



Making Yourself Understood

Here's a Way to Do It Better

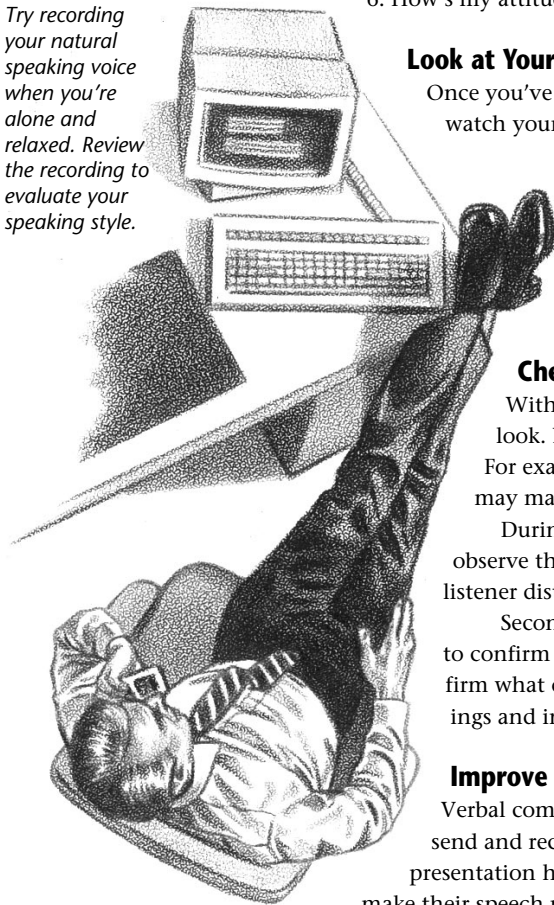
We listen to each other with our ears, our eyes and our life experience. In fact, it's estimated that your words are only 20 percent of what you communicate. Many factors, including the locale, the time of day and simple intuition affect how well you're understood. Nevertheless, there's a trick to making sure that the message that's received is the one you send. Here's how to make sure your words are in synch with the way you say them.

Listen to Yourself

Use a tape recorder to capture your style of speaking. Pick a time when you're relaxed and alone. Talk into the machine until you know your voice is natural. Your conversation with yourself should be long enough so that you can pick up repeating patterns of speech. To establish a natural situation, avoid reading into the recorder. When you review the recording, ask yourself:

1. How's my volume? Am I loud or soft?
2. How's my tone? Am I gruff? Do I whine?
3. Is my pitch high or low?
4. How are my speech patterns? Am I emphasizing or repeating key words?
5. How's my pace? Am I fast or slow?
6. How's my attitude? Am I a bully? Am I unsure?

Try recording your natural speaking voice when you're alone and relaxed. Review the recording to evaluate your speaking style.



Look at Yourself

Once you've established how you sound, focus on how you look. You can watch yourself in front of a mirror. Try to become sensitive to your physical movements whenever you talk. Again, ask yourself:

1. Do I move close to my listener?
2. Do I use hand gestures?
3. What sort of facial expressions do I make?
4. Do I maintain good posture?
5. Do I dress appropriately for each situation?

Check Your Impact

With your listener in mind, review how you sound and how you look. Make sure that your style doesn't interfere with what you say. For example, a gruff tone may mask a gentle nature. Too slow a pace may make listeners impatient. Closeness can be positive or negative.

During real conversations, check your impact in two ways. First, observe the other person. Is your listener moving away from you? Is your listener distracted? Does the situation feel tense?

Second, build feedback into your conversational style. Ask questions to confirm understanding. For example, if a project is due next week, confirm what day and what time of day is mutually agreeable. State your feelings and invite exchange.

Improve Relationships

Verbal communication takes up about 50 percent of our time. It's easier to send and receive the right message when you understand the effect that your presentation has on others. Professionals in radio and television practice to make their speech patterns friendly and persuasive. So can you.