



Better Public Speaking

Very often, *how* you say something is as critical as *what* you say. These six tips can help improve your interpretive programs.

1. Stand in front and face your audience whenever you speak:

No matter if you are leading an indoor or outdoor program, you should always speak directly to your audience. When leading a nature walk, stop and wait for everyone to gather before speaking so everyone can hear your presentation. When you interpret, speak audibly.

2. Look at your audience while speaking:

Eye contact is basic to good communication. It makes what you are saying seem more personal to your audience members. Train yourself to look all over the room (not just a few individuals) and to alternate momentary glances at different people throughout your program. When you want to emphasize something, give prolonged eye contact to an individual. Smile; that tells your audience that you are having a good time presenting and that you want to be there. Also, it will make you seem friendly and approachable.

3. Keep it simple:

State the goals for the program up front, so everyone knows what to expect. Use simple words. If you use an unfamiliar word, always define/explain it to your group. Present material in a logical progression, and use visuals for reinforcement. If appropriate, assign sequential labels to your talk (1-2-3 or A-B-C) to help keep things straight. Remember, *don't share everything you know about the subject*. Keep some information for questions at the end of the program. Check your audience's understanding by asking them questions before moving on.

4. Use active verbs and sentences:

The verb is the power in a sentence. Active verbs and using present tense are generally more interesting to people than passive verbs and sentences. Consciously practice using active verbs. Instead of "The dam was built by the beaver," say "These busy rodents constantly gather sticks and mud to create a very substantial dam."

5. Use foreshadowing:

Foreshadowing is a way to prepare your group for something that is going to come later in your presentation. It gives your audience something to do besides just listen to you speak. Foreshadowing alerts audience members to watch for ideas you have not yet presented. It makes people think, anticipate, and pay attention to what you are saying. Foreshadowing actively involves your group in your talk by bringing them into the thinking process with you. For example, "This beaver lodge will soon be crowded as the family grows. One-year-old beavers have some thinking to do about their future."

6. Incorporate mystery into your presentation:

Just like foreshadowing, mystery can engage your audience into the presentation. Mystery can be a riddle, a problem to solve, a story without the end, etc. Regardless of how you use mystery, it can motivate your audience to pay attention. But make sure the end (the answer to the mystery or story) justifies the expectations! For example, "If beavers don't hibernate in winter, where do they store their food? The pond is frozen!"