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How to communicate confidently



A Self Study Booklet for school prefects

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CONTENTS

Chapter	Title	Page
1	Introduction	1
2	What is communication?	2
3	Planning	4
4	How to appear confident (even if you are not)	10
5	Using your voice and language	13
6	Visual aids	15
7	Conclusion	16
	Checklist	17

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Chapter 1

Introduction

You have probably bought this booklet because you want to learn how to speak confidently in front of other people.

The first thing you should realise is that speaking in front of other people is one of the roles that prefects worry about most, but if you get 'butterflies' in your stomach at the thought of having to speak in front of other people, you are not alone. This feeling of 'nerves' is common and, by the way, a good thing. We'll explain why this is the case later.

Communication is about having a message you want to give to other people and putting that message into a form of words that will be easily understood by the people listening to you. So, put simply, you need put across your message in a logical sequence and speak clearly, using language that your listeners will understand. We will consider these things in more detail later.

Despite how you feel just before you speak to a group of people, you will need to 'look confident' so we will also cover body language.

Speaking in front of other people can take many forms. This can range from giving formal presentations to large audiences to short talks to other prefects or small groups of younger pupils. In this booklet we are going to look mainly at talking to large groups in quite formal settings. For smaller groups in less formal surroundings the same principles apply. You will need to adjust them slightly.

Before we get on with the serious business of this subject, you might like to read some light-hearted quotations:

"The human brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public"

"It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech"

"No one ever complains about a speech being too short"

"Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening"

Chris Cordery

Author

Chapter 2

What is communication?

Definition

Communication is a two-way process. It consists of giving information and receiving information.

Here are some basics

If you want to be an effective speaker in front of a group of people, small or large, formal or informal:

- Plan what you are going to say
- Make sure everyone can hear you
- Use language everyone, without exception, will understand
- Keep what you have to say as brief as possible

Here is another quotation that makes a profound point about brevity:

"I didn't have time to write a short presentation, so I have written a long one instead"

The point being that planning to be succinct can be a very time-consuming task.

In the following chapters we will look in more detail at these basics.

Chapter 3

Planning

For any kind of speaking to other people, planning is essential. Even if you are going to speak to a small group of younger students in your school, you should at least think about what you are going to say and write brief notes to help you remember.

So what do we mean by planning?

First - know your audience

Find out answers to the following questions:

- Who will I be speaking to?
 - This will give you information about the content of what you say and the language to use - if you are speaking to adults you will almost certainly need to take a different approach compared with speaking to children visiting from a nearby primary school, for instance.



Second - know your venue

Find out answers to the following questions:

- Where will I be speaking?
 - What is the venue? - school hall, classroom, town hall, church hall, community centre - having done all your preparation and knowing that an audience will be waiting for you, you wouldn't want to turn up at the wrong place!
- Where exactly will I be speaking?
 - Within the venue, where will you be positioned in relation to the audience: on a stage of some kind, in the centre of the front of the room or to one side?
 -



- Will I be responsible for pointing out where the fire exits and toilets are?
 - If, as part of the introduction to your presentation you need to tell your audience about safety and comfort, you need to find out where the fire exits are (and the evacuation assembly point) and the toilets.

Third - know what you are going to say

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OK, back to planning

The structure for your presentation should be as follows:

- Introduction (10%)
- Main body (80%) - including time for questions
- Conclusion (10%)
- Exit - very brief, high impact two sentences

The percentages show the amount of time you should allocate and you should plan to start on time, unless circumstances make it impossible for you to do so. The reason this is so important is twofold:



Introduction

If necessary tell your audience about safety (what to do in case of fire or other emergency evacuation), comfort (toilets, refreshment breaks).

Give your audience a structure for what you are going to say, for example:

"This evening I am going to explain[how our school contributes in a positive way to the local environment]. If you have any questions, please hold them until the end of what I have to say; I'll leave time for questions before we finish in about 30 minutes time."

This gives an enormous amount of reassurance to your audience. They now don't have to wonder (whilst you are talking) what to do if the fire alarm goes off or where the toilets are. They know that they should not interrupt you because you are going to make time for questions and they know that they will have to concentrate for just half an hour. Now they can relax and listen to what you have to say!

Main body

- By the end of my presentation, what must my audience know - high priority content
- What is desirable (but not essential) they know
- What may be useful for them to know, if there is time to tell them - low priority content

MUST
know

SHOULD
know

COULD
know

At the end of this section, plan to ask for questions from the audience, before moving to your conclusion.

When you ask whether anyone has questions, pause for several seconds to allow people time to compose their thoughts and spread your eye contact widely to indicate that your request is genuine. And, if people do have questions, make sure the rest of the audience can hear them, before you answer. You can do this by asking the questioner to speak-up or stand up or both. Or you can repeat the question so that everyone can hear and then answer it yourself.

Conclusion and Exit

In your conclusion, just run through the main points you want your audience to remember. Again, your thinking about **MUST**, **SHOULD**, **COULD** will help you decide what to include here, perhaps concentrating on the **MUST** know.

Chapter 4

How to appear confident (even if you are not)

So, the moment has arrived for you to give your talk and you might be feeling a bit nervous. You may have those butterfly feelings in your stomach; you may feel that you are not thinking clearly and you could even feel a bit sick.

These feelings are most likely brought on by the adrenalin in your body and that is a good sign. As long as it doesn't turn you into a quivering wreck, a little nervousness is likely to make you sharp and alert. In these situations it can be a good idea to 'reframe' in your mind how you feel. Tell yourself two things:



Now run through the positives

Thank goodness you planned well!

Before we move on, here are some well researched facts ...

Immediately you stand up to speak your audience will be creating a first impression of you. Here is another quotation:

"You only get one chance to make a first impression"

55% of this will be based on your *body language*; 38% will be based on *how* you speak and only 7% will be based on *what* you say. These percentages give you clues about how you should conduct yourself in the early part of your presentation.

Now let's consider some of the techniques you can use to *really* make you look confident:

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This will free up your hands to help emphasise certain points if you wish to do so.

4. Stand upright, but not rigidly and place your feet shoulder width apart. Once you start to feel confident, move around a little - this will help you stay relaxed and it will help keep your audience's attention.

5. Speak loud enough to be heard at the back of the room.

6. Spread your eye contact from front to back of the room and from one side to the other and continue to do this frequently. This will help everyone in your audience to feel that you are talking to them, personally.

It is also worth considering some DO NOT tips. So do not:



Chapter 5

Using your voice and language

As we saw in the previous chapter *how* you speak is very important indeed.

Volume

Going back to basics, you can't communicate effectively if people can't hear what you are saying, so make sure you project your voice in a way so that everyone can hear you. But, don't shout! A useful technique is to pretend to yourself that you are speaking to someone just behind the back row. If you do this, you will find a natural way of projecting your voice.



Tone and pace

The 'pause'

Language

Include some humour if you wish, but unless you are good at telling jokes or funny stories avoid them.

Also avoid sarcasm; again, it almost always offends someone.

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For very much the same reason, that is why the phrase 'do you know what I mean?' is so detested by many people.

Chapter 6

Visual aids

"A picture is worth a thousand words"

This well known saying is based on the fact that most people find it easier to remember visual images than spoken or written words.

The implication for people who speak to groups is that mixing visual images with the spoken word is likely to be more engaging and interesting than just speaking.

Sometimes presenters will use PowerPoint slides to show (in words) the important main points of what they are saying and, if used sparingly in this way, this is acceptable. However, if presenters use visual images to support what they are saying, then this is where PowerPoint (and other similar software) can have high impact. Let's take a very straightforward example. Which of these slides has the most impact?



Actions in case of fire

If the fire alarm sounds leave the building by the fire exits and assemble in the car park.

Fire!

A diagram illustrating a fire emergency response. On the left, there is a house with a fire on its roof and a person in a suit running away from it. On the right, there is a fire alarm bell and a car park with several cars. Three white arrows point from the house to the fire alarm bell, from the running person to the car park, and from the fire alarm bell to the car park.

Chapter 7

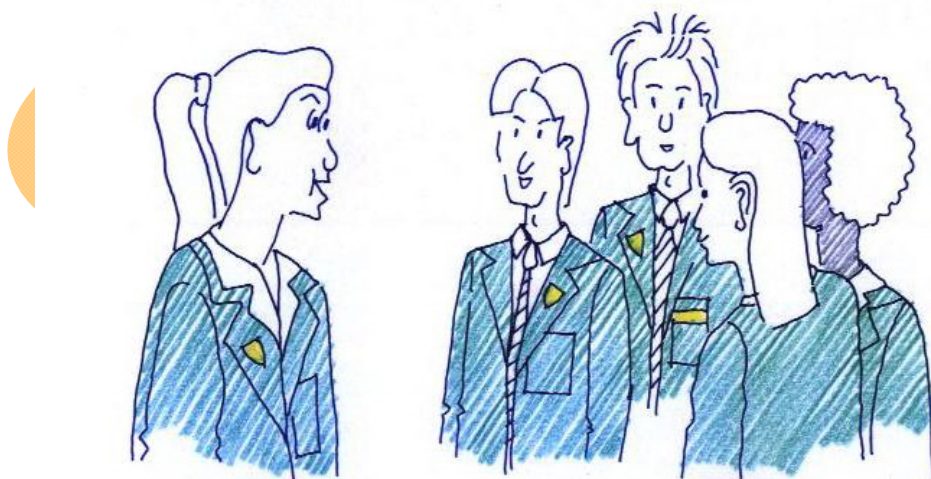
Conclusion

We hope you are now more knowledgeable on the subject of communicating effectively but please don't expect to be an expert immediately.

It can take a lot of practice to become confident and good at speaking to groups, but you won't achieve this without practice.

In this booklet we have mainly covered speaking in quite formal setting, but we appreciate that for many prefects speaking informally to groups of friends or younger students may be a weekly experience. Whilst you are doing so, we recommend that you ask a fellow prefect to observe you and give some feedback afterwards. On the final page you will find a checklist to help with this task. Ask your friend to complete the main part of the table and then record in your own words what you will do differently next time. This will help you to improve your speaking ability and raise your confidence.

For now, we wish you good luck in your role as a prefect, but more than anything else we hope you will apply the things you have learnt from this booklet and become confident at speaking in front of groups of people.



Information about the range of services that we provide can be found at

www.aurora-tds.co.uk

Effective communication check list

To what extent did my first impression look confident?
Could everyone see me and hear me?
To what extent did everyone seem to listen to what I had to say?
To what extent did everyone seem to understand what I was saying?
What
To what extent
<i>This section is for you to complete yourself</i> In the light of my experience