

## MODULE 5 - TECHNIQUES OF ORATORY

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, oratory (the art of speaking in public) was taught as a mainstream subject. Anyone who wished to consider themselves educated or a professional person would study the subject.

This was not only because newspapers were the only form of mass communication, and therefore the spoken word was far more important, but also because oratory was seen as a way of teaching someone to organise their thoughts in a logical way. Oratory was not considered to be a vague and woolly subject where someone talked for a set period on a topic of their choice. Rather, it was considered a strict discipline where certain rules had to be learned and applied. The result was that good and confident public speaking was considered normal and excellent public speaking was not that remarkable. Many of the best parliamentary speakers of the last few centuries studied oratory at school or at college.

If there is one point you should notice out of the last two paragraphs, it is that good public speaking can be *learned*. If you doubt this, take the example of President John F Kennedy. He was a dreadful public speaker in his early days. His delivery was wooden, he was plainly uncomfortable speaking in public, he spoke too fast and many of his speeches were not as good as they should be.

Later in his career, however, he was a mesmerising public speaker.

He was not hit by a bolt of lightning, or underwent a Road to Damascus conversion. He knew he needed to improve, so he learned. Some say it was the actress Marilyn Monroe who taught him. That is the point. He was taught. This skill can be learned.

What we are going to show you in this section is some of the tricks which can turn an uninspired talk into one which will interest the listeners, perhaps make them laugh a little, but certainly listen and absorb what you have to say.

It will also have an effect on you. You are not going to be confident when you stand up to speak if you know your talk is, well, pretty average. If, however, you have confidence in what you are about to say and how you are going to say it, your overall confidence levels will rise and therefore your presentation will improve.

All of these tricks can be incorporated beforehand: you don't have to try and do anything original while standing on your feet in front of your audience. Work out and write down all these "spontaneous" remarks when you are mapping out your speech at home.

So, remember. These are tricks, nothing more, which you are now about to learn.

Many of them are based in some way or another on comparisons. What you are doing when using comparisons is to engage the ear and the brain, to make your words more

interesting than if you just said what you meant in a bald and boring form. I think you'd agree that the idea of using comparisons is not that frightening.

Let's now look at some of these tricks. The first is

### **Antithesis**

Antithesis means *opposites* or *contrasts*. What this means is introducing opposites into your talk, as a way of contrasting one thing with another. This is best illustrated with an example. "Pharmaceutical drugs are used to make us healthy but often cause ill-health through side effects." Your "opposites" are health and ill-health. This opens up your talk so that you could go on to say that, of course, pharmaceutical drugs have their place but their down-side should not be ignored. You could follow a different path and say that as there are side effects, maybe the overall result is still not "health" but ill-health. It entirely depends on what you want to say after that. The point is, however, that you have highlighted an area where there are two points of view. You can then argue your position from there.

It is also a way of introducing some of the most common criticisms of complementary medicine into your talk, in order to answer them. By making them opposites, you are in fact exaggerating the position.

Let's take an of this example, using two "opposites". The point you want to highlight is that there are criticisms of complementary medicine, one of which is that practitioners are dealing with health issues but have not undergone proper medical training, that some qualifications are, in fact, not worth the paper they are written on. The reason you want to raise this point is to tell your audience that you are well trained and properly qualified, that you know what you are doing, and that you are not a crank deluding yourself that Martian Head Tapping is a good therapy.

This is an important point. You could, again, just speak directly to the audience, but you want to make sure that you have their full attention when you make this point, so you use a speaking device to catch their attention. One way to do this is to exaggerate the two extremes.

Thus, your opposites might be "medical training" and "no medical training". Your statement might therefore be, "Many people believe that your health problems can only be solved by seeing someone who has undergone a full medical training, and not by consulting someone with no medical training whatsoever, however well meaning they are."

You are, of course, exaggerating the contrast but you are doing that to highlight the point. You are exaggerating the point in order to make the other position sound extreme and silly. It is like saying that, "All unemployed youngsters are potential criminals." This is clearly not true. Most people accept that some are, because of their circumstances but it is taking a reasonable argument to extremes. That of itself would be off-putting but if

you contrast it against a statement that “unemployment has no effect whatsoever on a slide into criminal behaviour,” you have highlighted the issue.

From there, you could go on to make the point that a “full medical training” in fact rarely involves tuition on allergies, from which a substantial proportion of the population suffer, that mental health issues are poorly covered, that nutrition is poorly covered, if at all. The average GP, in fact, starts his professional career knowing less about these topics than the well-informed member of the public.

You could then go on to say that you underwent training for one year, or however long it was, tell them about the topics you covered in your training, and point out that it is specialist training in one particular area in which a knowledge of surgery or geriatrics would not help you at all.

Using antithesis again engages the audience. You have raised an important issue, using an argument the audience is sure to have heard, in order to lead into a discussion which will prove that the negative argument is unfounded.

### **Antimetabole**

This, if you like, is a more advanced form of antithesis, the use of opposites or contrasts.

You will recognise this classic example of antimetabole. It is the famous statement by President John F Kennedy,

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”

Is it a coincidence that this statement has been remembered by people from many different countries and cultures over the last decades? Is it just that he was lucky enough to say something which happened to ring a bell with people? Not a bit of it. This was a clever piece of oratory: it was no accident.

Read it again. What do you notice in particular about this sentence? There are, of course, two things which stand out. One is that the word “country” is repeated twice. The second is that the two halves of the sentence are separated by a comma. Apart from that, it is an incredibly ordinary sentence with no special or unusual words. Even so, it conveys an extraordinary concept and conveys it very clearly. So, the thing which makes it memorable must have something to do with either the repetition of the word “country” or the comma. In fact, it is the repetition. The comma plays a minor part in this but we’ll look at that below. Let’s go back to the repetition.

Look at the sentence again. Look at it in relation to the word “you”. This time, you can see that in the first half of the sentence, the word “country” comes before the word “you”. In the second half of the sentence, this word order is the other way round, with “you” coming *after* the word “country”. You might think this is really too trivial a point to bother about, but this sentence does have tremendous impact, and there really is very little else in it which could cause that impact. All the other words are simple, everyday

words. The impact has to be the order of those words and, as you can now see, there has been a very clever trick played with this word order. The sentence has effectively been divided into two parts. The word order has been changed so that the order of the words “you” and “country” has been reversed in each part. That, however, is not the end of the story. You are about to see exactly how clever this trick really is.

By reversing the order of the words, the two parts of the sentence mean two different things. There is a contrast between the two parts. In the first part of the sentence there is, all the action, if you like, has to be carried out by the “country”. What is it going to do for you? It is up to “it” to act. You are passive, the recipient of this action.

The second part of the sentence paints quite a different picture. Here, the onus is on “you” to act. The “country” is the recipient.

There are, therefore, two scenarios painted spelt out in this sentence, one where “you” are passive and the other where “you” are active. The two are *contrasted*, without this ever being said openly. It is all done in one short sentence. This is a very, very clever use of words

So, this is antimetabole. It is the use of repetition to create a contrast.

We said we would go back to that comma. For two paragraphs we’re going to talk about grammar, but we’ll make it painless.

Commas, in grammar, imply a break of some kind. Without going into great grammatical detail, a good trick to remember is that if there is a natural break in a sentence, for example, where the natural flow would cause you to take a breath, that is a likely place for a comma to go. It is a break, but it is a short break.

The other type of break is a full stop. This, if you like, is a longer, more meaningful break.

One of the most common grammatical errors is to confuse the two.

Now, you are a therapist writing a speech so in fact for practical purposes it doesn’t matter whether you write down a comma or a full stop. The point is this: there must be a break. You are contrasting two things. When you speak, divide them with a short pause. If your contrasts are contained within one sentence this should be a *very* short pause, not one which people will listen to and think “oh, there’s a pause”, but just enough to let people hear that you are separating two thoughts. They can’t, after all, see your written script with its comma or full stop.

If this is starting to mystify you a little, read the sentence again, this time out loud.

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”

There is, in fact, no way you can read this *without* putting that slight pause in without sounding false. It is, in fact, the dividing line between the two contrasts.

This is not, technically speaking, part of antimetabole. It is, if you like, a secondary trick which goes with it, which is necessary in order to make that contrast work properly. So, you can use your contrasts together in one sentence or you can put one in one sentence and the other in a second sentence. They do, however, need that divide.

Let's look at another example. Remember, you are using repetition and contrast by inverting the order of words and therefore the meaning. Let's take two words which a therapist might well use: "mind" and "body". The reverse order is, of course, "body" and "mind". Your sentence might, therefore, be, "The mind influences the condition of the body, as well as the body influencing the condition of the mind." It is that easy. This is a very effective trick indeed. The ear will pick up the repetition immediately and like it, because it is hearing the same words twice and thus they are familiar. It is also an interesting sentence, containing, as it does, that little sting.

You can set out quite deliberately to write a sentence, or sentences, containing this trick: you don't have to wait for inspiration to strike. Decide on two words you think are important. Write them down. Then write them down in reverse order. Then write down roughly the point you want to make. In the "body/mind" sentence above the point is, of course, that the mind and body are inseparable when it comes to health. Then just write your sentence.

Never use this trick more than once in a speech. However, when you use it, make the most of it. You could practice making a little flourish with your hand at this point as further emphasis. It is a good trick and sounds extremely professional.

### **Increasing order of magnitude**

This is exactly what it sounds like. You are presenting facts, theories or conclusions in an order of magnitude, but instead of just saying that A is better than B but C is better than both of them, which is adequate but a little boring, you are more creative. You are, in effect, comparing two or more items, but this time you are emphasising this by introducing words which show an increase in magnitude. Again, an example will help you understand.

"Reducing pollution is good for people, better for our country and is the best way forward for our planet."

You are still using "good", "better" and "best", but you are using them to build the tension. Once you have used two of these words, the audience will be subconsciously waiting for the third. What is going to be best of all? You have created a slight tension in your sentence. Again, emphasise your final point with a gesture.

It is easy to create a sentence like this. Simply think of three good things and put them in what is, to you, their order of importance. The first is “good”, the second is “better” and the third, obviously, is “best”. Then build your sentence around this.

This trick can also be used to emphasise negatives using, for example, “bad”, “worse” and “worst”.

“Increasing pollution is bad for people, worse for our country and is the worst way forward for our planet.”

You can use any words you like, as long as they convey this sense of building or increasing (or decreasing).

Again, use this trick very sparingly. Once in a speech is good, twice is acceptable but three times is one time too many.

### **Rhetorical questions**

A rhetorical question is one which doesn't require an answer. This might be because the answer is implied by the question, or because it is obvious that you are about to go on to give the answer yourself. It holds the audience's interest because they are then waiting for what you have to say next and learn why you have asked the question.

An example of a question which implies the answer is, “Do you think that traditional western medicine can provide all the answers to health problems?”

Even the sternest critic of complementary therapies knows that this is not so. The medical profession itself knows it, as does the scientific world. Modern pharmaceutical medicine does not provide all the answers, if only because there are so many aspects of biochemistry which are not yet understood, such as the electrical activity of the brain. Thus, you are asking a question with a self-evident answer. You have got the audience on your side by getting them to agree with you. You don't even have to give a verbal answer to this: you could simply smile or shrug your shoulders.

The point, however, is that you have asked the question, and you have asked it for a reason at that point in your presentation. The audience will understand that you are about to make a point. They will therefore be engaged, sitting there waiting for your next words.

Now of course you could make your point without asking the rhetorical question, by making a statement. “Even the medical profession and the scientific establishment are open about the fact that they can't yet provide all the answers.” This is, however, a more boring way of presenting your argument. The audience are less engaged. The rhetorical question, on the other hand, varies your approach to them – you are not lecturing them, but engaging them, even if all concerned understand that they themselves are not required to answer. It introduces variation, and thus, entertainment.

Let's look now at the type of rhetorical question where it is obvious that you are about to provide the answer (it is a rhetorical question in that you clearly don't expect the audience to answer). This need not necessarily be a question to which the audience would agree. You can, indeed, be quite provocative. "The question is, do all complementary therapies work?" Now, in this instance, a proportion of your audience may feel that on balance most do indeed have something to offer. Others may feel that some therapies are merely wishful thinking on the part of both the therapist and the client. It is clear, though, that you are about to present your thinking on this because you've just announced that there's a question. For different reasons, both parts of the audience will be engaged and awaiting your next words.

Rhetorical questions, therefore, are a way of introducing new points or themes into your presentation whilst avoiding your simply standing there and lecturing your audience. They *vary* your presentation and thus engage the audience. They are a very useful device.

### **Breaks in sentences**

This is all about making how you speak more interesting, in this case by making a very small change. What you do is to break a sentence. This is best shown by way of an example. Take the sentence, "A therapist will take a holistic approach if he is a good therapist." There's absolutely nothing wrong with that sentence. The overwhelming majority of therapists and a large proportion of the general public would agree with the sentiments expressed. It is grammatical, clear, and the point being made is well expressed. What you can do is to make it even *more* interesting by changing the order to the words. The sentence must, of course, still be grammatical but you are doing something slightly different with those words. Thus, you are avoiding boredom. It is a small point and the audience may not quite catch exactly what you have done, but its effect is there all the same.

Thus, when preparing your speech, you might look at that sentence and then rewrite it as follows: "A therapist, if he is a good therapist, will take a holistic approach."

You are taking the words "if he is a good therapist" and putting them somewhere else in the sentence. It also increases the suspense for the audience. They will have heightened interest in what you are going to say next, because you start out by saying "A therapist", then you effectively qualify it, by adding "if he is a good therapist" They are being told what the best techniques are.

Changing the order of words may sound a small thing but you are aiming to avoid the obvious, to avoid tedium creeping in. Don't forget – how you say something is as important as what you say. If your speech contains the same rhythms and patterns all the way through, there is nothing in these rhymes and patterns to keep the audience awake, alert and interested.

This is something you can do in advance, when writing your talk. You don't have to think on your feet to do it.

## **Hyperbole**

This is intentional exaggeration, almost to the point of caricature. It should be used to introduce a sense of fun into your talk: both you and audience know that you are exaggerating. Take this example:

“That moment when my first client walked through the door, I was scared out of my wits.”

Now, you and they know that this is not to be taken literally. Who in the audience, after all, would have confidence in a therapist who could totally lose his mental control when faced with a client? What you are doing is exaggerating an understandable nervousness in order to emphasise a point. By emphasising the point, you are saying that this point is important.

Another example might be, “I asked the client to take off his socks and I was knocked flat on my back by the smell!”

Again (one hopes), this is an exaggeration, understood by all. What you are doing is asking the audience to share a small joke.

Hyperbole is excellent for creating audience rapport as long as two things are remembered.

Firstly, use it very sparingly indeed. If you use hyperbole more than once or twice in a talk, you will come across as someone who habitually exaggerates. To put that another way, you will be perceived as someone who isn't telling the truth. Why should the audience then believe that your therapy is effective and that they should come and see you? A good way to remember this is to think of the type of man everyone has met in a bar or shop at some time in their lives. He cracks a joke. It's funny, so everyone laughs. He cracks another joke. Everyone laughs again. He cracks a third joke. People start to drift away because he is too lightweight, all he can do is crack jokes. A shared joke is marvellous but you are not there to be a stand up comedian. It is just a little very gentle, very acceptable humour with which to make a point.

You might wonder if hyperbole can correctly be called humour. Perhaps mockery would be a better phrase.

The second point is that hyperbole should not be used in the early part of your speech. As we have said, hyperbole is exaggeration, and it is not wise to use exaggeration until the audience has had a chance to see and hear the real you. Once the real you has been established, they will know that “it weighs a ton” is a figure of speech, and not to be taken as a literal statement.

## **Politician-speak**

The correct name for this trick is Litotes, but when you read the text below you'll understand why we've called it Politician-speak.

It is the art of understatement or negative phrasing. To hear examples of this, listen to a politician – any politician – and you'll recognise it straight away. A typical example is,

“Yes, there has been a slight increase in the crime figures for this year.”

You and I will immediately (and probably correctly) interpret this to mean that the crime rate has soared.

“People will have to ease back on their spending.”

A truer interpretation of that would probably be that taxes are about to be raised and we will have less money in our pockets.

You are probably wondering by this stage why we are recommending this particular trick to you as a good, caring and honest therapist for use in your talks. Well, the technique may have been hijacked by politicians and often used in a very cynical way, but it is a case of “don't shoot the messenger”. The technique itself can be both good and effective: the fact that you have listened with a certain cynicism when you've heard it used in the past should be put from your mind.

Let's look at ways in which this technique can be both effective and positive.

First of all, it can be used as a gentle way of disagreeing with someone, particularly someone who has asked a hostile question or has just disagreed with a point you have made.

“I have to disagree with you slightly on this point.” Now, what you mean is that you fundamentally, one hundred per cent disagree with him. To say so outright would, however, sound confrontational. It would set the audience against you and destroy this great chance you've been given of countering his arguments.

Secondly, understatement can be used as a gentle way of getting a point across. To put it another way, don't shout if whispering would be more effective. When you shout, people tend to shout back, thus people will listen and be more prepared to consider your point of view if you don't ram it down their throats. An example might be,

“It can be argued that some therapies have not stood up to scientific scrutiny.”

Now, when you say this, people will listen to hear what you have to say about this point. If, however, you were to put it in more robustly, for example,

“It’s a fact that there is no scientific proof at the moment that certain therapies work,”

you have immediately dug a hole for yourself. You could, in this example, go on to say that people believe in them anyway, but you are immediately restricting your appeal to those in the audience who are believers in some of the less orthodox therapies. You’ve said it’s a fact. Who can argue with facts? By using the first approach, however, you’ve toned down the negative effect of that sentence. By saying “it can be argued” you are implying that there is an argument one way, but there is also an argument the other way. In other words, the jury is still out. It is not “a fact”. It is a subtle difference, but an important one.

### **Summing up**

You can see that *what* you say is important, but it is the way in *which* you say it that will enable you to get your message across. You don’t have to use all the techniques detailed above – find one or two with which you are comfortable. The trick is not to over-use them. One or two nice turns of phrase in your presentation will stick in the mind and will ensure that your audience remains interested: any more than that and your presentation will sound artificial. That is bad enough for anyone, but is particularly disastrous for a therapist, who is presumed to be genuine,