where it performs a role similar to punctuation in writing, but involving far more contrasts. The marking of sentence, clause and other boundaries, and the contrast between some grammatical structures, such as questions and statements, may be made using intonation. A second role of intonation is in the communication of personal attitude: sarcasm, puzzlement, anger, etc. can all be signaled by contrasts in pitch. Intonation is also one of the ways of signaling social background."\*

(*A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, by David Crystal.)

In an oral presentation, you are an actor on a stage. Therefore, you have to speak like an actor. Actors use intonation that is not only accurate; they *enhance* their intonation.

Common problems of non-native speakers:

- The intonation is not enhanced. For clear expression of meaning, English depends on intonation (and stress and phrasing) more than Korean does. Intonation, stress and phrasing are like grammar markers in that they are essential in expressing meaning.
- Monotonous, singsong delivery. *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* defines singsong as "a voice delivery marked by a narrow range or monotonous pattern of pitch."
- Many females, especially those that have made friends with young American females, raise intonation at the end of almost every clause and every sentence, as if the sentence were not a statement but a question. This hides intended meaning, gives the impression of weakness and uncertainty (because it sounds as if you're asking a question where it should sound as if you're making an assertion), and is quite annoying to listen to.

## Stress

"... the degree of force used in producing a syllable... [T]he main function of stress is to provide a means of distinguishing degrees of emphasis (to ensure comprehension) or contrast in sentences..., as in "*We agreed to provide 50 million dollars in two payments*" (emphasis for clarity) and *The big man looks angry*" (not the small man)." In Korean, the function of stress is often performed by words.

(\**A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, by David Crystal.)

In an oral presentation, stress, like intonation, must be enhanced. Content words (nouns, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives) receive normal stress, function words (pronouns, prepositions, articles, *be* verbs, conjunctions, auxiliaries) receive less; however, function words receive stress when they are important in distinguishing meaning ("I said he was *a* student, not *the* student"). Especially important words (content and function) receive stronger stress than ordinary content words.

Common problems:

- Even comparatively fluent non-native speakers put stress on the wrong syllable.
- Monotonous, singsong delivery.

## Enunciation

Enunciation means clearly pronouncing individual consonants and vowels so that your listeners can easily recognize them. This, also, must be enhanced. Watch a stage play in English and note how the actors' mouths and lips move in an almost exaggerated way.

Common problem:

- Conversational (not enhanced stage) pronunciation.
- Lack of distinction between long and short vowels.
- Lack of distinction between consonants (e.g., *p* and *b*, *b* and *d*, *d* and *t*).
- Incorrect pronunciation of the vowel in *eat/it*, *bed/bad*.

- The *yong-du-sa-mi* sentence: A very common problem. Enunciate clearly and keep volume strong all the way to the last word in the sentence. In English there are often essential words at the end of the sentence; it's not like Korean, where we can de-emphasize polite verb endings.

## Phrasing

Native speakers speak English mostly in grammatical phrases. This is essential, because English doesn't have many of the phrase-final markers that Korean has (e.g., -가, -고, -데, -면) .

Common problem: Presenters don't provide these pauses, and they don't enhance them even when they provide them. They run their phrases and even clauses together. The related comment on the OP evaluation is "Usually accurate; not consistently enhanced enough for an OP."

## Rhythm

Rhythm is the general speed of your speaking. The speed of a native speaker's presentation is generally a bit slower than conversation speed. And speed variation is essential in holding the audience's attention.

Common problems:

- Many learners think, "The faster I speak, the more fluent I will seem to the audience." This is wrong. Native speakers speak more slowly than you think they do. They might sound fast, but that's because you're not completely used to English. If you try to speak fast, you will stumble over your words, and you won't be able to provide good phrasing or enunciation.
- There is too much hesitation, and too much repetition for correction (e.g., saying "book" and then correcting with "books"). This is very annoying to the audience, and it hinders understanding. The main cause of this is lack of practice. Native speakers, even professional presenters, practice many times before they present. One American scholar who has been presenting at conferences for over 20 years says she has to practice each presentation "several" times, "over and over."
- Vocal pauses occur frequently in a presentation that doesn't have good rhythm. It's pretty easy to avoid vocal pauses if you consistently concentrate on curing this habit, over a surprisingly short period.

## To sum up...

Make your intonation, stress, enunciation, phrasing and rhythm accurate — and *enhance* it! Be a great stage actor.