

Understanding the Physicality of Extemp

While the content of extemp speeches relies predominantly on analysis there is an expectation for extemporaneous speakers to be engaging and entertaining in their delivery. To put it simply, nobody wants to watch a boring seven minute speech regardless of how insightful the analysis may be.

Smile

As silly as it may initially sound, smiling while delivering a speech can affect the overall perception of a performer. Creating a likeable and accessible persona will help a speaker connect with her audience. Smiling also demonstrates confidence to the judge. Moreover, many studies have indicated that individuals are more likely to believe people who smile. While referencing sources can help validate your analysis, conveying a warm and engaging presence can also help a speaker to develop trust with his audience.

Gestures

Hand gestures can also aid a speaker in creating a more demonstrative and dynamic delivery. Many beginning performers struggle with finding the balance between too few and too many gestures. Some speakers find themselves using the same gesture too often while others may feel awkward when using gestures. Another common problem among speakers is feeling uncomfortable with simply resting their hands at their side while delivering.

Cultivating an effective use of gestures requires practice and feedback from teammates and coaches. Gestures should have purpose and complement your verbal delivery instead of distracting from it.

Walking

While pacing can be distracting, selective use of walking and movement can make the delivery more dynamic while also providing a boost of energy to the speaker. Speakers should consider the following when walking during a performance:

1. Walk with purpose by using the movement to highlight key transitions instead of randomly walking throughout the speech.
2. Avoid walks or movements that are distracting. Instead of journeying from one end of the room to the other, keep your transition walk to a maximum of three steps.

3. Avoid long strides, instead allowing for casual but measured steps.
4. The direction of your walking should always move you slightly closer to your audience. If space is limited you may have to use strictly lateral movements. However, speakers should avoid stepping backwards and/or walking away from the audience.

The diagram below depicts a typical approach to using transitional walks.

