DELIVERY: THE BASICS
by
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The reviews could hardly have been more different. Barack Obama had barely uttered the last words of the 2004 Democratic Convention speech that made him famous when reporters reacted.

Writing years later, reporter Mark Leibovich called that speech a "touchstone of national unity, a soaring manifesto of hope." And in the years since, the criticism of Obama has often centered about how the rest of him doesn't measure up to his ability to speak.

What has been the reaction to Donald Trump as speaker? Largely dismissive both during his 2016 campaign and after. In April 2017 writer Olivia Goldhill assembled a group of rhetoric scholars to ponder the reason Trump's "inarticulate speaking style" was so persuasive.

Goldhill cited Trump's campaign announcement as a "typical example of his rambling, incoherent speaking style."

I will build a great wall—and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me—and I'll build them very expensively. Our country is in serious trouble. We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories but we don't have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating—let's say China—in a trade deal? I beat China all the time. All the time.

In politics, speaking skills count. They can make a well-written speech dull or a mediocre speech sound terrific. It is no mystery why reporters would pay it so much attention.

But others watching and listening to Donald Trump, whether at home or in the hall, got a different impression than Goldhill. They saw a speaker standing erect, impeccably dressed in a red tie, white shirt and blue jacket. They heard him use the techniques we admire in JFK and Martin Luther King: repetition, rhetorical questions, and short sentences.

Incoherent? The readability stats tell us that 80% of Americans can understand him easily. Trump adlibs. But there is nothing incoherent about that passage. Whatever the substance of their speeches, both Donald Trump and Barack Obama offer strikingly effective ways to deliver them.

Both authors have coached clients, students, and politicians. The stereotype of elected politicians is that most are at least skillful speakers. "Public Speaking is an art—and it's one that many great politicians ... have mastered," writes speech coach, John Rydell. "When they step on stage they seem to draw the audience in from the first word."

The key word is "many". Many skillful politicians are mediocre speakers. We see that any afternoon of debate in the U.S House of Representatives: member after member droning through material, eyes wedded to the text, hands gripping the lectern.

It isn't as if they don't understand how to speak well. Some may ignore in practice what they understand in theory. They may rehearse for big speeches but feel too rushed to practice when it’s something more routine. In this chapter, we analyze how to deliver material compellingly no matter the occasion.
In a book meant for reading, there are limits to what we can change. There is no substitute for teaching delivery face-to-face. But for those who want to improve we can offer ways that work.

In this chapter we first cover the three basic elements of effective delivery: appearance, movement, and voice.

Then we’ll see how to improve: ways to prepare and practice, first with text, then extemporaneous speech.

Finally, we’ll look at ways speakers can systematically expand their horizons because for those who want to improve, the tools you need are easy to find.

ELEMENTS OF DELIVERY

David Demarest, one of George Herbert Walker Bush’s communications directors, once said of his boss that a belief in being a good “orator” just “wasn’t in his DNA.”

Sorry. To value speaking skills is not genetic, and no one whose job entails speaking in public can afford to think strong presentation skills are beyond them. After years of coaching, teaching public speaking and speaking ourselves, we know that if the lure of a good grade can turn students into good speakers, the lure of winning elections can, too. Every speaker can not just improve but excel. And that starts before they open their mouth.

Appearance

Appearance counts. Male candidates with hair do better than bald ones, and better looking ones over the less attractive. It is a fact of political life that taller candidates have an advantage over shorter ones—in the U.S. men average 5'9" but our last 10 Presidents included only two at 5'11" and eight at 6.0 or higher.

We can overrate the significance of these things. Plenty of successful politicians are overweight; the political talk shows are filled with people whose wizened faces would win no beauty contests. Most politicians are in office not because of how they look but for many other factors, including how and what they think.

Still, they need to do the best they can with what they have. In the studiedly cautious words of researcher Sheldon Chaiken, physical attractiveness “enhances one’s effectiveness as a social influence agent.” The research shows that before speakers say anything, audiences have formed some impressions of them. Speakers can't change how tall they are. But they can change how tall they look.

Stand Straight

“Listeners perceive speakers who slouch as being sloppy, unfocused, and even weak,” Speaker's Handbook authors Jo Sprague and Douglas Stuart advise.

But while most politicians know enough to stride briskly to the podium and look out at the audience as they start, it’s not unusual as the speech progresses to see them slouch, cross their legs at the ankle, lean on the lectern or commit other sins of body language.

As your mother always said, stand up straight. And whether you move around the stage or stay behind the lectern, keep standing straight for as long as you’re up there.

Dress Better Than Your Audience
Over seventy-five years ago, Dale Carnegie, then America’s guru of public speaking, in words dripping put it this way:

“[I]f a speaker has baggy trousers, shapeless coat and footwear, fountain pen and pencils peeping out of his breast pocket, a newspaper or a pipe and can of tobacco bulging out of the sides of his garment, I have noticed that an audience has as little respect for that man as he has for his own appearance. Aren’t they very likely to assume that his mind is as sloppy as his unkempt hair and unpolished shoes?”

That was then. We no longer worry about fountain pens and we've moved beyond the days when politicians had to live in a dark suit and dress shoes. On talk shows you will see male members of Congress willing to take interviews in shirtsleeves. Michelle Obama made news for going sleeveless. But politics still doesn’t share the casual vibe of other industries.

Fashion consultant David Wolff points out that for job applicants, “dressing down... could mean you don’t need the job.” As we never tire of pointing out, every political speech is a job interview. Politicians can't risk that.

**Win the Genetic Lottery**

Or seem to. It is tempting to argue that the usual remedies for grey hair and bad knees symbolize the posturing of so much of political life. Don’t believe it. In 2006, the 14 women in the U.S. Senate had an average age of 58, yet only one had grey hair. Audiences don’t want their politicians to look twenty-two. But appearance affects more than credibility.

“Speakers who feel attractive are more self-confident,” Steven Brydon and Michael Scott argue in their public speaking text *Between One and Many.*

For politicians, this means that within the limits of what culture finds acceptable, you should aggressively attack and mask the effects of aging. Some things don’t work: obvious toupees, wretched comb-overs, or a full set of perfectly white implants in a politician over seventy. But age isn't the only issue. Many in the audience thought comedian Joel McHale went too far when he repeatedly made fun of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie’s weight during his 2014 White House Correspondents’ Dinner routine. But the speech also reminded people that Christie did not fit the image of the leader of the free world.

**Movement**

In the 1988 Democratic primary, intelligent, thoughtful Arizona governor Bruce Babbitt knew a lot. Yet he made little headway as a presidential candidate. One small but hard-to-ignore reason: the facial tics he could not control during the early debates, leading one of his consultants to recommend “eyebrow pushups” as a way to stop blinking.

As governor and later Secretary of the Interior, Babbitt did have a successful career in politics. But in national politics even a small tic can hurt when cameras zoom in on a face. People in political life can increase their effectiveness as speakers by doing systematic work to eliminate movements that distract – swaying, shifting, jutting out a hip, blinking, licking lips, playing with hair and a variety of others.
You won’t see movement problems much at National Conventions, where speech coaches thoroughly rehearse speakers before sending them onstage to a podium flanked by Teleprompters. It’s more common at coffees or town hall meetings, where politicians sway, slouch, and stick their hands in their pockets; or in rarely-rehearsed floor speeches, where they may look down nearly the whole time they’re speaking.

In small gatherings like a living room, politicians don’t have to stay in one place. But they can learn to limit their movement so it doesn’t distract. Don’t sway. Don’t shift. Such movements signal that a speaker isn't relaxed. That means the audience won’t be, either. And while you work on eliminating movements that distract audience, focus on three areas that help you express your thoughts.

Use Appropriate Facial Expressions

You don’t have to smile all the time. When President Trump uses a teleprompter he often looks almost grim. Certainly in the beginning of a speech, smiles signal that a speaker is confident, happy to be speaking, and happy to see the people in front. They may not smile again until the applause after they are done.

Like posture, facial expressions count throughout the speech. It’s important not only to watch for inappropriate expressions but also to monitor what all your expressions communicate.

One of the authors, Eric, has helped prepare politicians for debates, including helping Vice Presidential candidate Joe Lieberman before his faceoff with Dick Cheney in 2000. Two days before that event, they watched the top of the tickets have their first debate. Most agreed, Gore knew his material. But they also watched him, unable to hide his exasperation, roll his eyes and sigh as George W Bush answered questions. The advice to Lieberman, and for any speaker, couldn’t be clearer. The camera and mic are on, even when you are not talking.

Maintain Eye Contact

In 1966, during Jimmy Carter’s run for governor of Georgia, Atlanta reporter Achsah Nesmith noticed something: Whenever Carter spoke, he would look not at the crowd but above their heads. He seemed to be hunting for an exit.

One day, Carter asked Nesmith her impressions of his speech. She told him.

“He looked hurt,” she said later, “and I rather regretted it.”

But Carter stopped his overhead glances. Ten years later, he’d forgiven Nesmith enough to hire her as a speechwriter.

Americans trust people who look them in the eye. And maybe not just people—in one Cornell University study researchers used the cartoon rabbit on Trix cereal boxes. They could manipulate the rabbit’s face, then ask subjects about whether they wanted to buy. The result? They were more likely to choose Trix over others if the rabbit was looking at them instead of somewhere else.

Said one Cornell professor, "Making eye contact even with a character on a cereal box inspires powerful feelings of connection."

The reverse is also true; one researcher points out that speakers in the United States who refuse to establish eye contact are perceived as tentative or ill at ease and may be seen as insincere or dishonest.
This sends an important message to politicians. Before live audiences looking up allows you to see what listeners are feeling. If speakers see people yawnng, chatting, or devoting full attention to their cheesecake, it may be time to cut the speech short. It certainly means you should speak less from text.

That is also true during a floor speech. Whether in State Capitols or Washing DC, legislators give most floor speeches to an empty chamber. It seems as if no one is watching. But the House of Representatives has televised its sessions since 1979. The audience is not huge. C-Span doesn’t regularly disclose the precise numbers though estimates hover around 30,000. But that includes staffers, other members, people in the District, and those who contribute to campaigns. Whether reading from a text, talking points, or a note card, political speakers need to master the art of looking up.

And when you do look up, make sure you also look around. You don’t connect with an audience by looking straight ahead; you need to make contact with all corners of the room.

Speakers can vastly improve eye contact by following two rules.

Absorb Groups of Words

Glance at the next two sentences for a moment. Then look up and say what you remember.

Tonight, we come together to write a new chapter in the American story.

Our Forebears enshrined the American dream -- life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Those are the first two sentences from the famous episode in Bill Clinton’s administration, when, about to give his 1993 health care address, he realized the wrong speech was in the teleprompter. He turned to Vice President Gore sitting behind him. Gore raced off stage to tell staffers. While they worked frantically to replace the disc Clinton had to read from his hard copy until the operators frantically replaced the disc and scrolled down to catch up.

Clinton was nothing if not resourceful. He first asked for a moment silence in recognition of a train wreck in Alabama. During that moment, head bowed, he was no doubt practicing.

Then, in the roughly first two minutes of his speech, Clinton looked down 14 times for the 158 words. That’s pretty good. His glances were brief. The ability to take in groups expands with practice.

Try it. Start by reading the first clause in a sentence. (Our Forebears enshrined the American Dream). Then look up, remembering the second part (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness), and look out as if at an audience. With practice every one of you reading this chapter should be able to look up for nine out of every ten seconds just like Clinton.

In front of live audiences, though, it is not enough to look up. That prompts a second rule.

Speak To the Whole Room

In those first two minutes, viewers saw Clinton turning his head each time he looked down. Left, right, right, center, left—even without the teleprompter he did what public speaking coaches urge clients: to move not just their eyes but their heads.

Imagine yourself speaking not to people but half a pizza, divided into three slices, the tips pointing towards you. We tell clients and students to divide the audience in thirds, as if they were
looking at each slice, moving at pauses from one slice to the next. They can cover the entire room, making eye contact and moving across the room, from left, to center, to right.

In the seven minutes before aides fixed his teleprompter, Clinton still looked up ninety percent of the time. It is a skill any politician can learn.

**Use Your Hands and Arms**

Whether from undergrads in a public speaking class, corporate officers, or people on the campaign trail we hear this question again and again.

“What do I do with my hands?”

In political life it is rare to see speakers with arms pinned to their sides, or gripping the lectern so tightly their white knuckles are visible to the audience. But using hands and arms expressively is not just a matter of appearance. It's well-established that American audiences view speakers who use their hands and arms as more open and more believable.

For that reason, some coaches believe speakers should consciously learn and practice gestures that express common emotions. In the box on this page, you’ll find a group of basic gestures once popular among public speaking teachers, but now in disrepute because they sometimes seem so artificial. The authors are agnostic about this issue. We have seen speakers use them robotically and seem almost comic in the attempt. But we have also seen some people use them naturally. Some examples:

**DELIVERY—GESTURES**

Pointing: finger or hand toward listeners when speaker is addressing them. (“You have been courageous…”)

Giving: Both hands outstretched when speaker is indicating support (“I have fought for your issues…”)

Receiving: One or both hands at chest level, palm turned toward speaker (“I have seen the pain when …”)

Rejecting: Hand up as if taking an oath, palm towards audience, waggling back and forth (“I will not accept…”)

Counting: Finger of one hand tapping fingers of the other, as speaker enumerates (“First, it’s wrong. Second, …”)

Cautioning: Index finger up. (“But we cannot…”)

Dividing: One hand chopping down, then the other, to indicate different sides (“On the one hand X … on the other side Y.”)

You can try different gestures by marking where in the text you’d want to use them. Rehearse your speech and check what you look like by setting your Smartphone on a nearby
shelf. Give these experiments some time. Just like any physical act, gestures will seem awkward at first.

Of course, the movements listed in the box above are not the only ways to use your hands and arms. President Trump does very well with a few minimal gestures, usually moving his right hand in rhythm to his words sometimes spreading his arms wide to illustrate great progress. However you decide to use your hands and arms, three rules will help you do it effectively.

**Use body movements to express your thoughts.** They do more than contribute. Imagine speakers passionate about what they say while their hands stay clasped in front of their chest. The effect is odd, discordant, and distracting.

**Use different styles at different events.** Your arms should get more of a workout at a rally in a labor hall than a coffee for fifteen people in a New Hampshire living room.

Finally, **use gestures that suit your personality.** What makes one speaker self-conscious might strike another as appropriately expressive. Experiment with gestures as you do with sound. You won’t know until you try.

Remember: if you speak forcefully while your hands and arms are motionless, you are sending two different messages. Whatever you feel fits your style, don’t rest until you see your body movement help what you say instead of contradicting it.

**Voice**

The student was smart, hardworking, eager to improve and full of ideas – which he uttered so fast that he swallowed half his words and spoke the rest in short, machine-gun-like bursts that all of us in the class had to work hard to decipher.

For the first weeks of that semester in 2007, I wrote long descriptions of what he sounded like and talked to him about it after class. “Yeahyeahyeah,” he would say.

Then, halfway though the course, American University made a great technological advance—the ability to record and watch instantly in the classroom.

The first time we tried it, my student was horrified. “That was gross,” he said after class, speaking slowly for the first time. He bought a tape recorder. By next week’s speech, he articulated every word.

Now, as a senior congressional aide that student speaks all the time. Reminiscing about that horrible moment a decade earlier he said, "I remember that day. Think about it all the time.”

You might be excused for thinking that a decade later everyone watches themselves. After all, smartphones make that easy. Not true. Even technologically sophisticated students hate the idea. So do older, well-established executives. Recently Eric coached the CEO of a global corporation, a man in his 60’s. He had access to every device imaginable and had NEVER watched himself on tape until that first session.

That was a mistake. Watching and listening is the best way to discover if you're speaking too fast. It’s also an important tool for what most speech coaches emphasize, vocal variety. That means varying your inflection patterns. It also means varying three qualities that affect the sounds you make -- *pitch*, *rate*, and *volume* – and learning to use two techniques for indicating importance or shifts in subject matter: *pauses* and *emphasis*.

Here we examine each, then suggest ways to improve.
Pitch

“Singing is just sustained talking,” intones the bass member of The Music Man’s barbershop quartet. Like a song, speech has high and low notes. Pitch means how high and low will you go in a speech. The range of highs and lows acceptable in conversation can sound dull in a twenty-minute speech. Announcers consciously learn to extend their pitch range—as an example, listen to any talk show host or weatherperson.

Stand up comics sometimes parody the pitch range on news shows—especially those delivering the weather—because it sounds unnatural in real life. To sustain interest in their speeches, though, most speakers need to consciously expand their range beyond the highs and lows they use from day to day.

Rate

Normally, people speak at about 150 words per minute. In his Berlin speech, Obama took 25 minutes to say about 3000 words; after we subtract several minutes worth of applause, that was pretty close to average. But these aren’t constant rates. For important points, good speakers slow down. At peak moments, they may speed up. Variety is enormously important in maintaining credibility and interest.

Volume

Speech coach Michael Sheehan, who preps speakers for the Democratic conventions, reminds them there’s no need to shout. The speakers are using a good sound system, and they have a large TV audience. For the folks at home, shouting is as invasive as someone shouting in their living room—which is where the speaker will be. Varying volume also helps you shift your tone and convey different emotions. Watch Obama’s quiet opening in the Berlin speech, and contrast it with the way he finished. He should not have done it any other way.

Pauses

The space between words can be an incredibly useful rhetorical tool. A pause can indicate to listeners that you’re switching gears, or that you have something important coming up, or that you’re searching for the right word because you care about being precise. Watch Ronald Reagan tell the “sailor” story we cite from his 1989 Farewell. Taken from about two minute into his speech, watch as a president who began as a radio announcer uses the pause to lend impact to his next words.

I've been thinking a bit at that window. I've been reflecting on what the past 8 years have meant (PAUSE) and mean. And the image that comes to mind like a refrain is (PAUSE) a nautical one -- a small story (PAUSE) about a big ship, and a refugee, and a sailor. It was back in the early eighties, at the height of the boat people. And the sailor was hard at work on the carrier Midway, which was patrolling the South China Sea. The sailor, like most American servicemen, was young, smart, and (PAUSE)fiercely observant. The crew spied on the horizon a leaky little boat. And crammed inside were refugees from Indochina hoping to get to America. The Midway sent a small launch to bring them to the ship and safety. As the refugees made their way through the choppy
seas, one spied the sailor on deck, and stood up, and called out to him. He yelled, (PAUSE) "Hello, American sailor. Hello,(PAUSE) freedom man." A small moment with a big meaning, a moment the sailor, who wrote it in a letter, couldn't get out of his mind. And, when I saw it,(PAUSE) neither could I.

We haven’t highlighted all the pauses. But note how the ones we include add irony, highlight a compliment, help Reagan make a key word memorable, or just imply emotion.

**Emphasis**

Read these sentences aloud:

**Emphasis** makes a big difference.
Emphasis makes a big difference.
Emphasis makes a big difference.

Now, thinking back to the Ronald Reagan excerpt, and add another device.

Emphasis (pause) makes a big difference.
Emphasis makes (pause) a big difference.
Emphasis makes a big (pause) difference.

Can you see how **pauses** and **emphasis** work in tandem, making a **big** (pause) difference?

**Pronunciation**

You might think people running for office would know how to pronounce words. Most do. But even a small mistake— like pronouncing *nuclear* as *new-cue-lar*— can erase the good impression of all the words you’ve pronounced right. To mispronounce a name can be just as damaging.

Once Bob wrote a speech that quoted a Bob Dylan song. To his horror, his speaker said, “As Bob Die-lan put it …”

Since then, he has included pronunciation guides in scripts even when he is sure the speaker won’t need them. Speakers shouldn’t hesitate to seek pronunciation tips, and speechwriters shouldn’t recoil at including them. Checking pronunciation is not a sign of ignorance; it’s a sign that you want to get things right.

**The Articulated Pause**

**Uh. Ummm. Er. Like.** Other ingredients in this list suggest things to improve and ultimately perfect. Here is one to eliminate. Why do speakers lard their speeches with noises, sometimes and descriptively called *disfluencies*, that make them seem unsure of themselves?

Back in 2010 Caroline Kennedy, then angling to be Secretary of State, participated in an interview she hoped would show her sophistication. The *New York Times* focused on something else: that Kennedy used "y'know" 138 times in a single interview–12 times in one minute. 13
That’s more than twice what most people do. An article in Harvard Business Review said that the average speaker uses 5 “filler” words and sounds per minute, and even that’s too much. The optimal number is only one.\(^{\text{14}}\)

We tend to believe that silence is more awkward than articulation. That makes this a hard habit to break. When we ask students to eliminate the word "like," they will start, use the word twice, and come to a screeching halt. "I'm like saying it again!" one student said during one exercise. "I did it again!" and then sank into silence. We borrow one exercise to help, from media trainer Brad Phillips.

Phillips tells clients to look around the room and pick an object. Then begin talking about it for 30 seconds. You can't use "uh" or "um" but you can stop briefly because a silent pause is better than filler. His own 30-second speech about a printer looked like this.

“I like my printer. I've had it for about two years, and it's been pretty maintenance-free, which I really appreciate as someone who runs his own business. It sits on the corner of my desk in my office in New York City. The best part of my office is the view of the Chrysler Building. It's pretty cool to sit, especially in the winter, and see a Manhattan icon out my office window.”\(^{\text{15}}\)

You can practice this anywhere. And you can tape yourself, too, since you may be unaware that you're still doing it.

It’s not the only way to get rid of an annoying verbal tic? But it's worth trying. The articulated pause is a sure way to lose credibility.

**DELIVERY BEST PRACTICE: PRACTICE**

Naturally, not all speeches need the same kind of practice. In the world of public speaking there are four methods of delivery. Two of them, *impromptu* and *memorized* speeches, don’t count -- or shouldn't. Memorized speeches take a prodigious amount of time and aren’t worth the effort. Impromptu speeches are too risky.

Two others dominate political speech. The first is *manuscript* or *text*, when you’re reading a speech that’s been entirely written out. The second is *extemporaneous*—the carefully prepared and practiced but not memorized speech, usually from talking points or some other form of notes.

Speaking from text may seem easy. But why did listeners interrupt Barack Obama sixteen times for applause in the last five minutes of his 2004 speech—against five for John Kerry?

It was not just the language. Neither was it the coaching they got; like tennis, a coach can suggest but the player has to be willing to hit a million balls and learn from each one.

Here, in a chapter aimed at speakers but offering ways to involve staffers, we offer 7 tips that over time will help both.

**Use every speech as a chance to get better:** It's common in politics to think that some speeches don't matter. Our suggestion: every speech gives speakers the chance to practice. But that means practicing, performing, and reviewing the right way. Like running, eating breakfast, or playing guitar, make this part of your day.
Don't just rehearse—record. It used to be hard to see yourself. You needed a camera, a VHS tape, and someone to work the camera. That might scare speakers off—even Senators don't like the idea of other people watching them stumble through a first try.

In 2018, the Smartphone gives speakers no excuse. You can set it up in private, speak, and then watch. Our suggestion: resist the temptation to just sit at your desk and run through the draft. You want to see exactly how you will look and sound when you deliver.

Don't just watch—correct. Each time you watch yourself, watch for specific things to change. Arms at your side? Voice a monotone? Next time work on that, and watch to see whether you look or sound different. Are you standing straight? Varying your voice? Do you use your hands expressively? Look up most of the time? Looking around? Deliver your speech again, working on the things that bother you most. Check your phone again. Repeat as needed.

Set specific goals. It shouldn't take long for you to know what gives you trouble. Take voice. Do you need more variety? Do rehearsals where you work only on that.

Rely on the kindness of others. In general, speakers are their severest critics. But nobody has a corner on insight. Politicians cannot be inhibited about asking staffers for advice. Create a climate of candor. Once staffers know you want honesty they will be eager to give it.

Debrief Have someone record the actual speech—then hold a session to review it. Politicians can't depend on asking people how things went. The impulse to flatter you is too great. Much better: a session in which the speaker and communication people watch together, knowing that the goal is to get better.

Finally:

Don't expect miracles: Practice is one habit you cannot abandon. But like most things, genuine improvement takes time.

And while you wait, we have some tips—in this case aimed mostly at those giving the speech—on rehearsing the two types they will use most.

Practicing With Text

During one presidential campaign, one of us walked into a friend’s office to see that he had pasted the pages of a speech around his walls, in two different colors of ink. Black was the text he had written. Blue were the adlibs his boss had delivered. The pages were about 80 percent blue – and almost 100 percent terrible. “He hates being scripted,” the friend said, mournfully.

It’s an occupational hazard. Most politicians need to speak fluently about dozens of subjects, and a lot rides on avoiding errors. That means, like it or not, they often need a text. Speeches read word for word might sound stiff in front of small groups but for bigger crowds, a formal text allows politicians to speak effectively about issues only staffers should know.

Besides, it’s always good to have a text to distribute to reporters. There is no way around having to read, whether with a teleprompter or without one.

We have heard speakers drone through a text, and with preparation, inspire. But just sitting at a desk mumbling through the script, occasionally stopping to change a word, does not. Here are some ways to rehearse that can make you better:

Rehearse like you mean it. That means standing at the podium and practicing exactly the voice and tone and gestures you will use. Only in that way will you be able to time the speech accurately and judge what works in your nonverbal language.
Mark up your drafts. Just because you have the text in front of you doesn't mean you remember everything you need. Do you use anaphora three times in a row? Underline each so you remember to get a little louder each time. Racing through sentences? Write SLOW DOWN in the margin. Especially important: pause and emphasis. Don't hesitate to write PAUSE or some symbol that reminds you to pause. Underline or use italics to emphasize.

Rehearse not just for what’s there – but to add what isn’t. The best speechwriters in the world cannot guess exactly what you want. Use at least one rehearsal to figure out what you want and don’t want. Revise. Then mark up the manuscript and start again.

Cut. Every draft ever written can be cut. After you have a revised draft, use one rehearsal to cut ten percent – including words for ideas that could just as easily be conveyed by a gesture alone. Some examples: It's a great honor … I want to make it clear that...

Extend eye contact. Even a rehearsal or two will allow you to remember larger groups of words each time, so you can preserve the eye contact so vital to persuasion. It may be tempting to skimp on rehearsal and practice with a text already done. But in addition to sacrificing the chance to work on overall speech goals, even a single rehearsal can make speakers more effective.

Record and review: You may take a few hours to go to a conference, speak, and come back. It's worth 30 minutes to see how you did.

Did you stand up straight? Use arms expressively? Vary your voice? Rise in pitch approaching an applause line? Be tough on yourself. Invite staff—and family—to watch and comment. Tell your kids you want them to be honest. They will oblige.

Practicing the Extemporaneous Speech

To give an extended speech without notes, or with only a few talking points, takes careful preparation and many, many hours of rehearsal. But if speakers prepare, learn, and deliver an extemporaneous speech well, they can create the same impact they would with a Teleprompter. They will seem to know a lot, sound relaxed and conversational, and can make eye contact the entire time. That, of course, includes delivering the stump speech, the most difficult and most valuable speech in politics.

At the local level, state legislator or small-town mayors should rarely rely on prepared texts; the audiences are too small, and the things they need to say not that different from one event to the next. But even at the national level, politicians should speak extemporaneously much more often than they do. Yes, text speeches make an event easy. You can eat, schmooze with the guests, and not give a thought to the speech until you pull it out of your inside jacket pocket.

But if you want to be really effective, use a stump not just during the campaign but as often as possible. Remember, even if staffers and reporters have heard the stump speech a hundred times, most audiences haven’t. Also, why sacrifice the chance to exhibit all the skills that make listeners say, “Let’s march!”? That includes the polished delivery—constant eye contact, expressive gestures, pause and emphasis—that comes from using material that you’ve planned and practiced.

When we teach public speaking, largely about extemporaneous speech, we tell students they should not think of the new assignment as one speech but fifteen. Even once they have
created an outline that works, it will take them at least that many rehearsals to deliver a three-
minute speech well.

Even for speakers who have used stumps often, we suggest ten steps that should allow you
to deliver one well.

1. Create a detailed outline of your stump—but not a full speech—with
careful attention to themes that work everywhere.
2. Limit it to ten to twelve minutes, or about 1,500 to 1,800 words.
3. Practice first with text, then the outline, then with no notes.
4. Watch each time, noting what needs improvement whether appearance,
movement, or voice. Work to correct.
5. Watch yourself with staff. Solicit comments. Pay special attention to
elements of delivery contained in this chapter: pitch, rate, volume, emphasis,
pauses, and articulation. Resist annoyance at comments by junior staffers.
7. Try out with less important groups. Deliver the speech you’ve prepared;
do not vary or digress.
8. Make sure stories and jokes remain intact.
9. Begin using the speech before groups for whom you might previously
have used a text.
10. Monitor constantly for creeping length.

Like some drugs, stumps take time to work. You need that time to become fluent, to
become confident, to experiment with new material, and to learn from failure. But as you do,
remember that this kind of practice can get you only so far. To really become good, keep
assessing your progress. Questions to ask yourself—mostly about delivery—appear at the end of
this chapter.

And while so far, we have focused on improving techniques, speaking skills, there are
other ways to improve delivery.

Expanding Your Horizons

Learn How Speeches Are Made

Often elected officials don't systematically examine the questions of structure, or language.
But delivery cannot be totally divorced from content. If say, a House Member or State Senator
doesn't know how repetition or parallel construction can increase power, how can they insist
they be in their text?

For those of you reading this book as you run for office, you’re learning just the kinds of
things that will help you. But check the web links and watch every example. Look at some of
the books listed in this book’s bibliography – even Political Speechwriter’s Companion doesn’t
have a corner on ideas. The more you read, the more you listen, the more ideas you’ll have for
your own speeches.
**Watch Other Speakers**

Not everyone should deliver a speech the same way. But whether you are a state rep in Illinois or a 10-term member of Congress, you’ve noticed which of your colleagues speak well. Imitating the things they do is a permissible form of plagiarism. In our classes we see that happen every semester. (“Oh! That’s how litany sounds. Let me try!”) If twenty-year-olds can learn by imitating, so should their parents.

Why don’t more politicians learn from one another? We learn how to speak French by listening to people who know how. We learn how to play tennis from a coach. We learn how to dance from—well, okay, some people never do learn. We can learn to speak by copying others.

If you need evidence, look at the role model admired by so many politicians: the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Taylor Branch’s biography describes King at Morehouse College, having decided to become a minister, sneaking into the balcony of Wheat Street Baptist with some friends to study the speaking style of William Borders, a minister whose style they admired.

Later, at Crozier Divinity School, King studied oratory: the “proven” sermon structures (the Ladder, the Jewel, the Twin, and others) and how to apply the “three Ps,” proving, painting and persuasion, “to win over successively the mind, imagination, and heart.” Soon, his fellow students were crowding into chapel to hear King deliver the Thursday morning student sermon.

You can make a case that King was a better speaker than writer. But he wasn’t born that way.

**Expose Yourself to Ridicule**

Constantly. Video has made observation much easier for us than it was for King. Any friend or staffer with a camcorder can unobtrusively provide a tape of every appearance. But don’t just watch. Watch critically, watch with friends or staff, and watch with the checklist you will find at the end of this chapter. Meanwhile, when someone points out a flaw, work on it. And keep working on it. Not overnight, but over time you will not just improve but revolutionize your delivery. And you will make that task easier with another step:

**Rely On the Advice of Others**

This Chapter has already urged reviewing speeches with staff. We have not explored how difficult that can be.

Politicians and candidates surround themselves with deferential aides. For a young mid-level staffer to tell them about their bad posture is uncomfortable for both. Neither can you count on an honest critique from the people who invited you to speak. As long-time Congressional management consultant Rick Shapiro points out, these people need you. They’ll always say, “great speech.”

Still, and here we speak not to staffers but those they work for, politicians cannot rely only on their own evaluation of their abilities. You may be reluctant to face the truth – or too harsh on yourself. You must subject yourself to the honest evaluation of others. Because our voices come to us altered by the thickness of our own skulls, we do not sound to ourselves the way we do to others. We don’t know when we’re slumping, swaying, or droning. Only exasperating and sometimes humiliating practice can help, aided by video and the frank
assessment of people who care about their goals and know what they’re talking about. For politicians used to fawning praise, honest criticism can be tough to take.

Our advice: Get over it. You have hired bright people. Now make sure you create an atmosphere that fosters good feedback.

If you encourage honest assessment, deal with it maturely when it comes, and then act on it in ways everyone can see, eventually you will get plenty of useful advice -- even from someone who looks younger than your kids. After all, if say, a U.S. Senator feels comfortable delegating to a 23-year-old the job of deciding how to vote on a $100 million appropriation, they should feel equally comfortable about that person’s judgments about eye contact.

Make the Teleprompter Your Friend

We leave this suggestion for last because not everyone has access to one. Also, in front of a small audience, a teleprompter looks out of place, an unnecessary crutch.

Still, they can make a world of difference. 2008 television audiences felt Barack Obama was speaking to them. He was looking up and out at them, after all. No one could see his eyes moving. They were amazed to learn that his speech was scrolling down teleprompter screens just out of camera range.

Sixty years after Dwight Eisenhower became the first American President to use one, most people still do not know how common this device is in politics.

Bob once gave a workshop in Hanoi for Vietnamese diplomats. He showed a clip of Obama. "How does he memorize speeches so fast?" one of the students asked when it was over.

Bob was confused. "He's using a teleprompter."

It turned out that not a single diplomat had ever heard the word.

Teleprompters come in for a lot of criticism, some of it reasonable. At one rally Donald Trump started with a teleprompter, then admitted to the crowd it had broken. Then he knocked one of the screens to the floor. "I like it better without the teleprompter," he said.

The fact is, when, like Donald Trump, you are saying the same thing from event to event, that's true. But now he uses one. Naturally, teleprompters are an illusion—one of the things that make voters distrust politics. To us, the solution is to stop pretending they don't exist. Without them, not only would speakers sound inarticulate. Listeners would be less informed.

Meanwhile, there are ways to improve that involve no technology

FINAL WORDS

In “White House Ghosts,” Robert Schlesinger’s engaging and useful book about presidential speechwriters, he paints two very different portraits of presidents through the eyes of the people who worked for them. The first was George Herbert Walker Bush, one of whose speechwriters once asked the president if he ever read his speeches out loud before delivering them.

No, Bush said.

He didn’t think about “how he wanted a speech to sound when he delivered it?” the speechwriter asked.

No, Bush said. That would take too long.

Later in the book Schlesinger describes how Bush’s “unwillingness to practice and habit of ad-libbing continued to dog him.” In the words of a staffer writing about one speech,
He ad-libbed significantly – embracing some lines verbatim, but mostly opening his arms to his own words … When he did look down to the lines on the cards, it sounded like bumper car met bumper car; lines ran head on into other lines, paragraphs into paragraphs. Transitions in almost every case were lost.47

Oratory did not decide the 1992 election. But it may have been the deciding factor in 2008. George H.W. Bush wasn’t a terrible speaker. But who knows how good a speaker he could have become if he’d tried? When politicians limit their own aspirations, they deprive themselves of what’s possible.

We say to those running: raise your sights. It should be clear from this chapter that the key to becoming an exciting speaker is not what you do at the podium—but away from it. Those sessions pay off for a skill often vital to your career. For except for the clergy, no field other than politics puts such a premium on speaking well.

And it allows you to express qualities uniquely yours. Speakers don’t have to imitate Barack Obama, or Donald Trump to be good. In the 2016 campaign, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Carly Fiorina, Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama and Bernie Sanders all moved audiences in different ways. This chapter should give speakers confidence about the elements of delivery, the way to practice, and the way to lift your game to a new level.

Audiences may still not remember much of what you say. But if you speak well, they will remember you.

THE SPEAKER’S CHECKLIST: DELIVERY

**APPEARANCE**

- Am I standing straight?
- Did I take time to get a haircut and check my wardrobe?
- Do I try to stay reasonably physically fit?

**MOVEMENT**

- Have I refrained from swaying or other distracting movements?
- Do my facial expressions resemble those I’d use in conversation?
- Am I using my hands appropriately and expressively?

**EYE CONTACT**

- Have I rehearsed enough so I can look at the audience at least two-thirds of the time?
- Am I following the “three slices of pizza” rule?

**VOICE**

- Am I using a good range of high and low notes?
- Have I varied my inflections and speaking rate to suit the material?
- Do I articulate clearly and pronounce everything perfectly?

**PREPARATION**

- Do I routinely mark up speeches?
- Rehearse to cut and reshape?
- Practice extending eye contact?
- Systematically prepare my stump?
- Listen to other speakers?
- Investigate ways speeches are made?
- Watch other speakers?
- Study my own performance?
- Rely on the advice of others?