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## "Unaccustomed as..."

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)

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MAR 7 1967



**“Unaccustomed as...”**

***American Institute of  
Certified Public Accountants  
666 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10019***

Some years ago the public relations practitioner who is now consultant to the Institute prepared a booklet for Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) titled "Mr. Chairman...Distinguished Guests..." It was about public speaking, particularly about *reading* a speech. Some CPAs who saw the booklet suggested that it might be useful to members of the profession so, with the permission of Standard Oil Company (New Jersey), it has been reprinted by the Institute, with slight revisions.

*Illustrations by Herbert W. Kearsse, Jr.*



## “Unaccustomed as...”

Many accountants are called on at some time or another to make a speech. They may be asked to address business forums, civic clubs, or groups of students.

Whatever the occasion, the speaker wants to put across his ideas in a clear way. He hopes to make a good impression on his audience, or, at least, not to make the experience painful for them.

This booklet is intended to offer suggestions on one way of delivering a speech—by reading.

People who write and talk on the subject of public speaking do not, generally, recommend that speeches be read. They point out that, in most cases, a speech which is *not* read gives a greater impression of naturalness and establishes more direct contact with the audience than a speech delivered from a script.

Ability to speak impromptu, without any preparation at all, or to speak merely from notes or an outline varies among individuals. But, like other abilities, it can be developed by training and practice. It is unquestionably a valuable talent to have.

## *The advantages of reading*

The most suitable method for delivering a speech is often indicated by circumstances. For example, it might be pretentious to read a prepared script before a small group or even before a large but relatively informal meeting.

On the other hand, it is usually desirable that policy speeches or other important addresses be read so that a manuscript is available for later reference in case of misquotation or misunderstanding.

Furthermore, a complete text before you on a lectern is reassuring. You know that if you lose the thread of your thought—if your mind suddenly goes blank, as happens to all of us at times—you're not going to be left with mouth open, eyes glazed, and panic growing in your chest.

A speaker who reads a speech is less likely to ramble than one who speaks without text. He will not "er" and "ah" while he searches for a word or casts about in his mind for the next point. His talk will probably be better organized. Assuming that his text has been well written, he will not get involved in those sentences which start out all right, trip on a phrase, get tangled in a welter of clauses, and end in mid-air. A speech that is read can be clocked in advance, so the speaker can be sure not to exceed the time allotted him.

## *Getting the most from reading*

A speech which is read need not *sound* read. With a little practice, a person can read with expression. A good actor, delivering the lines of a play, is not speaking words that have just come into his mind at that moment. In fact, the words aren't even his own. Yet



the actor makes them sound spontaneous, fresh, and alive.

A speech which is read should be delivered in a similar manner. The speaker can vary the tone of his voice and give it the rhythms and stresses of normal speech. If he has read the text through several times, he will probably have committed large parts of it to memory unconsciously and will have only to glance at the first few words of a paragraph to deliver the whole passage. So he does not have to keep his head bent down and his eyes fastened to the page, but can look into the faces of his listeners most of the time he is speaking.

It is a good idea consciously to memorize the opening sentences of a written speech and to deliver them without looking at the paper. Better still, get the whole first page by heart. It's somewhat ridiculous for a speaker to open his remarks with: "It's a



great pleasure to see all of you here this evening," when his eyes are glued to the paper before him and the audience knows he doesn't see them at all. If a speaker memorizes the first page of his speech, he stands a better chance of making a good impression at the outset; he can then slide into reading, having established a favorable contact with his listeners.

### ***Remember that you're talking***

The unsatisfactory character of many a speech that is read could be avoided in the drafting. In preparing a speech for reading, remember that spoken language differs from written language. When ideas are expressed in writing, a reader can retrace—if the sense of one passage depends on a preceding one, and the reader misses the connection the first time, he can go back and reread. A listener to a speech cannot do this.

So, while in straight writing economy of style is a virtue, in material prepared for oral delivery it is often desirable to pad out with "carrier" phrases and sentences. These give the listener time to digest one point before you proceed to the next. They serve also to "flag" a point. For example, you might say: "One thing we must always remember is..." and then hit the point. The introductory clause alerts the listener that a big point is coming up.

Most people use somewhat different vocabularies in writing than in conversation. The use of "literary" words which give esthetic qualities and precision to a piece of writing may sound unnatural and distract attention in a speech. Therefore, in writing a speech, *think* it as though you were talking.

When finished, read it *aloud* and consider whether the expressions are those you would use in normal conversation.

### ***Repetition makes the point***

To a greater extent in a speech than in written material, it is frequently effective to say the same thing more than once, in a different fashion each time. In that way, members of the audience whose minds were idling when you made the point the first time may get it the next time around. In many cases it is desirable to list for your audience, at the outset, the three or four points you intend to make in your speech, and then to summarize them toward the close. A CPA who is a veteran public speaker notes that a common fault of many speeches delivered by accountants is that they fail to be simple and practical. A CPA speaker who tries to be technically perfect, he says, often alienates his audience because they are not interested in a lot of detail.

If your subject is one which the audience is likely to have some difficulty understanding, it is a good idea to use many examples. After explaining something in abstract or general terms, describe a concrete case. If the things you are talking about are outside the experience of your audience, use analogies — draw parallels with things that are within the audience's experience. Homely, colorful similes will help the listeners grasp your meaning and help keep their interest alive. Avoid trying to cram everything that is known on your topic into one speech. Emphasize one or two aspects and drive home the significant points.

Personal references do much to liven up a speech. Generally speaking, people are more

interested in hearing about other people than in hearing about things or ideas. A number of CPAs who are active in public speaking remark that telling an incident in which they or their firm was *wrong* has been effective in drawing the audience closer. Everyone makes errors and usually people appreciate one who admits it.

### ***Type can lend a hand***

The reading of a speech can be helped by the way the typescript is prepared.

A typewriter with the largest type available should be used, so you will not have to bend your head down to the page to read it. The script should be double- or triple-spaced. Margins should be fairly wide, because the eye has difficulty sweeping across a long line of type.

Avoid ending a line with the hyphen of a broken word.

Every page should end in a full sentence so that you don't read like this: "Every page should" (pause for turning page) "end in a full sentence." It's probably better still to have every page end with a full paragraph, so that the pause for turning a page will coincide naturally with a pause to introduce a new thought. In accomplishing such a division of the typed material, it is unimportant, of course, that some pages will contain fewer lines than others.

It is less distracting to an audience if you *slide* a page to the side of the lectern after you have finished reading it than if you *turn* the page.

Some people make a practice of reading a few passages from a prepared draft, then interpolating some ad lib remarks, then returning to reading, and so on. But such delivery

is likely to be unsatisfactory from the audience's standpoint—the transition from reading to ad libbing is usually so marked that the change can be distracting.

This does not mean that a text must necessarily be read word-for-word. It does mean, however, that, if a text is used, it should be followed fairly closely. Also, the manner of delivery should be consistent and without abrupt breaks between reading and ad libbing. (An exception would be the reading of a quotation when a definite break will indicate that the speaker is delivering someone else's words rather than his own.)



### ***Be familiar with your speech***

It is important to *rehearse* a speech. Whenever you have heard an address that struck you as exceptionally smooth and effective, you can assume that the speaker has made the same talk a number of times before. Regardless of how spontaneous the words may have sounded and how unstudied the gestures may have seemed, every phrase and

movement were no doubt polished by practice. If you have ever had occasion to give the same speech several times yourself, you must have found it went more easily with each successive delivery.

A good speech can give a lot of mileage. Once the word gets around that an interesting talk was given at a certain function, program chairmen for other affairs are likely to invite the same speaker.

If possible, always visit ahead of time the place where you are going to speak so you can familiarize yourself with the surroundings—the platform, lighting, the availability of a lectern, etc. If possible, check the loud-speaker system. If this cannot be done, don't hesitate to check it at speech time—even asking whether those in the rear can hear you.

A great aid to a speaker is a ready sense of humor. But use of humor requires practice and discretion. Experience will tell you whether your style of humor is an asset or not. One CPA notes that he tries to relate a humorous story near the beginning of the talk and near the conclusion. He saves his best one for the finale so he can “leave them laughing” as he steps from the microphone.

### *Use your voice to full effect*

A principal fault with most speeches that are read—as well as many given without text—is that they are delivered from beginning to end without change of tempo, tone, or volume. The speaker may talk in a low, steady-paced voice, in which case the effect is like that of a hypnotist saying softly to his subject: “Go to sleep—go to sleep.” Or the speaker may talk, especially if he is nervous, in an unrelieved high-pitched voice. The ef-

fect of this on an audience is auditory fatigue. In either case, it is as though a musical composition were played throughout by a single instrument, at unvarying volume, and with identical time-value given each note. With such rendition, even the finest of works would be dull.

The human voice is capable of great variation, and a person reading a speech should



take advantage of this fact. If you have been speaking at moderate volume, wake up the members of the audience who are feeling the effects of a heavy lunch by suddenly getting very loud. On the other hand, if you've been going on for a minute or two at rather loud volume, read the next paragraph (where it is appropriate to the thought, of course) *pianissimo*. That will probably wake up the audience as effectively as a shout.

If you have been rattling along at a clip of 200 words per minute, slow down to emphasize a point and give the audience a chance to consider each word. If your voice tends to

rise in pitch when delivering speeches—which is likely to happen as a result of tension—deliberately drop to a lower range.

Don't hesitate to indulge in fairly long pauses—a few moments of complete silence. This stirs listeners' attention, even if only by making them wonder whether you are able to go on!

Notes to yourself—written at the head or margins of the sheets of typescript—can be reminders. Pencil on the side of the page, "Watch pace." "Slow — with emphasis." "Raise voice—hit this passage hard." "Voice strained? Drop pitch."

Reading a speech into a tape-recorder and then listening to the playback is a most helpful form of practice. A person hears his own voice chiefly by the vibrations transmitted to his auditory nerves through the bones of his head. His voice, therefore, sounds different to him than it does to people who hear it by vibrations through the air. Use of a tape-recorder will enable you to hear yourself as others hear you. Listening to the playback, you will quickly perceive faults in delivery: the trailing off into inaudibility at the end of sentences, the slurring of words, hard-to-understand word combinations, or the too rapid pace. If you don't have a tape-recorder, it is still a very good idea to read the speech several times aloud in the privacy of your home or office.

### *Gestures add punch, too*

Just as changes of voice will help to hold audience attention, so will changes of posture and expression. The man who takes a grip on each side of a lectern and then reads his speech with a dead-pan expression and without ever moving anything but his jaw

seems more like a machine than a human being. If you are speaking into a microphone, your range of motion is, of course, restricted; you must be careful that your movements do not bring your lips up to an inch or two from the mike one moment and a couple of feet away the next. But even with such limitations, considerable movement is possible. One CPA who has success with public speaking, recommends occasionally leaning closer to the audience as if confiding in or speaking individually to each person.

Don't be afraid to gesture. And *vary* the gestures.

It goes without saying that, while deliberate, appropriate gestures are good; fidgety, unconscious ones can be bad. Consider, for instance, the fellow who methodically rocks back and forth on his heels or goes into a rhythmical lateral sway; or the one who keeps rattling the coins in his pocket. Such things detract from even a good speech.

With gestures, as with voice changes, marginal cues to yourself, written on the reading script, can be helpful reminders.

### *Above all be yourself*

Perhaps the most important advice that can be given about speaking is to be yourself—to follow your individual style and your own taste. Discover the aids that you feel most comfortable with. If you find it helpful to have a script typed on sheets 5½" x 8½" instead of the usual 8½" x 11", or to rubbercement the sheets to stiff backing, do so. All that has been offered above is merely by way of suggestion. You may find better methods for making your own talks effective.

Finally, a word about subject matter. Often a program chairman invites a CPA to a



talk on taxes or penny-saving tips for the home because he thinks these are the only areas the guests will want to talk about. But an accountant who can discourse on a wide range of business and financial topics should so inform his host. Choosing some subject other than the expected one is likely to result in a talk more interesting to the audience and more helpful to the public image of the CPA.



