



Understanding Vocal Variety

Level 3 Project



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Understanding Vocal Variety

About Understanding Vocal Variety

Your greatest tool as a speaker is your voice. The best public speakers recognize when to raise or lower their voices, how to use silence to add impact, and the value of varying their pace as they present to an audience.

In this project, you will learn to recognize the impact of vocal variety and identify changes in pitch, tone, volume, and pace when listening to a speaker. You will learn when and how to effectively adjust pitch, tone, volume, and pace to emphasize different sections of a speech and use vocal variety to enhance a presentation. You will demonstrate knowledge of personal vocal variety patterns, adjust them to meet the needs of audience members, and improve the quality of a speech.

Resources

The following is a list of resources available in your digital project on Base Camp. Some of these resources, such as evaluations, are also available on the Resources section on Base Camp.

Project Checklist

Speech Profile

Evaluation Resources

Introduction and Assignment

Introduction

With time and practice, every Toastmaster can become skilled at using their voice to move an audience.

Your Assignment

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to practice using vocal variety to enhance a speech.

Overview: Learn or review the importance of vocal variety. Use the exercises in this project to improve your vocal variety skills. Then present a 5- to 7-minute speech on any topic at a club meeting. The primary focus of the evaluation is your vocal variety.

Your speech can be persuasive, humorous, informational, or crafted in any style that appeals to you and supports your speech content.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



Video: Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



Resource: Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.



Weblink: Return to your digital project when you see this icon to link to a website or Base Camp location.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the [Project Checklist](#).

Learning in Understanding Vocal Variety

Assess and Reflect



To assess and track your knowledge, complete the activity below by listing what you already know and what you wonder about the topic today. Add up to five items to each list. After you complete your project, you will have an opportunity to review your answers and add what you have learned.

Know

For example: I know how to identify changes in pitch, tone, volume, and pace when listening to a speaker.

Wonder

For example: I wonder how to use vocal variety to enhance a speech.

Competencies

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Recognize the impact of vocal variety on audience members' reception of a presentation.
- Identify changes in pitch, tone, volume, and pace when listening to a speaker.
- Effectively adjust pitch, tone, volume, and pace to emphasize different sections of a speech.
- Use vocal variety to enhance a speech.
- Demonstrate knowledge of personal vocal patterns.
- Adjust vocal patterns to meet the needs of audience members and improve the quality of a speech.

Vocal Variety

An outstanding public speaker is very engaging. These people make you forget where you are and what you were thinking before they took the stage. They are intriguing, entertaining, interesting, and in the end, you gain from what they shared with you, even if it is just a funny story. Aside from a well-crafted speech, compelling speakers take full advantage of their voices.

Vocal variety is more than sound or quality. It is how a speaker uses silence and pace to build tension or add impact. Each presenter has a unique way of varying their voice. The variations are components of vocal variety.

Specifically, vocal variety is made up of pitch, tone, volume, and pace. When you present a speech, effective use of vocal variety is essential to connect you with audience members and make every word impactful.

Through evaluation of your emotions, you can begin managing your emotions.

Pitch, Tone, Volume, and Pace

Pitch

The pitch of your voice is how high or low it sounds. Though every speaker has a range of pitches when they speak, some tend to default to a low, deep voice with a booming pitch while others tend toward a high voice with a gentle or shrill quality.

While there is no absolute correct pitch for public speaking, it can be helpful to extend your pitch. This is particularly important for individuals with a narrow range who may sound monotonous. Monotonous means the pitch of a voice is always the same. Other speakers have a wide range in pitch.

Speak Aloud

Select any group of words to say aloud. You may choose to practice an upcoming speech, select a poem, or read the words on this screen.

Start Comfortably

Read or say the words at your most comfortable pitch, but keep the pitch the same. This should sound like you are playing one note on a musical instrument.

Change Pitch

After 30 seconds to a minute, change your pitch. You may choose a higher or lower pitch, whichever appeals to you. Read or say the same selection at this pitch for 30 seconds to a minute.

Repeat

Do the exercise several times to move up and down your vocal range (all of the different pitches at which you are comfortable speaking).

Broaden Range

Extend your range by completing this exercise and reaching higher and lower than you normally would. The broader your range, the easier it will be for you to vary your voice as you speak.

Tone

Your tone is the emotion behind the sound of your voice. It is the quality that tells an audience how you feel about the words you are saying. Your tone will tell the audience when you are happy, sad, excited, or any number of emotions you can have about the material you are conveying.

Communicate with tone. Use the following exercise to practice speaking using different tones.

- Select any short sentence, such as, “My grandmother arrives on Friday.”
- Say the sentence in a neutral tone.
- Say the same sentence as if you are very excited.
- Say it again as if you are afraid.
- Repeat the sentence several times using different tones. Try joyful, sad, secretive, and terrified.
- Practice in front of a mirror or video record yourself to hear and see the impact of your tone. Practice tone by saying the sentence in many different ways.

Volume

When you speak, your volume affects many things. First and foremost, your volume impacts your ability to be heard. When your voice is too quiet for the room or setting, your audience will struggle to hear you. If you tend to speak in a loud, booming voice, audience members may be too distracted to listen to the content of your speech.

Emphasis

Your volume can be a tool used to emphasize words or sections of your speech. Shouting in the middle of a speech with an otherwise consistent volume can have an impact—a whisper may be even more powerful.

Achieving the best volume level for each speech takes practice and feedback. Outstanding public speakers practice volume levels to make sure they can be heard and to make effective use of the loudness or softness of their voice.

Practice

Use the following exercise to practice speaking using different volume levels.

- Work with a partner.
- Stand at one end of a room and have your partner stand at the other.
- Begin speaking (say anything you choose).
- Keep your voice quiet at the beginning and slowly increase in volume.
- When your partner can hear you, they should raise their hand.
- Speak at that volume for a few seconds and begin lowering your voice.
- Your partner will drop their hand when they can no longer hear you.

Pace

A speaker's pace is the speed at which they speak. Many speakers, when they begin their Toastmasters journey, speak too fast or too slow. A speaker whose pace is too fast is difficult to understand. Speakers who tend to speak at a slow or plodding pace often lose audience members' interest in their speech.

For many people the pace at which they speak is affected by nervousness. When speaking in front of an audience causes you to feel anxious or uncomfortable, it may help to focus on your pace.

Once speakers are able to keep their pace from being affected by anxiety, it can become another powerful tool of expression. Like the other forms of vocal variety, a speaker's pace can create or enhance emotion in audience members and add to the overall quality of a presentation.

Adjust Your Pace

Use the following exercise to practice adjusting the pace of your speech.

Select a Piece of Writing

You may choose a children's book, a newspaper, or a magazine article. It may be effective for you to use a speech that you have presented in the past or one that is upcoming.

Review

Take a few minutes to read and familiarize yourself with the material.

Say it Aloud

Read the text aloud at a comfortable volume.

Add Power and Interest

After you have read it aloud once, identify sections that could be more powerful or effective at a different pace. For example, identify sections to read with a slower pace. Mark sections to read faster.

Practice

Read the same selection several times, speeding up your speech and slowing it down. Pay close attention to the effect of your pace. If possible, complete this exercise with a partner or create a video recording. You will benefit from feedback on the impact of changes in your pace.

Take a Breath

When people are nervous or worried, their breathing can become shallow. This can present a serious problem for people who are about to present a speech to an audience. When speakers are winded or breathless from nerves they lose volume, have a higher pitch, and are often difficult to understand.

Making time to take a few deep breaths before you begin a speech will help in two ways. The first, and probably most important, is that deep breaths can lower anxiety and help a speaker relax. The second is that a speaker who has plenty of air will have better control of their voice.

A deep breath that fills your lungs will move your stomach and not raise your shoulders. To practice taking deep breaths:

Stand or lie down.

Place your hands on your stomach.

Relax your shoulders.

Take a deep breath. Make sure your shoulders stay level and feel your stomach move out as you inhale.

Exhale slowly. Repeat the exercise any time.

You can use this exercise at any time to help you relax before a speech. Practicing will help you understand how your body is affected when it is well-oxygenated.

Speak aloud after taking several deep breaths. Notice how your voice sounds and feels when you have plenty of air. Remember the feeling to help you the next time you have a presentation.



Watch a video on Base Camp to learn more.

Review and Apply

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- In what ways can you use vocal variety to express emotion?
- Describe how tone can be used to change the meaning of a sentence.
- Why is it important to consider your volume when you speak?
- How can pacing enhance your message?
- How does the pitch of your voice affect your speech?
- In what ways can breathing exercises help you be a better public speaker?

Complete Your Assignment



Project Checklist

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report. First, review your assignment.

This project includes:

- A 5- to 7-minute speech

The following list includes tasks for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You can use the checklist here or complete the digital version in your project on Base Camp.

Review the Speech Profile resource.

Select any topic of your choosing.

Schedule your speech with the Vice President Education.

Write your speech.

Rehearse your speech.

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

Evaluation Criteria



Review the criteria for the evaluation in this project. Your evaluator will use the following scale:

Loudness or Volume

Difficult to hear	Quiet	Good projection	Loud	Overly loud
Flat, monotone	Little intonation	Vibrant and dynamic	Some overly expressive moments	Too expressive throughout

Pitch

Too high	Higher than comfortable	Successfully varied	Lower than comfortable	Too low
Roaring	Booming at times	Full bodied	Piercing at times	Shrill

Voice Quality

Nasal	Whiny at times	Open and clear	Indistinct at times	Breathy
Lifeless	Somewhat dull	Engaging	Mildly overpowering	Overly enthusiastic

Articulation

Mumbling	Somewhat muttered	Clear articulation	Staccato speech	Over enunciated
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Long, ineffective pauses	Too many pauses	Effective use of pauses	Too few pauses	No pauses
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Timing or Rate

Halting and arrhythmic	Slow at times	Fluent, consistent	Overly fast at times	Fast, racing
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Unvaried, droning	Mild speed changes	Engaging variation	Jarring speed changes	Uncontrolled, disorienting
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Hesitant	Some hesitations	Deliberate	Some parts too fast	Frantic
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Vocal Variety

Emotionless	Didn't convey emotion at times	Conveys emotion well throughout	Inconsistent emotion at times	Exaggerated emotions throughout
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Unfriendly	Disconnected from audience at times	Genial	Overly engaged with audience at times	Forward, meddlesome
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Disconnected, disinterested	Mildly disinterested	Calm, comfortable	Stressed, uncomfortable	Strained, highly stressed
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Complete Your Project



Once you have delivered your speech and received your evaluation, take a minute to review what you recorded under “Know” and “Wonder” in the Assess and Reflect section at the start of this project. Then add what you have learned while working through this project. Add up to five items.

Learned

For example: I learned how to adjust pitch, tone, volume, and pace to emphasize different sections of a speech.

Before You Move On

Review Your Learning

Review all the material in this project.

Deliver Your Webinar or Online Meeting

Plan, practice, and deliver your webinar or online meeting.

Receive Your Evaluation

Receive your evaluation and complete any other tasks required by your club.

Assess and Reflect

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

Congratulations!

If you have completed every task, CONGRATULATIONS! You have completed your Understanding Vocal Variety project and you are ready to move on to your next project.



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