

How To Improve Your Speaking Voice

As a human, you have the good fortune to have been fitted as standard with a really top of the range sound system. Seriously, the voice is an amazing thing. Use it. In fact, before you use it, try playing around with it, just to see what it can do. Try this exercise in front of a mirror when no one else is around.

Read the following paragraph

1. Like a newsreader
2. Like an actor
3. As if reading to a small child

"Yesterday a train was de-railed due to a technical failure. Miraculously, only a cow grazing in the field parallel to the tracks was injured. Passenger Michael Benjamin Darlington said it was "an absurd accident" and was annoyed to have been delayed by the incident. No railway personnel were available for comment."

What's the difference between reading something in different ways?

Your voice can produce an amazing diversity of sounds. When you're speaking, try to use all the following things to make your voice sound different. Let's look at them one by one:



Volume

When you're nervous, your voice tends to go all quiet. Concentrate on speaking louder: Don't shout, but it's generally good to speak a fair bit louder than you would naturally. It is possible to be too loud, but at the moment this is unlikely.

Pace

When you're nervous (and excited!), you'll probably speak too quickly. Controlling your breathing should help, but it's still important to concentrate on talking at a natural pace, which usually means a fair bit slower: Most people have no idea how fast they actually talk. Talk slowly and people will think that everything you say is incredibly wise and important.



Articulation

Slowing down to a comfortable pace should do a lot to help the clearness with which you pronounce words. But it's something to think about on its own. When they're having ordinary conversations, most people clip bits off words, or run them together and so on. Speaking in public, you need to make each syllable count.

Rhythm

Scientific fact: the more powerful the leader, the more pauses in their speeches. Just look at George W. Bush (only kidding!). But seriously, in one speech by the genuinely great French president Georges Pompidou, an amazing 55% of the whole speech was made up of dramatic pauses. If he could do it, you can. You too can unleash the amazing power of the pause. Whenever you make a point, make an absolute religious law of stopping for a few seconds so that everyone can have time to marvel about just how important and profound what you just said was. And while you're pausing, remember to use eye contact not just to one person but sweep around and catch the attention of them all.

You can go further than that. Think about the way you emphasise words in a sentence. Feel free to repeat lines for effect, to roll sounds around in your mouth, to stop, start and slow down as you might if you were reading a particularly dramatic bedtime story. As with most things in speaking, the point where it all starts sounding downright silly to you is probably the point at which other people will start to sit up and be impressed.



Pitch

So you're tone deaf. Like we care. Anyone can do sarcasm, or surprise, or who has ever raised their voice at the end of a question can make use of the unique English feature of pitch variation to add spice to speeches that will delight your friends and dumbfound your enemies.

"It takes an interaction of 72 different muscles to produce human speech"