

Making Yourself Heard

Ryerson classrooms can range in size from a narrow boardroom to a full movie theatre. Making sure that you can be heard, no matter how big the space, is an important concern. The LTO has therefore assembled a group of tips that will hopefully enable all Ryerson instructors to project their voice to their classes, large and small. All the books mentioned in this document can be found at the Ryerson Library.

Before beginning to work on the volume of your voice, there are a few things to keep in mind. In *Power presentation: Formal Speech in an Informal World*, Patsy Rodenburg lists the qualities of an ideal speaker (p.7):

- “The speaker will have an energized yet open body and delivery.
- You will feel that you, the listener, matter, and through the speaker’s eye contact you will feel connected to the presentation.
- You will feel spoken ‘to’ not ‘at.’
- Their voice will be open and clear, not pushed and forcing you back.
- You won’t have to struggle to hear them but will listen with ease.
- The speaker will have energy and passion but this energy appears effortless and efficient.
- You won’t worry about the speaker as their presence makes you secure in the knowledge that they know what they are doing.
- There is authenticity and humanity in their presence and even if there are a thousand people present, the speaker is speaking to you alone.”

According to Rodenberg, becoming the ideal speaker can be achieved through a series of steps.

Ten Steps to a Power Presentation

1. *Give your presentation structure* – a journey that moves forward from a strong start and seeks a conclusion through exploration. Prune any random words or ideas.
2. *Practice out loud* – focus on every word and idea at this point, so practice slowly and then build up to a natural speed.
3. *Release your body tensions and warm up your voice.*
4. *Walk into the space with presence and natural confidence* (not arrogance) and make eye contact with your audience.
5. *Breathe to your audience so that you connect with them* (don’t breathe halfway to them, nor beyond or above them).
6. *Stand centered* and don’t lock your knees.
7. *If standing behind a lectern, don’t focus on the mike* – you will become rigid and your energy stifled.
8. *If holding a mike don’t focus on speaking into it but out to the audience.* Practice will make this easier
9. *Prepare for all the things that can go wrong*
10. *Be yourself* and believe in what you’re saying

Releasing Tension

Before beginning any work on your projection, release any nervousness and relax your body. Rodenburg recommends running through the following checklist before any presentation (p. 39):

- “Pay attention to your posture—head, spine, shoulders, abdomen, and legs. Make sure everything is in alignment and free of tension.
- Pay attention to your face—relax your jaw, your forehead, and your cheeks
- Stay connected to your body by staying present and mindful of your physicality.”

Rodenburg continues: “Most of us feel stress, fear, and disempowerment in our shoulders. When the energy surge hits the shoulders they both rise, and because of the enforced tensions your breathing and voice can be affected” (p. 32). The following two exercises can help release this tension:

- Stand with your feet under your hips and weight slightly forward on the balls of your feet.
- Keep the spine up and grasp your hands behind your back.
- Lift your arms up and away from your torso, and down to your body several times.
- When you unclench your hands the shoulders should release and find their natural position.

“The most subtle release you can do is very small and is reliant on you understanding the whole mechanism of your shoulder tensions.

- Lift up the shoulders half an inch. Tense them there and then let them go and release.

“What you will notice is that if they are riddled with tension, that tension will go. The glory of this release is that you can do it without anyone noticing and you can regain control of your presence in the middle of any distressing or fearful encounter.... Release your shoulders before any important meeting so that you start freely and then release them afterward, so any tensions formed in the meeting are not carried through the rest of the day. Leave your desk and computer and release several times a day, even when not under threat. You will feel better and look better.”

Placing Your Voice

Once you are relaxed, you must adjust your speaking voice to suit the space you are in. In *The Articulate Voice: An Introduction to Voice and Diction*, Lynn K. Wells elaborates (p. 64):

One “important consideration is your audience. Are you speaking to one person in a confined space or to many in a large area? Where you ‘place’ your voice will depend on your audience....

You may have had the experience of attempting to vocalize an idea, of breaking into a conversation, or of getting someone’s attention but failing. No one even heard you. You know, perhaps only viscerally, that you did not speak loud enough to be heard. Space and the acoustical variables of that space are great detractors from the human voice. What you need to apply to your own voice is the principle of ‘guided imagery.’

Sociologist Edward Hall first described a series of spaces within which human interaction occurs. For our society these are defined as (1) *intimate space* (within inches), (2) *personal space* (arm’s length), (3) *social space* (around ten feet), and (4) *public space* (beyond ten to twelve feet). With regard to voice, we alter the loudness levels of our voices given these spatial parameters... When you are faced with a public speaking situation, you need to use public voice. Most people are not used to employing public voice because their stations in life do not require speaking beyond the distance of a few feet. For public voice, increased breath support becomes important. Rather than focusing your energy on your larynx, you must concentrate on abdominal control and force.

Depending on the spatial parameters in which you are speaking, you need to make vocal adjustments. For instance, if you are in a large space, you will need to increase the degree of vibratory force upon the vocal folds and open your mouth wider than you would if you were in an intimate space. **You need to think about where you are trying to send your voice. You need to be able to mentally guide or place your voice for your listener”** (Wells, p. 64).

In order to practice this, try the following exercise:

Place your open palm just under but within inches of your mouth. Keeping your head up, say this line: “I’ll be leaving you now. Goodbye.” Do not whisper. Speak the line directly into your hand as though you were tossing your voice there. Now hold your palm at arm’s length. Repeat the line again place your voice into your hand. Next focus on a point about twelve feet away. Repeat the process. Lastly, pick a spot fifty feet away. Although pitch may raise slightly when you increase loudness, try to maintain the same pitch. Repeat (Wells, p. 64).

Patsy Rodenburg also has an exercise to help develop your ability to throw your voice to any size room. As she describes it:

“Your voice releases from you on an arc... Imagine throwing a dart: you arc it and then it lands on the board. This throw is how you place your voice (Rodenburg, p. 78).

Throwing your Voice

- “Stand and find a point across the room just above the eyeline.
- As you fix yourself on that point, come slightly forward through your body to that point. Enter that point through your body’s imagination. You will feel this through your feet up to your head. Stay alert to the point or target
- Now breath to that point. At the end of each breath, stay connected freely to the point...
- Hum freely to the point until you feel a buzz on your lips. This will also mean the jaw must be free. When you feel the buzz sustained on your lips this is an indication that the voice is ready to leave you and enter the world.
- Pick up a reading and turn to face a wall. Place one hand against the wall and push gently until you feel your breath engage.
- Read aloud with this push in place, all the time monitoring your tensions and, if necessary, stopping to release them.
- After reading a 90 second section, come away from the wall and read to the point or target.
- Your voice should be more placed and connected. And you will feel words clearer in your mouth” (Rodenburg, p. 78).

Breathing

The most important physical aspect to speaking louder is breathing. According to Osborn in *Public Speaking* (p. 356):

“To speak at the proper loudness, you must have good breath control. If you are breathing improperly, you will not have enough force to project your voice so that you can be heard at the back of a room. Improper breathing can also cause you to run out of breath before you finish a phrase or come to an appropriate pause. To check whether you are breathing properly for speaking, do the following:

Stand with your feet approximately eight inches apart. Place your hands on your lower rib cage, thumbs to the front, fingers to the back. Take a deep breath—in through your nose and out through slightly parted lips. If you are breathing correctly, you should feel your ribs moving up and out as you inhale.

Improper breathing affects more than just the loudness of your speech. If you breathe by raising your shoulders, the muscles in your neck and throat will become tense. This can result in a harsh, strained vocal quality. Moreover, you probably will not take in enough air to sustain your phrasing, and the release of air will be difficult to control. The air and sound will all come out with a rush when you drop your shoulders, leading to unfortunately oral punctuation marks when you don’t want or need them. To see if you have a problem, try this exercise:

Take a normal breath and see how long you can count while exhaling. If you cannot reach fifteen without losing volume or feeling the need to breathe, you need to work on extending your breath control. Begin by counting in one breath to a number comfortable for you, and then gradually increase the count over successive tries. Do not try to compensate by breathing too deeply. Deep breathing takes too much time and attracts too much attention while you are speaking. Use the longer pauses in your speech to breathe, and make note of your breathing pattern as you practice your speech” (Osborn, p. 356).

According to Rodenberg, “if you need to use your voice for...several hours a day, you will need to extend your breath strength, capacity, and consistency” (p. 54). To do this, she suggests performing a series of exercises, one of which is excerpted below:

Rib Stretches

- Stand centred... and keep checking the body for any useless tensions
- Keep upright with your knees and ankles soft
- Allow the left arm to arc over your head so that you flop over to your right
- Breathe in and out in this position, then stand upright and you will feel a stretch and an opening on the left side of the ribcage
- Repeat, but this time pull the arched arm with your right hand
- As you breathe in and out you will feel a bigger stretch and the breath will begin to go lower in the abdominal area
- As the stretches get bigger you should identify the moment of readiness in the breath and the support that goes with this breath presence
- Now stretch the right side of your ribcage by repeating this sequence with your right arm” (Rodenberg, p. 54)

Above all, remember: “Breathing is very basic and natural, and I would simply impart these three basic rules for you to remember” (Jones, p. 138):

Basic Rules on Breathing

1. *Breathe through your mouth when you are speaking*
Breathing through your mouth is less contained and allows you to be more expressive. The breath goes to your lower abdomen first, and then up into the rib cage.
2. *Free yourself up by letting go of physical tension and let the breath happen on its own.*
Release the abdominal muscles and let the breath go there (You don’t need to manipulate your breath).
3. *Take in only as much breath as you need to express the thought.*
You want your breath to express your physical and emotional state. Little breaths for little thoughts, big breaths for big thoughts” (Jones, p. 138).

Diaphragm

According to Chuck Jones in his book *Making Your Voice Heard*, “the basic secret of freeing the breath is this: If you release the lower abdominal muscles, the breath seems to go into your belly. (It doesn’t, of course; in truth, it goes into your lungs). Relaxing your abdomen, or belly, frees the diaphragm, the flat muscle that separates the abdomen from the chest cavity. In turn your lungs are able to fill with as much air as you need. This is the natural way you breathe when you are sleeping.

If your abdominal muscles are released, the breath will automatically go into the lungs without effort. You don’t need to push it there. Even if you need only a tiny amount of air, you still want to feel it start in the abdomen (rather than up in your chest). Likewise, if you need a lot of air in order to be very loud or express a long thought, the breath goes first to the belly and continues up into the expanding rib cage” (Jones, p. 135)

Lynn K. Wells continues: “Since you have no direct control over you diaphragm, it is impossible to suggest that you work to flex it as you could your bicep. You can, however, simulate the muscular tightening necessary by doing the following:

Stand about two feet from a sturdy wall. Place both palms against that wall and try to shove it over. Become aware of all the muscular movements engaged at that moment. Relax, then try it again until you are confident you know the feelings involved in the activity. At this point, once again shove against the wall, but this time vocalize, “I am going to push this wall over.” If you tried to say the sentence quietly, you no doubt felt a degree of abdominal relaxation. What you should achieve as you speak is an increased vocal force. Now step back from the wall and deliver the line in the same manner” (Wells, p. 69).

Eisenson continues in *Voice and Diction: A Program for Improvement*: “To understand the change in action of the abdominal wall in loud vocalization, place your hands on the abdomen and shout aloud, “Ready, go!” You will (or should be able to) note that there is a sudden pulling in of the abdominal muscles and that the pulling in is greater than for normal conversation. If this does not occur, and you are not readily able to speak as loudly as you would like to and should reasonably expect to, then the following exercise should be of help in establishing adequate loudness, that is, a voice that can project easily and effectively” (p. 144).

Exercises for Developing Adequate Loudness

1. “Place your hands on your abdomen and say *ah* as you might for a throat examination. Then take a moderately deep but comfortable breath and again begin to say *ah*. This time apply pressure suddenly with your hands. The tone should increase in loudness. If you have not caught yourself by surprise, and exhaled without vocalization, the *ah* should have become appreciably louder. Whether or not you have caught yourself by surprise, repeat the exercise and produce a loud *ah*.”
2. Repeat the first exercise, producing three loud *ah*’s without straining. Breathe in if necessary after each *ah*. Loud voice production requires more breath than normal conversation, so that more frequent inhalation becomes necessary to maintain a loud voice without strain. Try again, this time with *aw*.
3. Repeat, except this time exert direct control over the abdominal muscles as you produce your loud *ah*’s and *aw*’s.
4. Say the following short commands, each on a single breath, without strain and without an elevation of pitch level toward the end of the phrase.
 - a. Let’s go!
 - b. Do it now!
 - c. We’re ready!
 - d. Stop him!
 - e. Silence, please!
 - f. I’ve had it with you!
 - g. None of that nonsense!
 - h. I’m going, and that’s that!
 - i. Jump, before it’s too late!
5. Try the following sentences on a single breath, if possible. Speak as if there were a need to use a loud voice to assert yourself
 - a. No, this will not do
 - b. Let’s waste no more time
 - c. Certainly, I meant what I said
 - d. We’ll talk about this matter later.
 - e. I want my full share
 - f. Enough is enough, and I’ve had more than enough.”

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