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Online Public Speaking: Tips on Staying Engaging

Most of your online public speaking projects will likely involve recording your speech and posting it to a discussion board for peers to see/comment on and for your professor to grade. Without the usual presence of a live audience, one of the main challenges you may face online is *keeping your speech engaging*. These tips will help you captivate your audience:

Tip #1. Practice your speech ahead of time—especially to others. By practicing your speech a few times, you'll familiarize yourself with the content so you can focus more on how you deliver your speech when it comes time to press record. In addition, practicing in front of family or roommates might help you see if you're consistently engaging your audience. Pay attention to the expressions/reactions of your audience while practicing the speech and ask for feedback.

Tip #2: Rehearse with a stopwatch running. When giving a speech to a camera, you might speak too quickly or slowly. Since your assignments will likely have a minimum and maximum length requirement, finding the right pace to deliver your speech will be key. Practice a few times with a stopwatch; afterward, check your time and adjust the pace of your speech accordingly.

Tip #3. Find ways to stay dynamic—particularly during longer speeches. Watching a recorded speech doesn't necessarily convey as lively an atmosphere of watching in-person. To keep your speech interesting, *try varying your tone, pace, facial expressions, and gestures*. To avoid delivering a monotone speech, consider the context of what you're saying and how you think it should be delivered. Are you discussing something serious? Slow down; use a warning or somber tone. Are you discussing something positive? Try a joyful or hopeful tone while emphasizing key words or phrases that highlight your message. Similarly, see if you can match your facial expressions to the context of your speech. You might look passionate during a call to action or concerned while delivering a dire statistic. And utilize gestures when you can—they help add emphasis, provide visual context for information, and add an element of movement to your video. *

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Tip #4: Memorize strategically. You usually won't be required to memorize your speech, but you may find it helpful to know your introduction, concluding statement, and any other key facts or lines word-for-word to help you come across as prepared and convincing as possible. For the rest of your speech, a notecard or reference sheet can help you to stick to your outline and hit all of your sub-points. If you don't want to be looking down during your speech, place or tape your notecard/reference sheet at eye level so when you refer to your points, you maintain eye contact with your viewers.

Tip #5: Treat your video as if the stakes were as high as in-person. You may not experience the nerves that sometimes accompany giving a live speech, but don't let that stop you from putting as much effort and professionalism into your speeches as you would in-person. If it helps, imagine you're participating in a livestream on your topic. You still have an audience to keep engaged, even if they're not in the room with you. Try to keep your video distraction-free (ex: quiet setting, clear background, good lighting and camera position), and utilize the tips above to deliver a speech that captivates your audience as much as you'd want to in-person.

*For more attention-grabbing tips for videos, check out:
https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/12/the-linguistics-of-youtube-voice/418962/

Note: Many of these tips come from Dr. Ishak during his Spring 2020 Public Speaking course!