

Successfully Speaking

Top Ten Tips for Effective Pronunciation and Speech

1. Identify a speech role model

Find someone whose speech is pleasant to your ear. This can be a radio or TV personality, a family member, friend or colleague. Do you like the tone, rate of speech, resonant quality, phrasing? Try to emulate those desirable features in your own communication.

2. Get a professional's opinion

It is difficult to change aspects of your speech if you don't know what may be detracting from the effectiveness of your communication. Find a specialist who can help you identify areas that may need improvement. Make sure to check references!

3. Video or audio-record yourself

*This can be as low or high-tech as you please, but it is very helpful to hear and see how you may present yourself to others. Consider how you **look** (fidgeting with your hair, wringing your hands, pacing), how you **sound** (monotone, rapid-fire, nasal, whiny), and how you **speak** (using professional language or too much slang, rambling or concise)?*

4. Solicit feedback from those you trust

If you feel as though your communication may be holding you back at work, ask your manager, co-workers, and others for honest feedback. Seek people who interact with you in a variety of settings such as on the phone, in meetings, during formal presentations, etc.

5. Project your voice

Take deep abdominal breaths and speak as you exhale; do not waste any air. Keep your mouth open and relaxed. Look in the direction you want your voice to go and imagine your breath stream floating along a string to your target (the person or object farthest away from you). Take replenishing breaths as needed so the end of your sentence sounds as loud and strong as the beginning. Stand up when speaking.

6. Pronounce your sounds clearly

Make sure that your speech sounds are accurate and clear, especially at the ends of words. Finish the words so that you say "thinking" vs. "thinkin'," and "biggest," vs. "bigges-".

7. Speak at a slightly slower rate

Slightly reduce your speaking rate by stretching out the vowels, and pausing where a comma or period would occur. Chunk information into manageable groupings, and then take a breath before continuing. Try to speak at the same rate as the person with whom you are speaking (assuming they are not racing themselves)!

8. Use appropriate intonation

Try to speak with a natural, varied inflection pattern. Stress the last important word in a thought group. Stress the word by slightly raising your pitch, speaking slightly louder, and lengthening your vowels. Smile to infuse a little more energy and/or personality in your voice.

9. Practice whenever, wherever, and with whomever you can

Use every speaking situation as an opportunity to practice your best speech techniques. Listen and observe the reactions/responses to your speech from your mail carrier, doorman, barista, newspaper vendor, secretary, etc.

10. Practice idiosyncratic stress rules when reading

Everywhere you look, you will see Proper Nouns (business cards); Compound Nouns (grocery store circulars); Numbers (appointment books), and other written references to pronunciation rules. Use every opportunity to read aloud practicing your newly learned techniques for proper stress and intonation.