

Oral Presentations – Assessors Report

There were many strong presentations across the cohort in 2012. As students spoke on a variety of topics the responses were varied in their style, content and delivery.

The best responses tended to have a range of things in common:

- **Regular eye contact.** This means you have learnt your speech and are not reading it. This also means you are more likely to be articulate and engaging in your use of voice. Most importantly however you form a relationship with the audience and are more likely to convince them of your position by showing them you care.
- **Clarity of opinion.** You must state your contention clearly at the beginning of your speech. The best speeches build their discussion around a logical and easy to follow exploration of the ideas and justification which support the opinion. They also sum up in a dynamic and engaging way so that the audience is left with a strong impression of the speaker's opinion.
- **Audible.** Clear speech does not mean loud but neither should the audience be straining to hear. Stand up straight, look forward and project. If you speak too quickly or mumble this can also impact the audience's ability to hear what may be a well-written speech.
- **Pause for effect and to signal where new points began.** Pauses help the audience catch up and allow them to take in the material just discussed. They act like a paragraph break and also allow you to signal important ideas. If the point being made is intended to elicit a strong emotional response or make the audience consider an idea carefully you have to allow time for that response to develop in the audience.
- **Variation of tone of voice to maintain interest and highlight key ideas.** The best speakers control the pitch, volume and pace of their voice to capture and control the responses and thoughts of their audience. Avoid speaking in one unchanging tone or the audience will fall asleep! Using humour, showing emotion, avoiding reading your speech and knowing your content will help you vary your voice.
- **Use of expert quotes, data or anecdote to support and justify position taken.** Back up what you think. Great speeches last year didn't only quote sources and point out where the quotes came from but they discussed why these quotes were relevant. Quotes were woven seamlessly into the discussion not just stuck in at random places to meet the criteria. The best speeches often didn't just use the most obvious quotes and references they clearly had thought about which pieces of evidence best fit the speech and point being made.

A few students adopted a character and speak from their adopted position. This was a worthwhile strategy only if the student had clearly thought through the purpose of adopting the persona and was able to speak from this position using appropriate language for the character. The idea in itself was not enough to gain extra credit, the execution of the performance had to be excellent to gain a benefit from taking on the extra challenge.

Props and PowerPoint presentations were not commonly used last year. Where they were they tended to be a distraction to the speaker rather than helping them to engage the audience or highlight their points. Students unfortunately found themselves not facing the audience, reading what was written on the screen or stumbling when referring to their visual aids. There were

exceptions to this where the visual material extended and enriched the presentation, highlighting emotionally challenging content or fleshing out the material being spoken about, but this was rare.

Those students who under-performed seemed to struggle most with the presentation aspect of the task. Some issues that commonly held students back included:

- **Reading.** Where students read their speech either from cue cards or from an A4 sheet their delivery in general suffered. A monotone delivery with no life or indication of real interest in the topic was the main issue but also of concern was the tendency to stumble over words or phrases due to misreading.
- **Lacking audience contact.** While reading often students neglected to make eye contact with the audience or only made contact with one or two audience members.
- **Not flagging main ideas or the central argument being made.** Some students failed to adequately highlight their core contention early in their speech and as they moved from point to point did not provide cues, either in the content or delivery of the speech, which indicated the transition into a new idea.
- **Rushing.** Speeches that were delivered without taking a breath or where students spoke too quickly were difficult to follow and did not provide the audience time to consider the content being discussed.

In terms of content there were two major issues that dragged marks down by a significant margin:

- **Lack of references and justification.** Simply stating your opinion is not convincing. Showing it is well founded and considered in light of experts, experience or consideration of all the available information is the most effective way to garner support.
- **Failure to address the prompting statement.** The prompting statement is there to ensure your speech is complex and addresses the relevant ideas. It does not matter what side of the discussion you take. However if you do not address all parts of the prompt your speech will lack depth and not discuss the issue thoroughly. You are also likely to drift away from the point and waste time on irrelevant observations.

The most evident suggestion to come from the previous few years of speeches is that those students who are able to start their preparation early and polish both their content and presentation of their speeches have tended to see the benefit of this forward planning in their result. They are the students who are more confident, less rushed and understand their material more fully.

Best of luck in the 2013 speeches.

Mr Young