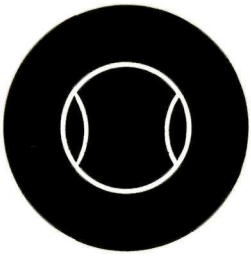
talks



talks

A Public Speaking Guide for
National Park Service Employees

First edition, 1953, by Howard R. Stagner

revised, 1968, by David D. Thompson, Jr.

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IMPORTANCE OF SPEECH

Have you ever considered speech and its importance to you? You utter thousands of words for every one you write, and hear hundreds for each one you see in print. There are many more occasions for use of the spoken word than for the written word, and this is especially true for those of us in uniform who daily meet park visitors face to face. Effectiveness in speaking, whether to an individual or to a large audience, is a valuable asset. So it is going to be profitable to work on making your speech more effective.

You have probably had some college training in speaking and have been acquiring speech habits, consciously or otherwise, since early childhood. Now is the time to take inventory of your skills and recognize your strong and weak points, discover how to improve them, and set about the task of improvement.

Although what follows deals mainly with speaking from a platform, many of the ideas have much broader usefulness. Many good techniques of public speaking are just as useful in dealing with an individual, in writing a popular publication, in laying out a self-guiding trail, or in conducting a tour.

YOUR AUDIENCE

Speech—the communication process—may be traced from an idea to an audience. Idea, speaker, and audience are equally important elements. We shall give attention to ideas and their organization and development. We shall consider the speaker and some of his problems and techniques as he meets his audience and puts ideas into spoken words. But it is obvious that all this is futile unless there is an audience attuned to sound and receptive to ideas. Talk is for people, and the successful speaker is constantly aware of the nature and characteristics of the people to whom he speaks.

Your audience is made up of individuals free to withhold or to give attention. The listener, present of his own volition, has voluntarily surrendered his time to hear what you have to say. In exchange, he is entitled to hear something interesting, to hear it from someone who knows what he is talking about, and to hear it presented in an intelligent and attractive manner in a pleasing voice. If any of these conditions is not fulfilled, you will lose the attention of your audience.

Listening barriers. At 8 p.m., on October 30, 1938, the famous radio program, War of the Worlds, starring Orson Welles, went on the air.

The program was a series of fictitious news flashes describing a Martian invasion of the world. Although repeated announcements stated the program was fiction, more than 1 million people were gripped with abject fear. During the program, Welles saw the studio's control room filling with police and realized they had caused a panic of national proportions.

This incident points up one thing—how poorly people listen. There are certain barriers to good listening that you as a speaker must overcome.

1. Listening takes energy. It is not a passive activity and is characterized by quicker pulse and a rise in body temperature.

2. Concentration is difficult. The average speaker talks at about 125 words per minute, but the mind can race much faster. If you cannot pull the listener back, he soon goes off on mental tangents and finally into mental excursions far from your remarks.

3. Distractions break thought patterns. Children crying, people talking, outside noise—any number of things can compete for the listener's attention or cause him to lose interest.

4. Listener's fantasy. This is a Walter Mitty reaction caused by 2 and 3 above. After a few flights of fantasy, the listener may be having more fun than you can provide and is thereby lost for the rest of the program.

Your ability to cope with these barriers to listening will depend upon the effective use of techniques proposed here.

Audience background. Park visitors comprise all types of people, representing widely varied experience, education, and temperament. If you give a talk which assumes an audience with a background different from that actually represented, your audience will soon lose interest. You must state your message in terms familiar to the audience, relating it to situations familiar to them.

Audience intelligence. A certain background of information and vocabulary is necessary before the audience can understand and accept what you say. When your audience does not possess that background, it must be supplied. In doing so, you should assume that the audience is as intelligent as yourself, though unschooled in the subject matter. Your task is to arouse interest in something that is familiar to you—something that you have discovered and found interesting and are anxious to share with others. There is no greater fault in speaking than that of talking down to an audience.

Audience interest span. As a speaker, your first job is to attract the scattered and casual attention of the audience, and to focus it upon your subject.

Your manner of approach, your voice, and most important, *what you say first,* will determine whether you take the audience with you, or lose them. But to focus initial attention is not enough, for attention wanders and a speaker is never more than a minute or two away from loss of visitor interest. A skillful speaker repeatedly uses techniques for pulling wandering interest back to the subject. A change in voice inflection, of pace, an illustrative story, a rhetorical question, a comparison, a quotation, a picture, or an object are examples of such devices. Straight recitation of a series of facts without embellishment will lose most of the audience many times during the course of a talk, and is *not* interpretation.

In summary, a good speaker is aware of the expectation, interest, education, and experience levels of his audience. He approaches the audience at their level, and builds from that toward his objective.

YOUR SUBJECT

Whether you are a historian, geologist, or wildlife specialist, it is assumed that you will be well grounded in your subject.

This booklet does not deal with obtaining facts and scientific background for a talk, but rather with the way they are presented. Of course facts constitute the building material of talks, and without that background, obtained through study, observation, and experience, no speaker can be successful. Here we want to suggest how you can organize the facts to give your talk unity, coherence, logical development, and climax.

Selection. The subject you select—or which may be assigned to you—should be one which you believe can be made interesting and about which you know a good deal more than most of your audience. Your interest will be reflected in your enthusiasm and sincerity, which will build interest in the audience.

Definition and limitation. Select a *phase* of the general subject to develop. Perhaps you are talking about wildlife. Can you expect to cover adequately *all* details of the 40 mammals and 100 birds of your area? The danger is that your talk will become nothing more than an oral catalog.

Define and limit the scope of your talk by reducing it to a phase that can be adequately handled. For example, consider the themes, *"How man gets along with animals," "How animals are dependent upon each other,"* or *"Strange habits of some strange animals."* In the course of the talk, you will mention many of the species present in your area, but by restricting the field, you can give unity, completeness, and greater depth to your presentation. Historical and archeological subjects should likewise be limited.

Conservation aspect. You are not trying to make experts of your audience. You are trying to give meaning to what surrounds them in the park or monument area. Part of that meaning relates to the natural and historical aspects of that environment, and part relates to conservation and national park objectives. Every subject we discuss exemplifies in some way the use, conservation, philosophy, objectives, or values of national parks and monuments. Discover those meanings and adapt them to your discussion.

ORGANIZING YOUR TALK

Synopsis and outline. You have selected your main topic. You have defined in your own mind the phase of that subject which you will cover. You have discovered the related conservation aspects. Next try to express your theme in a subject sentence, or short paragraph. For example, perhaps your general field is geology, and the specific phase of that subject is to be the story of water. Your synopsis might be:

We trace the course of water from the sea to its precipitation as rain and snow, and then follow it back to the sea, noting its effects upon life and upon topography en route. Thus we learn to understand the importance of watershed protection such as is afforded by a national park.

For an example in the field of history, suppose your general subject is the American Civil War, with the limited subject being the significance of the Battle of Antietam. The specific theme to be developed might be stated as follows:

The Battle of Antietam, September 17, 1862, was fought in western Maryland on lands surrounding Antietam Creek. It ended Lee's first invasion of the North, postponed indefinitely England's threatened recognition of the Confederacy, and gave Lincoln the opportunity to issue his Emancipation Proclamation. It thus greatly affected the course of the Civil War.

With this general picture in mind, you are ready to plan the development of these subjects. Here an outline is most useful.

WATER

A. Introduction

1. Water cycle defined
2. The effects of water as it returns to the sea

B. The geological work of water

1. Surface water
2. Underground water
3. Ice and snow

C. Water and wildlife

1. Response and adaptations to normal and extremes of water supply
2. Plants in relation to soil, water supply, and erosion

D. Water and man

1. Water and scenery
2. Water and modern civilization

E. Conclusion

Water enhances park and recreation values and is requisite to man's economy. Conservation of watersheds, as exemplified by certain national parks, is the best way to assist nature to provide adequate water for all these purposes.

ANTIETAM

A. Introduction

1. Brief background of the Civil War

B. Lee's Maryland Campaign, 1862

1. Reasons for first Confederate invasion of Northern territory
2. Lee's route of march and its influence on Federal military strategy
3. Federal attempts to turn Lee's march

C. Battle of Antietam

1. Positions of Lee's and McClellan's forces, September 17
2. Action on the morning of September 17 to the north of Sharpsburg
3. Action on the afternoon of September 17 at Burnside's Bridge

D. Conclusion: results of the Battle of Antietam

1. Immediate military results
2. Political and diplomatic results

The outline gives your talk structure and a plan of development; it results in a story to tell in a smooth, even, and logical sequence, and bound together or given unity through the device of a plot and an objective. Without such a structure and plot and objective, a talk becomes merely the telling of a group of apparently unrelated facts.

A certain degree of organization is almost automatic in some talk subjects such as travelogs, or those in which an orderly sequence of events forms the basic structure. Wildflower talks, animal talks, and the like, appear to be the most difficult to organize. Frame your talk within a theme, such as lifezones, a walk along a trail, color in nature, the food of animals. A talk should be on a definite subject (and stick to that subject); cover the subject with satisfactory completeness, and relate its several parts to the central theme: in other words, it should have unity and cohesiveness.

The introduction. Your talk will have three parts: An introduction, a development section, and a conclusion. For a 30-minute talk you might allow about 5 minutes for introduction, and somewhat less for the conclusion. So far we have considered chiefly the development section. The introduction and the conclusion commonly are planned after the basic structure of the talk is completed.

The introduction should first focus audience attention on you and your subject. You don't have to startle an audience in order to attract attention, but you do need an initial statement which is in itself of commanding interest. A story, an experience, a problem stated, or a question raised—all relating to and introducing your subject and anticipating its development—are good devices for accomplishing this purpose.

Having attracted attention and interest, and having indicated the general field of your talk, next tell the audience what you are going to do with that subject. The following examples illustrate these functions of an introduction:

Have you ever wondered why this country is called Yellowstone? The story is an interesting one, and dates back to the time of the French voyageurs who preceded Lewis and Clark. The Yellowstone we know today was long considered a myth, and before that myth was shown to be fact, many exciting adventures occurred right here where we are now. Let's look a little into the history of Yellowstone and picture in our minds some of those exciting scenes in its discovery and exploration.

or

In Ecclesiastes we read "All the waters of the land run down to the sea yet the sea is not full, whence the waters come, thither they return again." Water still evaporates, falls to earth, and runs downhill, and in this cycle from land to sea to air and back to the land, it affects the landscape, the forests, the fields of wildflowers, and the animal inhabitants of the wilderness, as well as the welfare of even those of us who live far below the mountains. Let's talk about water.

The conclusion. Finish off your job. You are not a continuously playing tape that can be started and stopped with equal effect at any point. For most, the conclusion is the hardest part of any talk. You will need to *work* on it.

The conclusion may be a recapitulation—a brief summation of the points you have established. It should tie those facts together in such a way as to point to the purpose of your talk—your objective. It often refers back to your introductory statement. It may, in addition, with skill and awareness on the part of the speaker, assume an inspirational tone. The best opportunity to leave a lasting impression with your audience invariably occurs during the last minutes of the talk. Make these minutes count.

So the land of the Yellow Rock River of the French, its mysteries explored and explained by Colter, Washburn, and Hayden, became our first national park. Where once tourists were harassed by the Nez Perce, millions now peacefully witness the eruptions of Old Faithful, or contemplate the colorful beauty of the Yellowstone Canyon. Once a land of mystery and tall tales, now the Yellowstone is a national park, preserved by our Nation for the enjoyment and inspiration of all our people. Yes, these riches of nature are yours and mine. They are ours to enjoy to the fullest degree, and to pass on unimpaired so that people for all time may know and enjoy the Yellowstone.

The conclusion for a talk on the Battle of Antietam could summarize its significance in this way:

This was the war's bloodiest day. Had Robert E. Lee won a decisive victory it might have foreshadowed the final independence of the Confederacy. As it was, the battle gave President Abraham Lincoln a long-awaited opportunity. Five days after Antietam, he issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Now the purpose of the war broadened. Not only would Lincoln fight to preserve the Union, he would end slavery as well. The bloody Battle of Antietam provided the backdrop for a great moral victory.

The conclusion may summarize, make an appeal, or look to the future. It may use quotation, object lesson, or illustration. It should not go off on a sidetrack, but should end with dispatch.

REINFORCING THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR TALK

The working outline gives your talk structure and unity, but it is only the framework of ideas which you must decorate and embellish—the skeleton which you must clothe with living flesh and blood. Here are some devices and techniques to strengthen that structure and give your talk life and color and interest.

Connectives and transitionals. Perhaps the first thing to work out is the matter of tieing the structure together. For example, you connect phrases and sentences by the use of the words *and, so, also, but, therefore, for example, besides, in other words.* Similarly develop transitional devices to move from idea to idea, from paragraph to paragraph, or from one section of your outline to the next. *This suggests, in contrast to, by comparison, in the meantime, an even more interesting case, a parallel situation, as we move on to another place, at another time*—these are examples of transitionals that lead from one idea to another. Transitionals give your talk a continuous flow instead of a jerky, broken, and detached presentation. They help hold attention and help you remember what comes next.

Suspense and climax. Suspense is achieved by arranging facts in order of their increasing strength of interest or of importance, by posing questions to be answered, or by the development of an idea in such a manner as to point toward a goal that is not immediately apparent. Climax is achieved as you reveal the answer to the question you posed, or the goal or conclusion toward which your facts have been leading. Suspense and climax may characterize a single sentence, a paragraph, or, indeed, the entire talk.

Following are some examples for study:

Cornwallis was defeated because of blockade by sea, the loss of his defense works to the land forces of Washington, sickness among his troops, and dwindling supplies. (Decreasing emphasis.)

His troops were weakened by sickness, his ammunition and supplies were nearly exhausted. Toward the sea, the French held him under blockade, and with the capture of his defenses, Washington's army brought him under direct fire by land. Cornwallis was forced to surrender. (Suspense and climax.)

Here is a peculiar situation. In the middle of a dense forest, surrounded by hilly terrain, is this flat, treeless meadow. As far as we can tell, this meadow, sharply bounded by forest, has existed without change for hundreds of years. Why doesn't the forest advance upon it? (Suspense—a problem stated whose solution will develop through the body of the talk to a final explanation—the climax.)

Here is a cougar. Is it a varmint? Is it a ferocious beast, dangerous to man? Should it be exterminated, or are there good reasons why we should take steps to preserve this largest of our native cats? (Suspense through stimulated curiosity, to be satisfied by a climax in the form of an appeal for understanding of the cougar's status.)

Supplementary material. You will not hold your audience's interest with a series of statements of fact. Recognizing this, you devise ways to dramatize the facts and to relate them to the lives of your listeners. You do this through illustration and anecdotes, with examples that make the facts applicable to the visitor's own experience and home environment, and by putting him into the scene you are describing. Here are some examples:

What would you have done had you been General Lee and faced with the seige at Petersburg?

or

It's the same sort of feeling you get when, waking up in the night, all sorts of strange noises, multiplied in your imagination, convince you there's a prowler around. But now, every unfamiliar forest sound, every strange shadow suggests BEAR!

Here are other guides to help listeners understand what you are talking about:

1. Define or explain in lay language any unfamiliar terms or concepts you will use.
2. Relate factual data in support of ideas.
3. Use anecdotes and examples.
4. Make comparisons and contrasts.
5. Cite testimony and quotation.
6. Employ narration.
7. Use repetition for emphasis, varying your wording.
8. Make full use of visual aids and of three-dimensional objects which can be seen by the audience.

Words as tools. Your talk will be diluted and weakened by words poorly chosen or improperly used or used too profusely. Carefully selected words, used judiciously and economically, give vigor and color to your ideas. Chose words that say exactly what you mean.

Live verbs are more forceful:

General Grant *believed.* (Active)

General Grant *was* of the opinion. (Passive)

The flood *eroded* the mountainside. (Active)

The erosion of the hillside *was* the result of the flood. (Passive)

Specific words express more precise meanings:

They *climbed* the mountain . . . (or, better, did they *scale, rope up, walk up, scramble, struggle,* or *stroll?*)

Simple words. Sometimes you will need to say *with regard to, for the purpose of, with reference to, in the nature of, with view to,* or to use modifying adverbs such as *worked diligently, fed abundantly.* Habitual speech patterns of this kind, however, result in monotony and dilution. Most of the time the single unadorned word is more forceful and more precise: *About, for, like, if, to,* or *labored* or *feasted.*

Understandable words. Use the language of the layman rather than technical, professional, or abstract terms. For example, do not use *"piece"* for rifle or gun, or *"redoubt"* unless it is explained to be a type of fort, or *"cannon emplacement"* for cannon platform. In archeological talks, don't say *"Anasazi complex"* when you mean simply the life of the Pueblo Indians. Similarly, *"plant succession," "fault," "Sonoran life zone,"* or *"saprophyte"* may not be understood by your audience unless the discussion itself makes the meanings clear.

This does not mean that you must avoid these words; they are very useful. People like to add new words to their vocabularies, and you can help them do this, while at the same time giving more precise meaning to your statements. Just be sure that you make clear to your audience the meanings of the new words and new concepts.

Slides. "It's easy to give a slide talk." Perhaps it is true that a poor speaker can "get by" by using slides, but then it is the picture, not the talk, that commands attention and holds interest. Occasionally pictures can be shown for their intrinsic interest and aesthetic appeal, and in these cases, the commentary quite properly is secondary. But using pictures to support the spoken word is quite a different matter, and requires a considerable degree of skill and careful preparation. Illustrations can easily steal the show unless you overcome certain handicaps.

First, you probably will be giving part of your talk in the dark, and thus be deprived of the use of facial expressions and gestures. To compensate, rely upon voice inflection for emphasis and attention.

Secondly, after placing yourself in darkness, then you give the audience something attractive and colorful to look at. For most people, what they see takes precedence over what they hear. People can hear and see at the same time, but unless what they hear is well coordinated with what they see, the mind will concentrate on one or the other.

The temptation is great to use slides as a substitute for good organization and as a cover for poor preparation and delivery. Speakers who use this crutch give themselves away as they introduce each slide with "The next slide shows . . . ," "Here we see . . . ," or "This is a picture of . . ."

How do you avoid these pitfalls, and overcome these handicaps? The following techniques should be helpful:

Prepare thoroughly for your talk. Forget about slides for the moment. Plan a talk that will stand on its own feet. First write down an outline of your talk and know what you are going to say. Then select and arrange your illustrations. Choose slides to fit the talk, not words to explain a series of previously arranged slides. Then you will be prepared to come through with the talk, even if your projection equipment should fail.

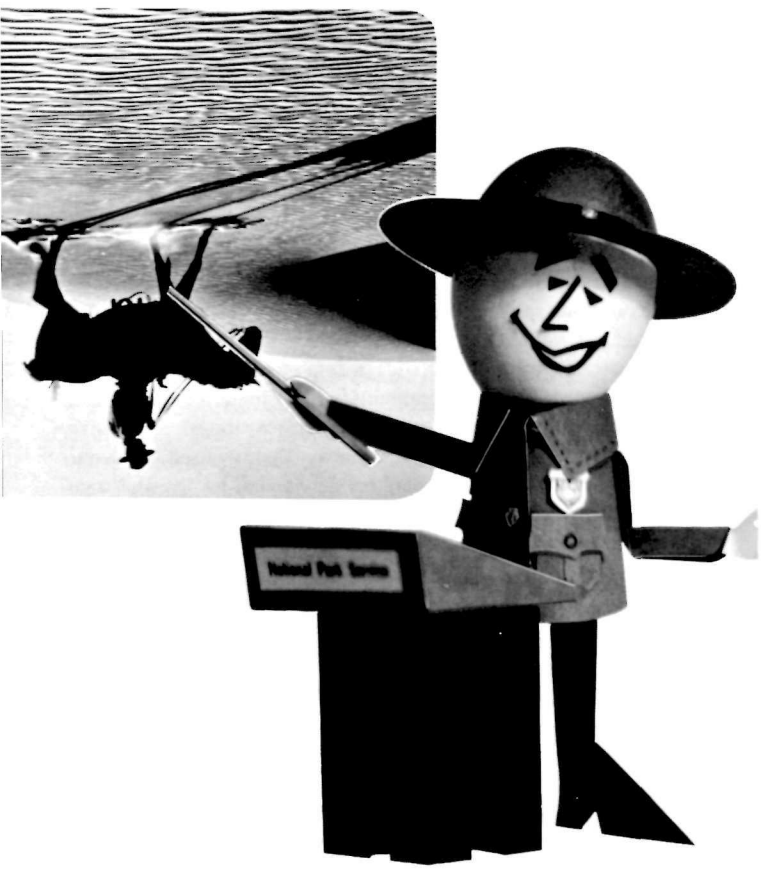
In the actual presentation, avoid all unnecessary reference to the slides. When you say "This scene shows," you are telling the audience to focus their attention on the screen. What you really want them to do is to listen to what you say. The effect you strive for is a well-organized, smooth-flowing talk which, at just the right time, is illustrated by a picture. Used in this way, pictures supplement the talk rather than compete with it.

Every change of scene on the screen is a momentary distraction from your spoken word. Try to make this work for rather than against you. One way is to make the transition to the idea illustrated by the next slide a few seconds before the picture is changed—in your commentary, anticipate the next scene. Recognize, too, that some of your pictures are so impressive that they immediately steal the show. Be prepared for your prize shot, and when it appears on the screen, let the audience concentrate attention on it. You may continue to talk, but defer important comment until attention swings back to you.

Vary slide time. This will prevent monotony and anticipation of slide change. Seldom should an illustration be on the screen much longer than 10 seconds. Otherwise your audience will start "searching" in the picture and your words of wisdom are lost. Of course, there are occasions when a slide being used to illustrate the explanation of a concept—say, a geological process—must be kept on screen for a longer period.

Expert projection is a basic requirement. An upside-down slide, an obvious spot or fingerprint, a jerky change, a delayed change, a slide changed too soon, a blank, fully lighted screen, an unusual noise—all of these are distractions that only serve to pull attention away from the picture, and more importantly, away from you.

Some thoughts about motion pictures. These programs are usually complete in themselves and need little except good projection to make them effective. Be sure the projector is clean; have the focusing accomplished and film positioned before show time; make sure the sound works and is at correct listening level; have spare projection bulbs and extra lamps on hand; know how to wrap a broken film on the take-up reel so the show can go on with minimum interruption; and be ready to fill in, if equipment or power should fail.



YOUR TALK

Appearance and actions. By the mere act of walking to the platform you focus all eyes upon yourself. An erect posture manifests self-confidence and inspires respect and confidence on the part of your audience. The same is true for overall appearance, which can be helpful in creating a favorable impression. By pausing a moment and looking at your audience with friendly interest, you can ensure quiet for your opening remarks. During this interval do two things—establish eye contact, and remind yourself that you are communicating with *people,* not talking to yourself. Make yourself aware that there is a real, live audience in front of you. Awareness of your audience will help you throughout your talk in maintaining good volume, tone, and quality of voice, and in giving naturalness to your gestures.

Don't prop yourself over a table, pace back and forth, fiddle with objects, or make meaningless motions. Limit your movement and gestures to times when they are called for by what you say and when they come naturally.

Finish your talk at its highest level, with its most important idea, pause, and then take your departure from the stand or otherwise let your audience know that the formal program is over. Don't apoligize, and avoid killing your conclusion by changing character, or uttering unessential comments—just close your talk and be done. (Old adage: Stand up; Speak up; Shut up!) Ending with an NPS arrowhead slide at the same time turning on the house lights often does the trick.

Use of your voice. We cannot deal extensively with the matter of training and speaking voice. However, the knowledge of some general principles and some common pitfalls will be useful. Voice volume and quality and articulation are important.

Volume, in general, is regulated and controlled from the chest and diaphragm. Breathe deeply, and gain force from the diaphragm. As an aid to establishing proper volume, select some person in the rear of your audience, and talk to him. You don't have to look at him all the time, but bring your eyes back to him periodically. Your awareness of that one person will unconsciously help maintain an adequate volume. Change of volume is a technique of emphasis, and a lowering of volume is often more emphatic than a loud voice. If available, use electrical amplification whenever you find that you must strain, even slightly, to be heard by all.

Voice quality is a product of overtones produced in mouth and head and added to sounds produced by the vocal cords. Without good overtones the voice may be thin, flat, colorless, harsh or nasal. Speaking from the diaphragm with clear and precise enunciation, speaking with an open mouth, and attempting to throw the voice toward the roof of the mouth are practices which aid in developing resonance, good tonal quality, and fullness of voice.

Good articulation is basic to good speaking. Volume alone will not carry your message if your words are spoken indistinctly. On the other hand, with good articulation, less volume is needed to carry the voice to the audience. A deadpan, motionless lip delivery will result in muffled, slurred, and indistinct tones. Good articulation is a result of active use of throat, tongue, teeth, and lips.

Your normal speaking key is generally best for you. Normal pitch places less strain on your voice, and provides the greatest latitude for expression. However, the excitement of appearing before an audience often raises the voice one or two tones above normal pitch. The very fact that the voice is too high prolongs stage fright, and the voice may never drop to its normal level. For most people, then, it is good practice at the beginning of a talk to deliberately lower the voice one or two tones. This may even place the voice below its most effective pitch, but it will soon move up to its natural level.

Speech mannerisms. Recordings of your voice probably will reveal certain mannerisms of speech. Some are bad, some neutral. Only *you* can correct them. The most common and objectionable is the habit of punctuating each pause with an "ah" or "uh." Keep your mind ahead of your voice and there will be fewer pauses and fewer occasions for "ahs." When you do pause, make it a silent interval. There is nothing wrong with a few of these. Pauses properly used are oral punctuation marks. Other mannerisms include habitual use of certain words or phrases, or of a set pattern of sentence structure. Use variety—synonyms for commonly used words, a varied sentence structure—to improve the cadence and swing of your talk.

A word about substandard speech. Your audience deserves and expects proper English. The use of colloquialisms and poor speech, such as "git" for get, "goin" for going, are intolerable. Good speaking ability is developed by practice and hard work—but it is rewarding.

Stage fright. Most speakers, including professionals, experience an excitement commonly called "stage fright." This is not fear of an audience and it will not render you speechless. It is a stimulation, an excitement, which results as the body fortifies itself in anticipation of an unaccustomed activity or a crisis. This stimulation can be an advantage to you. It can make your mind more alert, and add life and vigor to your delivery. Stage fright also may reflect fear of yourself, a feeling of inadequacy; complete preparation is the obvious antidote. Confidence and control come with experience, but in the meantime it is helpful to (1) firmly fix in mind your introductory statement, (2) pause, and gain eye contact with the audience before you start, (3) think about your subject, not about yourself, and (4) use a memorized outline.

During the course of a talk, sometimes your mind goes completely blank. Again, a brief pause while you collect your thoughts is not objectionable. If the next word doesn't come, step forward and repeat the last point you made, and go on from there. As a last resort, simply acknowledge that the next point has slipped your mind for the moment, and pick up your talk at the next point in your outline. If you talk from a memorized sequence of ideas, a memorized outline, rather than from a memorized speech, you can't get lost for long in any place in your talk.

Reading aloud is helpful in improving the quality of the voice and also aids in avoiding the kind of stage fright that may occur when, for the first time, you become conscious of the sound of your own voice. Tape recordings should be made periodically to detect faults and improve quality.

USING FEEDBACK

Your first National Park Service talk before an audience probably will leave room for considerable improvement, especially if you have had little experience in public speaking.

Right after that talk is the time to start thinking about how to strengthen it. Did parts of the talk seem to leave you dangling or otherwise fail to come off smoothly? Did you forget an important point? Were there moments when you sensed that the audience wasn't quite with you? How about sections that may have evoked unusual audience interest—could you expand here next time? Jot down such ideas while they are fresh in mind.

To help improve your technique, you will want to know the reaction of others to your talk. Several sources of feedback are available; make use of all of them.

1. From the audience. Observing facial expressions during your talk can give you a good idea of how your words are coming across. The inevitable questions put to you in an informal way afterward also will give you clues as to whether you were on target. On rare occasions your listeners will volunteer helpful criticism. This is most likely to happen when you chat with one of them the next day at the information desk or elsewhere in the park. There is nothing wrong with asking for such feedback from someone with whom you have established informal rapport.

2. From your collegues. Ask your co-workers to attend and criticize your talks. They, too, can be alert for audience reaction, usually from the vantage point of the last row or two.

3. From your boss. Sooner or later, usually not the first talk you give, your supervisor or other member of the park staff will audit your talk. Remember that his purpose is to help you, not to find fault. Take his suggestions in the spirit of welcoming self-improvement.

4. From the tape recorder. Tape one of your regular talks before an audience soon after you have started giving them, say your second or third talk. Audience situation tapes are especially useful in detecting unsuspected habitual use of words and phrases or other speech mannerisms.

A LAST WORD

It is said that rules are made to be broken. Certainly many of the procedures outlined here may be violated without resulting in failure. There is still a very important place reserved for individual expression and originality. By all means experiment, develop new techniques, or devise methods of presentation that best reflect your own abilities and personality and that fit the local situation. Before breaking the rules, however, you should know the rules, and in judging performance be sure of the criteria for the measurement of success.

Nor will this, or any other discussion of speaking in itself, give you ability as a speaker. Speaking is a skill; it is capable of improvement, and, like golf or singing, it will decline through lack of exercise. There is no way to achieve proficiency except through practice.

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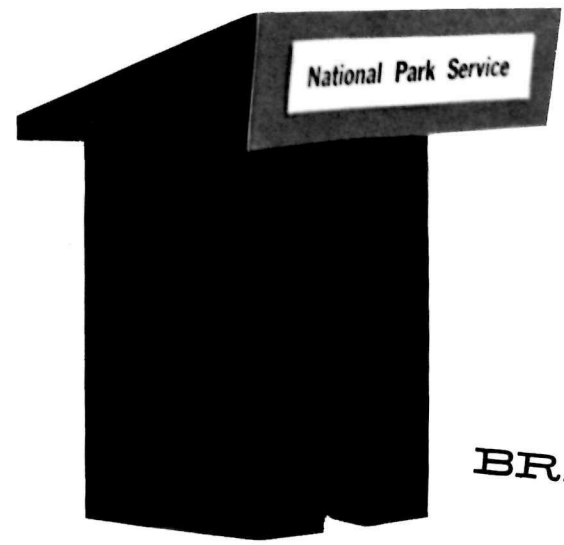

TALK CHECKLIST

I. Preparation

Did I
- ☐ select slides that illustrate points clearly?
- ☐ run through slides, making sure they were clean and right side up?
- ☐ review my written outline before the talk?
- ☐ make sure equipment was ready to go?

II. Program time

Did I
- ☐ start off with a welcome?
- ☐ break the ice with an item of current interest about the park?
- ☐ work in somewhere the name of my organization?
- ☐ briefly state what the program would cover in my introduction?
- ☐ avoid talking down to the audience?
- ☐ explain technical terms at the time they were used?
- ☐ avoid frequent, direct reference to slides—"this is," "here we have," etc.?
- ☐ maintain eye contact with audience?
- ☐ let my voice reflect enthusiasm, using inflection, varied pace?
- ☐ beware of speech mannerism and distracting body movements?
- ☐ end with a conclusion, friendly, but a definite cut-off?

III. Self Evaluation

Was
- ☐ the talk well-organized, with one subject flowing smoothly into the next?
- ☐ audience interest held throughout?

Did
- ☐ the audience get any new ideas?

Were
- ☐ favorable attitudes toward the area, the Service, my subject developed?

Am I
- ☐ taking advantage of feedback to improve future talks?

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