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## **Is your life influenced by Speaking Anxiety?**

Speaking Anxiety is the number one social phobia and if you're one of the many sufferers it can make your life much more difficult than it needs to be.

I believe there are 8 levels of Speech Anxiety ranging from no anxiety at all to acute anxiety. Realizing that most people suffer at some level or another is a great first step to overcoming the problem.

These 8 levels are:

### Level 1

No Anxiety. Willing and able to speak to anyone, anywhere including Public Speaking in front of large groups.

### Level 2

Able to speak to anyone and will speak to small groups when confident about the topic. An example of this is a teacher talking in front of a class.

### Level 3

Able to speak to people you know plus strangers in any situation. These are strangers you might meet on a bus, train, party etc where you have to speak for an unlimited amount of time - you can't easily get away.

### Level 4

Can speak to people you know plus strangers when only a few sentences are required. Examples are shop assistants, receptionists etc. it's fairly easy to get away and cut the conversation short.

### Level 5

You can speak to family, friends, work colleagues and bosses and teachers - or other people in authority.

### Level 6

These people feel comfortable when speaking to family, friends and work colleagues.

### Level 7

Will only speak to family and close friends.

### Level 8

Acute Anxiety. These people only comfortable when they're speaking to their family members.

I was level 7 when she was a 10 year old and it was after my parents met my school teacher, and he admitted that I hadn't spoken to him for a whole academic year, that my mum sent me off to elocution lessons. Slowly my confidence grew, and although I still considers herself a shy person I'm now happy at level 3 and has been known to perform at level 2.

Most of us fall in the middle from level 5 to level 3 and can manage quite well at this level.

However sometimes a change in job or family circumstances may mean we need to move from one level to another. This can be quite easily achieved with the correct training.

Luckily confident speaking is a skill which can be learned.

Some people are just naturally quiet but are confident enough to be able to speak when they have to.

Other people are very shy and think that they're going to somehow make a fool of themselves if they speak.

Others think that they sound strange, they imagine they've got a speech impediment when they haven't. This could be the result of being teased when they were younger.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Word Pictures**

The whole purpose of speaking is to share our ideas with other people.

We might be talking at a wedding where we're sharing our opinions about the bride and groom.

We could be telling a story and be sharing the authors' words with our listeners.

A salesperson will be trying to persuade us to think about a product in the same way as he is.

We might be reading a eulogy and encouraging others to remember the deceased as we do.

All of these speakers are talking about different topics, in different situations - but they're all sharing their thoughts with their listeners.

When any of us speak we have images in our mind. If you're talking about the groom doing something silly, you can picture the event in your mind. The fact that you're telling other people means that you'd like them to see the same images.

### **Important Words**

So that your listeners can get these images in their mind you need to be able to pick out the important words in your speech. These important words can then be emphasised so that they stand out.

Right - the first things you need to learn is how to pick out these important words.

An easy way to do this is to imagine that you can only hear part of the sentence. Which words would you need to hear to be able to guess what the sentence means?

An example is:

If you want to run faster, try picking your feet up higher.

The important words are: run, faster, picking, feet, higher.

Try practising with sentences out of magazines or books.

Once you have decided on the important words there are various ways of emphasising these words.

### **Inflection**

The first technique is the use of inflection.

This put simply is the bending of the voice. The voice may start a word on a lower note than it finishes the word. If you speak without using inflection the voice becomes monotonous and the people listening will fall asleep! It would have the same effect as singing a song all on the same note – it would sound terrible.

We need to slide the voice up and down during a sentence. When asking a question we bend the voice in an upwards direction at the end of the sentence. When we have finished a thought we end on a downhill inflection. A good example of this is when we are quoting lists of things. Our voice bends up at the end of each item and then down on the final one.

Apples, carrots, turnips, potatoes and peaches.

If you want to sound passionate about your subject you'll have to use inflection. A voice that has no melody sounds as though it also has no energy.

### **Pausing**

Silence, when used correctly, can be much more effective than actually speaking.

To be an effective speaker you need to pause before an important word. This gives the audience a chance to anticipate what you are about to say, which can create a kind of excitement and has a dramatic effect.

It can also be equally effective to pause after the important word. This gives the listeners time to reflect on what you have just said.

Of course, to be really dramatic and to make the word or words really stand out, you can pause before and after the important word.

The use of the pause shows other people that you have confidence in yourself, you are not afraid of silence.

We all tend to associate people who talk very fast with nervousness. When a small child is frightened or nervous they talk too fast and parents all around the world can be heard saying: 'Slow down, take a breath and start again, but speak *slowly* this time'.

People who are nervous have a tendency to talk non stop! Unfortunately they also tend to run out of intelligent things to say! Just stop and take a breath – your listeners will appreciate time to think much more than another sentence of rubbish!

We're all familiar with sport either as spectators or as competitors and you must have noticed that in any sport once a point or goal has been scored, play stops, the player takes a breath and the spectators have a chance to acknowledge the fantastic shot or goal by clapping and cheering.

When we are speaking we must also pause. This gives us a chance to take a breath and think ahead about the next thing we are going to say and it gives the audience time to take in what we have said and perhaps laugh, groan or simply pull a face!

All speakers need this feedback (from an audience or an individual) so that we can judge if the listener has understood what we've said. If we didn't bother to pause we could talk for a **very** long time before we realise that no one is understanding what we're saying.

If you talk for too long without pausing, listeners, especially children will lose interest, their brains need time to think about what you've said. Trying to listen to someone who hardly ever pauses is hard work, the listener has to try and take in what you've just said at the same time as listening to the next sentence. After a while they'll just give up!

## **Power**

Power is simply the volume you use.

Obviously the more people you are talking to, the louder you need to be. However, if you follow the advice in this book you'll hardly ever have to shout! If you speak clearly, you'll be heard more easily even if you speak more quietly.

However, if you speak too quietly you'll give the impression that you're too frightened to be loud and that you don't want to be

noticed. Confident people usually speak quite loudly because they're not afraid of the sound of their own voice.

Remember that your voice must always be loud enough to be heard. It's very difficult to get excited about what's being said if you have to strain your ears to hear it.

Think of one or two people you know who you think are confident – then think about the volume of their voice. Is it quiet or loud?

One of the easiest ways to increase your volume is to open your mouth wider (see page ).

### **Pitch**

Most nervous people speak with a high pitch (as do angry people) – by lowering the pitch of your voice you'll sound more confident.

However you also want to sound excited and enthusiastic about the topic of your speech and so you'll need to raise the pitch of your voice on some words – but don't screech!

Talking with a low pitch can make you sound more professional but it can also become very monotonous and boring. If you have a naturally high pitched voice try to lower it just a little. It's a fact that high pitched voices are harder to listen to than lower pitched voices, so to make your voice sound exciting you should only raise the pitch on the important (or exciting) words.

Read the following sentence to yourself.

'It was a fantastic goal'

Now say it out loud twice - the first time say the word 'fantastic' lower than the other words in the sentence, the second time say the word 'fantastic' higher than the other words. Which sounded the most enthusiastic? If done properly it should have been the second one.

### **Pace**

Pace is the speed at which you speak.

The more serious the topic, the slower you should speak. You'll also find that the larger the room or hall you're in, the slower your speech will need to be. The same is true if you are talking to an elderly or slightly hard of hearing audience.

If you're talking to an audience who are not experts in your field, for example if you're talking about tennis (lobs, spin, different grips etc.)

to an audience who aren't very familiar with these terms, you'll need to slow down slightly to give them a chance to take in what you've said.

Talking outside needs to be slower than talking inside especially if the weather conditions are bad as the wind and rain will swallow up your words. Although I wouldn't recommend that anybody should speak too quickly, there are times when you will need to be slightly faster than others. This would happen if you wanted to convey excitement, anger or a crisis of any description. You can't expect your listeners to get excited about what you are saying if you don't sound excited yourself.

### **Facial Expression**

Facial expression is essential in communication.

We need to use our eyes, eyebrows and mouths to reinforce what we mean. If we're saying something serious we need to look serious, if we're joking we need to smile! These expressions shouldn't look rehearsed. Don't think:

'Oh this is a serious bit, I must look serious'.

If you fully understand and believe in what you're saying your face will show the correct expression at the correct time.

Some groups of people need to see our faces more than others – children often need to see our face because they don't always understand the vocabulary we use and the hard of hearing find it helpful, they can try to lip read what we say or just use our general expression to guess what we mean.

Practice using your face to express yourself by doing the following exercises.

1. Imagine that you think someone is calling you from another room but you're not sure. Listen carefully – is it your name you can hear?
2. Now use your eyes – follow a butterfly flying around the room, it lands on your shoulder.
3. Now your mouth, imagine you're eating a piece of chocolate, now imagine you're eating the food you hate the most! Show your disgust on your face.

4. Finally, imagine you have just scored the perfect goal, or hit the perfect shot – let your face show your delight.

### **Gesture**

Gesture can be used to emphasise a point but mustn't be overdone. A speaker who fidgets and gestures too much is very disconcerting. Imagine hands flying all over the place or a head that nods up and down all the time. It's very difficult in these circumstances to concentrate on what's being said.

Consequently, when you are giving a talk the less movement you use the better. A person who continually moves around (swaying from

one foot to the other, or putting one hand behind your back and then the other one etc) can be very annoying to try to listen to. However, don't concentrate so much on not moving that you forget what you want to say.

You need to look natural so don't stand looking like a statue. Practice in front of a mirror or a friend and be aware of any irritating movements you may have. Perhaps you fiddle with the bottom of your jacket with your hand, move your feet from side to side, flick your hair back or play with your earrings.

If you do need to make a gesture to emphasis an important point, make sure it is a deliberate gesture but don't practice it to much. Any gestures used need to look spontaneous (even if they are rehearsed).

Only use body movement if you really must. Try to keep your hands still and sit or stand relaxed, not too tense. When you stand don't lock your knees, this tensing of the muscles in the back of your legs will cause tension up your back and in to your shoulders which will restrict your breath and make speaking much more difficult. Your knees shouldn't take the weight of your body, it's the job of your feet and this should be done on both feet without too much weight on the heels of your feet.

Oddly enough, athletes have a tendency to stand with their feet wide apart when talking and tend to move from side to side, possibly because they are ready to move off very quickly!

Remember that people who stand to attention (soldiers, ballerinas, gymnasts etc.) don't talk at the same time as tensing all their muscles – so be relaxed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Breathing**

Every sound we make needs breath. I'm going to ask you to stand up. Now say out loud:

'I am a brilliant coach and I'm bound to produce some champions.'

What did you do immediately before you spoke?

I would imagine that most of you pulled your shoulders up as you took a deep breath. (Hopefully after reading the last few paragraphs you didn't lock your knees!)

Lifting up your shoulders did you no good whatsoever! All you did was restrict yourself and tense your muscles. This is called clavicle breathing. With this type of breathing you're trying to move parts of the body which don't move, in particular the top ribs.

When we're asleep or resting the air enters our body slowly and escapes quickly. When speaking we need to inhale quickly and quietly. The emphasis here is on quietly. It must be done naturally with no preparation – you mustn't think, 'now I'm going to take a breath'. If you lift your shoulders and think, ready, steady, go – there will be a gasping sound and this gasping sound will make you sound very unfit.

Breathe in through your nose as this will protect your vocal cords. Breathing through your mouth will dry out your vocal cords so it's essential that anyone with a sore throat breathes through the nose.

Good breath control is essential for good speech but it must appear natural. In order to breathe to speak we need to use our intercostal muscles and our diaphragm. The intercostal muscles move the ribs and the diaphragm forms the bottom of the thorax and the top of the abdomen. At the centre of the diaphragm is the central tendon which joins the lower ribs, the sternum and the spine. During normal breathing the diaphragm descends about 1 cm but during strenuous breathing it can descend as much as 10 cms. Between the ribs are the external intercostals muscles and when these contract they elevate the ribs.

When we breathe in our lungs need to fill up with air. This requires our ribs to move outwards and sideways. If you place your hands on your ribs just above your waist and breathe in you should be able to

feel your ribs move outwards. As the lungs fill with air the diaphragm will move downwards, giving plenty of space for the lungs to expand. As the air is used up the diaphragm returns to its normal position – pushing the air out. During normal breathing out (exhalation) the muscles are relaxing. The diaphragm and the external intercostals muscles relax causing the ribs to depress. Other muscles become active only after forceful breathing, as in sport or trained speaking – the abdominal muscles and the internal intercostals contract. This is a skill which has to be practiced, it does not come naturally.

It's also important that your posture is correct. Stand up and sit down again. How many of you sat down and then let your ribs drop down a second time?

We have 12 pairs of ribs. Ribs 1-7 are fixed and can't move, consequently lifting up your shoulders or any other movement around the neck and shoulders can't increase the size of your thorax. Ribs 8-10 can move outwards and these are the ribs we concentrate on. Ribs 11 and 12 are floating ribs and when we sit down badly, we rest the top half of our body on these ribs. Remember that your lungs need room to expand.

I'm going to be a nuisance and ask you to stand up again. This time imagine you are talking to a group of adults.

How are your knees? Have you locked them tight?

If so, bend them a little and relax the muscles. The tension in the back of your knees will travel up your back into your neck and shoulders making breathing more difficult. Let your feet take your weight, not your knees. Stand evenly on the heels of your feet. Make sure you're not standing to attention. The only people who do this successfully are people who don't need to speak – such as soldiers on parade, gymnasts and ballerinas. If you stand upright with your head up (but still relaxed and not to attention) people will immediately take notice of you. You will look as though you know what you are talking about.

Standing and sitting correctly will also make you feel less tired so you'll sound much more alert.

While you're sitting or standing correctly, try the following sentence. Start each line with a new breath (fill your lungs with air and feel your rib cage moving outwards) and see how far you can get until you run out of breath (ignore punctuation).

1. I can name...
2. I can name seventeen different sports...
3. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket...
4. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming...
5. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming, boxing, squash, badminton...
6. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming, boxing, squash, badminton, gymnastics, trampolining....
7. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming, boxing, squash, badminton, gymnastics, trampolining, diving...
8. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming, boxing, squash, badminton, gymnastics, trampolining, diving, skiing, hockey...
9. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming, boxing, squash, badminton, gymnastics, trampolining, diving, skiing, hockey, basketball and...
10. I can name seventeen different sports: football, baseball, cricket, tennis, golf, swimming, boxing, squash, badminton, gymnastics, trampolining, diving, skiing, hockey, basketball, snooker and athletics...

Although breath control is very important, we mustn't become so obsessed with taking deep breaths that we are too frightened to pause in the middle of a sentence - especially if it makes sense to do this.

***Good breath control means that we can pause when we want to rather than when we have to.***

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Articulation**

Articulation is the art of speaking and involves the study of the muscles we use for speech. Good articulation has three advantages.

- 1 It enables us to speak for long periods of time without tiring. As in any sport, muscles used correctly can work more effectively for much longer than muscles used incorrectly.
- 2 The more these muscles are exercised the clearer the speech becomes and listeners find it much easier to understand you. Again as in sport – the fitter you are the easier it becomes.
- 3 It enables you and the audience to concentrate more on the content of what you're saying rather than how you're saying it – they don't need to decipher it. If your technique is good in sport you can concentrate on winning – you don't need to worry about how to make the shot.

### **Laziness**

Many problems of articulation are caused by bad habits and laziness. We may mumble our words or perhaps speak out of the corner of our mouth because we want to sound like our friends – it may not be fashionable among our friends to speak clearly.

However, most cases of bad articulation are caused, not by design, but simply by laziness.

We know what we're saying so we expect other people to know what we mean. We just can't be bothered to use our mouths.

Look at the following example:

Suppose you're serving in tennis, the ball hits the net because you were too lazy to stretch your arm up - would you then expect to win the point because you knew where you wanted the ball to go!

It would be ludicrous but the principle's the same. There's no reason why people should know in advance what you're going to say, therefore you must speak clearly and use your facial muscles to produce good clear speech.

## **Organs of Speech**

There are five organs of speech

1. The tongue
2. The lips
3. The teeth
4. The soft palate
5. The hard palate

As the sound enters the mouth these organs of speech alter the sound.

The lips can be moved forwards and backwards and can change the shape of the mouth.

The tongue is the only muscle in the body connected directly to a bone, it can move in and out, from side to side, it can twist and can move very quickly.

The teeth cannot move but are used in conjunction with the lips and tongue. We notice the importance of teeth when we listen to young children who are waiting for the tooth fairy to arrive or to more elderly people whose teeth have unfortunately not managed to reach such an old age as they have!

The soft palate is the back of the roof of the mouth. It can be lowered or raised for differing sounds.

The hard palate is the front of the roof of the mouth and cannot move. It is the bony bit near the teeth and like the teeth it is used in conjunction with the tongue.

Try saying these two simple words:

### **'AT ALL'**

These two little words represent four sounds and the tongue moves so quickly to produce four sounds that we don't notice.

The sounds are 'a' as in cat, 't' as in tuh, 'aw' as in crawl and 'l' as in luh.

## **Vowel sounds**

Speech sounds are either vowel sounds or consonant sounds.

We have five vowel names - a,e,i,o,u - but as many as twenty six different vowel sounds.

For example, take the vowel 'a', now imagine its sound in the following words, car, cat and way. Each sound is different.

The same with the 'e' in bet and bee. Each sound is different and it's the sound that's important not the name of the letter.

The breath for vowel sounds comes up through the vocal cords and straight out through the mouth.

The different sounds are made by altering the positions of the tongue and lips.

Note that for these vowel sounds the organs of speech never touch each other. The teeth shouldn't touch the lips, the tongue shouldn't touch the hard palate and the lips don't touch each other. (Sometimes the tongue may rest behind the bottom teeth although technically it shouldn't.)

### **Technical details!**

For those of you who might be interested in more technical details, there are three types of vowel sounds.

If the position of the lips and tongue don't alter during the sound it's a monophthong. An example is 'ee'. Once the sound has been started the mouth stays in the same position.

If the position of the lips and tongue alter from one position to another, it is a diphthong. An example is the sound 'ay'. The mouth closes slightly.

If there are three positions, it is a triphthong. An example of this is 'our' which is often mispronounced as 'are' (which is only a monophthong.)

Look in the mirror as you say the above words and you'll see the shape of your mouth change.

### **Consonant sounds**

A consonant sound comes up through the vocal cords and is then stopped in the mouth by the contact of two of the organs of speech.

We have to remember that it is the sound of the consonant and not the letter name that's important.

The fourth letter of the alphabet is called 'dee' but the sound isn't 'dee' but more of a 'duh'.

To achieve good articulation each word must be finished right to the

last syllable and to the final consonant. This articulation helps us to project our voice and this means that we don't have to shout which is obviously beneficial to us. Being able to use our organs of speech correctly enables the sound to carry further.

The organs of speech need as much training and care as any other muscles in the body.

Try the sounds below out loud to see how the organs of speech work. The two lips touching produce the 'p', 'b' and 'm' sounds – (puh, buh and muh)

The teeth and lips touching create the 'f' or 'v' sound.

The tongue and hard palate make the 'd', 't', 'n' or 'l' sound.

The tongue and soft palate produce the 'k' and 'g' sounds.

### **Exercise and drills**

In order to correct lazy speech we have to practice and make the muscles work effectively. If we compare speech to sport again, we all know that in any sport there are drills which you perform in practice over and over again but that you wouldn't dream of reproducing in a match.

Dribbling around cones in football, running and picking up tennis balls in tennis, stretching in dancing are all examples of routine drills which have to be performed daily but you wouldn't see any of the Manchester United players running around cones during a match at Old Trafford. It goes without saying that there is no point in doing any of these drills if you don't give 100%.

The same is true of speech drills. There's no point in whispering them or speaking quickly so that you can get them finished in a hurry! They have to be performed **out loud** and **slowly** if they're to do you any good. Incidentally, I would never expect you to do any of these drills in public. When you do these drills you must open your mouth as wide as possible which if done correctly will result in you looking very odd!

Try to speak to an object when you do these drills, it doesn't matter what it is, it could be a chair, a teddy bear, a clock or a telephone. Focus on the object – look at it and direct the sound towards that object.

## **Open your mouth**

If you want to kick a ball you move your leg, if you want to throw a ball you move your arm and if you want to speak you must move your mouth.

*The sound cannot come out of a closed mouth.*

I'll show you what I mean. Try saying the following sentence with your mouth shut:

'Throw the ball high in the sky'

You might achieve a humming sound which goes up and down in pitch, it might even be a loud humming sound but no one will understand what you're trying to say because there'll be no clear words.

Now say the same sentence but open your mouth as wide as you can. I can guarantee it sounded better but I bet you didn't open your mouth half as wide as you thought you did. Go and get a mirror and say the same sentence for a third time. This time physically pull your chin down with your hand on the 'high' and 'sky' words and make sure you make a circle with your mouth on the 'throw' word.

## Drills and exercises

Below are two different drills for vowel sounds. Make sure they're repeated out loud.

### The 'I' sound pronounced 'eye'

My shot is a mile wide of the line.

Open your mouth open as wide as it will go. Pull your jaw down with your hand. You should be able to put three fingers in your mouth vertically!

### The 'O' sound pronounced 'oh'

Oh dear, my throw is too slow and too low.

For the 'oh' sound you need a round mouth.

As we get older we are often too embarrassed to open our mouths, I guess because we think we look stupid. However, as with all the muscles in our body, the mouth (lips and tongue in particular) need to be exercised.

We all know the importance of keeping the rest of our body fit and think nothing of skipping, lifting weights or stretching to help build up our muscles or to keep ourselves supple.

We owe it to ourselves to look after the organs of speech with as much care. There are voice exercises that exercise specific muscles in the face but the easiest way to exercise is to make funny faces.

Stretch the lips and tongue as much as possible and see how far you can stick your tongue out! (Incidentally, these face exercises also help us to stay younger looking for longer!)

The following are consonant exercises. You must make sure that you sound the first and last consonant in each word. Rather like you do when shouting at a child or a dog!

1. I needu to win the firstu pointu at the netu.
2. I wouldu have gotu a birdieu at the thirdu butu my puttu wentu long.

Every 't' and 'd' must be heard.

### **Correct number of syllables**

We need to be very careful not to cut words short. Quite often we are in such a hurry to finish what we are saying that we miss out parts of words.

Examples of this can be seen in the following words:

1. 'Secretary' which is often shortened to 'secretry'. Instead of giving it four syllables it is only given three.
2. 'Every' is nearly always pronounced 'Evry'. It should have three syllables but is only given two.
3. 'Extraordinary' should be pronounced as 'ex-tra-or-di-na-ry' but is often pronounced as 'ex-tro-di-na-ry'. It should have six syllables not five.

While we mustn't miss out parts of words, we must also be careful not to add syllables that aren't there.

The word 'athlete' is a good example of this. People who don't speak correctly often say 'athlelete' making the word three syllables long when it should only be two. Other examples are umbrella, pronounced umberella and toddler pronounced toddeler.

Another example of a word which is mispronounced is 'tomorrow', this is often pronounced 'tamorrow', we lose the long vowel sound 'oo'.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Help – lots of people want to listen to me!**

This chapter applies to anyone who has to speak in front of an audience.

Speaking in public isn't like chatting to friends, to speak in public your speech must be clear and focused. You chat to a friend for fun, you can repeat things and ask questions – you can even change the topic of conversation if you get bored! When you give a talk you have a responsibility to your audience. They must be able to hear you and understand you.

### **Audience**

The first thing you must do is find out what sort of audience you'll have. Is it young, old, knowledgeable about the topic of your speech or completely clueless?

If the audience has no previous knowledge of your topic be careful not to use too much jargon. If you're talking to young children, perhaps in a school hall or classroom, don't be frightened to sit on the floor – get down to their level. Children have a very short concentration span, so keep the talk interesting and try to include them in your talk as much as possible. Ask questions and encourage them to join in.

The audience won't care if you make a mistake, it may seem like a huge mistake to you but unless you stand there and make huge apologies they probably won't even notice! If it's a wedding reception, everyone will be too busy having a good time to worry about mistakes.

So if possible ignore it and carry on. Try not to stop and say "sorry" this will only draw attention to your mistake. If you can carry on talking without any hesitation they'll even think that they heard you wrong and that it was their mistake!

Although your speech isn't a chat with friends try to think of your talk as a conversation with lots of people – talk to the audience but not at them. Let them react – give them time to nod, smile, laugh etc.

Imagine a friend asks you a question about the groom, or about the deceased or about the item you are trying to sell etc. You'd answer easily with loads of ideas.

The information you give in a talk is the same information. The main difference is that the audience don't get to join in as your friends would and as you don't get their feedback to motivate you, you need

to concentrate much more on what you are saying and have a plan so that your talk has a beginning, a middle and an end.

## **RESONANCE**

In order to fill a large space with sound you must learn to use your resonators. These resonators are all the hollow spaces above the larynx – the part of the throat that contains the vocal cords. The sound vibrates against these hollow spaces and these vibrations cause the voice to resonate.

The mouth is the most important resonator because:

1. It is the largest resonator.
2. All of our sounds come out through it.
3. When we move our lips and the tongue we change the shape of it so we can make different sounds.

To exercise your resonators you need to practise the following sounds: 'n', 'm' and 'ng'.

Remember, it is the sounds not the names of the letters that's important. A long humming sound is required. Practice humming now – if you do it correctly and place your hand on the top of your head you should feel the vibration.

Now say the following line with an exaggerated hum on the 'm' and 'n' sounds.

The New York Marathon means I run many miles.  
It should sound like this:

The NNNNew York MMMMarathon mmmeans I runn mmannny  
mmmiles.

My mummy made me swim a mile.

Mmmy mmmummmmy mmmade mmme swimmm a mmmile.

## **LOOK AND AIM**

Look at your audience. Don't lower your head and talk to the ground unless you're giving your speech to a group of mice! If you were playing football you'd aim the ball where you wanted it to go – you must also aim your words where you want them to go.

If you're using your notes don't hide your face with them and don't speak into them. Make sure the sound goes over the top of your notes and let the audience see your face. They need to be able to see if you're serious, joking, angry etc. You also need to open your mouth. Remember that you can't kick a ball if you don't move your leg. The words can't be directed in any direction – right or wrong - if they can't get out of your mouth in the first place.

## **CONSONANTS**

Sound the last consonant sound in every word. It's often the last letter of a word that decides the word. If you don't emphasize the last letter of the following examples the audience at the back will end up trying to guess what you are saying.

The difference between 'ant' or 'and' is difficult to decipher if you miss off the last sound, all you can hear is 'an...'

The same can be said of 'bug', 'but' and 'bud', all the audience will hear is 'bu?'

Making sure you sound these final consonant sounds is the major factor which will improve your projection. Taking the time to finish to these words correctly will also slow your speech down.

## **CLOTHING**

Clothing plays a very important part in your ability to speak well!

Most of us spend our working life in comfortable clothes that we find easy to move in.

However, if you need to give a presentation or speech of any kind you may be dressed in clothes which you hardly ever wear.

Your trousers may be slightly tighter around the waist than your tracksuit bottoms.

Your shirt might have a tight collar and the tie will make it feel even tighter.

How on earth can you expect to breathe – your lungs need room to expand, your vocal cords need to be able to vibrate – no wonder you're frightened to speak, I'd be frightened to move in case a button popped off!

Ladies are just as bad, tight skirts and trousers, probably no collar or tie but necklaces, bracelets even earrings that weigh us down and jangle whenever we move.

Hairstyles that make us too frightened to move our head in case we put a hair out of place – all of a sudden you're in a situation where you imagine that every hair out of place is important – it isn't!

We also wear high heeled shoes that throw us off balance therefore making our bodies tense - with these heels we feel as though we might fall over. In your day to day life you can wear trainers or flat casual shoes - now you're in the strange position where your feet don't feel as though they belong to you.

The answer is to loosen the tie slightly, go easy on the jewelry and relax the feet in those high heels. Clenched, squashed feet will tense all your muscles from your feet up to your throat. Shoes must be comfortable (for ladies and gentlemen) and if it at all possible take your shoes off! This may be possible if you're sitting behind a desk or standing behind a podium – so make sure that you wash them before you leave home!

You can look stunning and smart and be comfortable. When you're getting ready to attend a formal event, as well as making sure that you look good, try sitting down a few times and then standing up to practice your speech. How do you feel – do your feet hurt? Does your skirt feel too tight? Does your dress crease? Don't wait until you get to the function and then think, 'why did I wear this?'

Clothing plays a major part, if you feel comfortable, you are more likely to be relaxed and therefore be more confident.

## **CONTENT OF TALK**

Every talk needs an introduction, a middle and an end. When you get near the end of your talk resist the temptation to rush. You may be relieved to get to the end but remember it's the last thing that you say to the audience, that they'll remember the easiest, so end on a positive note.

## **The End**

To the audience the ending is as important, if not more important, than the beginning of your talk.

Therefore end the talk as forcefully as you started. You may know how your talk is going to end – but your audience don't. Stay focused right to the end – don't speed up or end in a whisper. Think of your talk as a long joke – it won't be very effective if your audience don't hear the punch line at the end.

Avoid the use of 'ums' and 'ers' in your speech (or any other favourite word such as 'alright' or 'okay'). The audience will be waiting for the next 'um' or 'okay' rather than listening to what you're saying. If you find it impossible to avoid altogether try thinking 'um' or 'okay' instead of saying it. I know of a group of school children who were taught by a teacher who kept saying 'alright'. At the beginning of her class they would make a table in their notebooks and put a tick every time she said 'alright'. I'm not sure if they ever learnt anything during her class so be warned!

Give yourself time to prepare what you want to say. Don't wait for last minute inspiration – it rarely arrives. The professional speakers who appear to talk without preparation are generally using old speeches that they adapt to suit the occasion.

Also be wary of writing down every word you want to say then memorising it. For a start it'll sound false, we write differently than we speak. We tend not to write in a chatty way, if we were to write down what we say and then read it back we would want to alter it. We write 'I am', but we say 'I'm'. Favourite words would crop up all the time and the sentences would be short. A writer of English would tell you to find another word which means the same and to lengthen the sentences. All very well for a written English exam but it wouldn't sound natural.

### **Memory**

You also have to be aware of how you would cope if you forgot your words. Would you have to go back to the beginning or could you improvise until the end. It's also very difficult to alter your talk to unforeseen circumstances.

For example, if you're expecting an elderly audience and you discover they are younger than anticipated or if someone interrupts you and disagrees with you, what would you do, could you change your talk? If you're not very experienced your mind will be too busy trying to remember the words to be able to alter the content.

If you're reading the speech or using notes you can take a few minutes at the beginning to write a few alterations on your notes.

With today's technology we don't have to use our memories as much as our parents or grandparents did, we don't memorise our times tables any more (we have calculators) and with the advent of mobile phones, we don't even have to remember anyone's phone number.

Only use your memory if it's in constant use and can be relied upon.

Sometimes you'll want to or need to use notes when you're speaking. It's assumed that because a person can read to themselves adequately well they can automatically read aloud just as effectively.

Wrong! When we read to ourselves our brain goes very fast and it's just not possible for our mouths to keep up at that speed.

### **READING ALOUD**

You may have to read aloud from a piece you've either never seen before or you've only had a chance to glance through. When reading aloud in these circumstances there are a few points to make note of.

Hold the piece you are reading so that it doesn't hide your face and don't hold it so low that your mouth is pointing at the ground.

Look at your audience on the important words, but try to avoid looking up and down like a yo-yo. If you can't manage to look up without your losing your place at least look up at the audience on the first words of each paragraph and end your reading by looking at the audience.

I personally put the thumb of my left hand next to the line I'm reading, so it slowly moves down the page as I speak. If I look up I can easily find my place again.

As with any kind of speaking, you have to understand what you're saying. Pick out a few key words which you would like to emphasise.

For the moment we'll assume that on these key words you'll just make eye contact with the audience – so remember to look up at them. To avoid speaking too fast, every time you come across a full stop or a comma, say 'full stop' or 'comma' to yourself.

The tendency is for our voices to drop down as we reach the end of a sentence. Consequently, we must make the effort to lift the voice at the start of each new paragraph, otherwise our voice would just get lower and lower.

If you're using notes which are only there to jog your memory don't be frightened to look at them but make sure you only write on one side of the card. If you write on both sides you can guarantee that when you glance at the notes you'll be reading the wrong side!

Trying to hide the notes and then fumbling around to sneak a glance doesn't give a very professional impression. Have your notes in front

of you – don't fiddle with them, look at them when you need to and don't try to hide them. If you have notes which you want to read from (rather than just to use as reminders), it is helpful to underline the parts you want to look up on. Go through your speech and pick out the important words and underline them. Also make sure that you underline the first sentence and the last sentence. This will give your speech a more natural feel to it and will give you more confidence.

### **Food and drink**

If you need to have a drink, avoid cold water, warm water is much better. Dairy products should also be avoided as they cause mucus to form. If you want a drink that will relax your vocal cords try honey and lemon.

### **ENJOY**

Enjoy speaking. Remember that you're talking about something that you know about.

Some people can talk for a long time giving a very intellectual talk full of facts and figures.

Other people find it difficult to present facts and figures and get in a muddle when they try. These people often think they have nothing interesting to say, however, when they start to talk about their particular interest they say it with such enthusiasm that as soon as they have finished you want to go out and find out more!

I know which one I would prefer to listen to.

If you smile and sound enthusiastic every one will enjoy your talk – if you can't get enthused about it how can you expect anyone else to?

## **Chapter 5**

### **Starting a Conversation**

If you're stuck for conversation starter topics read on ..

Having a conversation should always be fun. Think back to a time when you've been busy chatting to a friend and then suddenly realised you've been talking for 2 hours! It didn't seem like it - if you were asked how long you'd been talking you'd probably had said 20 minutes. This is how it should be.

So why do so many people get frightened at the thought of having to make conversation with someone?

Are they worried they won't have anything to talk about?

Are they worried they will run out of ideas half way through the conversation?

Conversations don't need to be about serious, academic or literary topics - although they sometimes are. Conversations can be about fear of the dentist, the price of apples, a new teacher at school, a pair of shoes - the list is endless.

Although we can converse about most things there are a few things we need to be wary of. For example don't start criticising people you know (or don't know) in front of other people. They will immediately wonder what you say about them to other people. Don't ask questions that are very personal and try not to talk about yourself the whole time.

If you disagree with what is being said - say so - but do it in a friendly way. You don't need to be argumentative to get your point across.

If you're worried about conversation starter topics read the newspapers, look at magazines, watch the television, listen to friends and work colleagues when they are talking. Perhaps you have an interesting job or hobby - practice a two sentence answer to the question 'what do you do?'

Instead of answering 'I work in a shop' say 'I work in the gift shop at Lulworth Castle'. People will immediately be interested in what you do.

Or if it's a clothes shop, add something such as 'the clothes are really cheap so I can buy loads' or 'the clothes are really expensive - great for special occasions.'

This way the person who has asked the question has something to work with. The same applies for any job, if you're a motor engineer, do you work with posh expensive cars, or cheap runarounds?

You may be very shy but to be good at conversation you need to be able to listen and if you are very good at it you'll get away with saying very little. Take your lead from the other person, agree with them, smile at them, ask questions - not too personal - about what they are saying and they will feel they've engaged in a great conversation.

Conversing with strangers can be frightening but take a clue from your surroundings. If you're in someones home and there's a signed picture of Marilyn Monroe on the wall it's a safe bet to talk about Marilyn Monroe, even if you know very little about her. You could start by saying, 'I like your Marilyn Monroe picture, I've never seen any of her films but I understand they're good' or 'I don't know much about her but I love that white dress she wore'.

Try to avoid the use of favourite words. If you know you have a habit of saying 'like','okay','alright' all the time and you're finding it very hard to stop this habit, try thinking the word instead of saying it - it really helps!

If you're at a formal event and you know the host, you can always start a conversation by asking the stranger if they work for the same company as the host.

If it's an event that you've never been to before, perhaps a conference about tourism, frozen food or dancing, don't be frightened to pick out a friendly looking person and introduce yourself, 'Hi, I'm Jon and I've never been to one of these before, I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to do.' People, in general, love to help other people and at the same time it gives their ego a boost, they'll be pleased to fill you in on all the details.

If you have a happy friendly disposition people will be happy to converse with you.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Reading Poetry Aloud**

Poetry readings take place at weddings, funerals, poetry clubs and concerts.

There are a few different rules for poetry reading than for prose reading and these rules help us to keep the shape of the poem.

First you have to be heard. The sound has to get out of your mouth and for this to happen you have to open your mouth.

If you have written the poem yourself or if you've had it written for you, you will know the emotion the poem is trying to convey. You will know what is coming next but remember your listeners don't know. They've never heard it before so they have to get in the right mood and then they have to listen to the words and they will need time to take in what you've read.

It might come as a surprise to know that there are different kinds of pauses. Some of these pauses are used when reading prose and poetry and some are used in poetry only.

#### **Pauses used in prose and poetry**

- Grammatical pauses - used when punctuation dictates such as a comma or full stop.
- Sense pauses - used when our common sense says we need a pause.
- Rhetorical - this is a longer pause that comes at the end of paragraphs and some verses.
- Emphatic - this is used before an important word or after an important word or before and after an important word.
- Emotional pause - this is used to give an emotional effect such as when a person is crying.
- Dramatic pause - a pause used to give a dramatic effect.

### **Pauses used only in poetry reading**

- The main pause is the suspensory pause. This occurs at the end of an enjambment line where the sense carries on into the next line of the poem. There must be a slight pause on the last word of the line but no breath must be taken.

An example is taken from Sea Fairies by Eileen Mathias

They're hiding by the pebbles,  
 They're running round the rocks  
 Each of them, and all of them  
 In dazzling sea green frocks.

There is a pause at the end of the first line and the next place for a breath is halfway through the third line. However at the end of the second line you must hold on to the word 'rocks' so that the shape of the poem is kept.

- Caesura pause - This can come anywhere in the line of poetry but it always coincides with sense
- Metrical pause - Lines of poetry are made up of metrical feet. These feet are very similar to bars of music. Each foot is made up of 2, 3 or 4 syllables. A metrical pause occurs when part of a foot or a whole foot is missing.

### **Why pausing is important**

- Pausing allows the listener to take in what you've just said.
- It shows you have confidence in your ability to read the poem aloud.
- Gives you a chance to breathe.
- Keeps the shape of the poem.

### **Pace and Power**

Try to alter the speed at which you read the poem. If you want to sound angry or excited speed up a little and raise the pitch of your voice. When you want to sound more serious lower the pitch and slow down. A higher pitched voice can also be used when talking about things which are high up - the sky, angels, tall buildings and a lower pitch for things lower such as the soil, graves, underwater etc.

## **Facial Expressions**

Your facial expressions and gestures are important. If you are reading a serious poem try not to smile! Any movements you make must look natural and not rehearsed, you want the whole experience to look and sound natural and relaxed.

If the poem wasn't written by you, you'll need to read through the poem a few times to try and gauge the feeling of the poem and also try to pick out the important words and phrases. These important words and phrases can then be emphasised using the methods outlined above.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Reading for Auditions/Interviews**

Cold reading arises when you have to read aloud a piece you haven't seen before - this can also be called sight reading. This can occur in an interview, at an audition or if you have to stand in for someone at the last minute at a wedding, funeral, business meeting etc.

I've done a lot of cold reading. Every time I took a speech and drama exam I had to sight read and I now actually enjoy it. It's a skill that is incredibly useful and a skill that most people think is easy (but they usually mess it up because they speak much too quickly).

You have to remember that reading aloud has to be done a lot slower than reading to yourself. The brain and your eyes can act a lot more quickly than your mouth.

Take a few moments to read through the piece to yourself. If it's a long piece just glance through it to get the general feel of the piece. You don't want to read through the whole piece to yourself while your audience wait for you to finish!

There are two schools of thought about this. The first is that glancing through the piece gives you a chance to see if there are any difficult words in the piece. If there are you have a moment or two to work out how to pronounce them.

It has to be said that this is probably the sensible route when cold reading.

I, however, used to worry!!

I'd see a word that I didn't know and then worry about having to say it. The first part of my reading was bad because the 'word' was approaching fast and then the second part of my reading was bad because I'd messed up the 'word'.

My answer is to literally glance at the piece - mainly just to see how long it is and to try and see if it's funny or serious. Then I just start!!

I don't go too fast, just an even pace and if I come across a word I don't know I just guess. No hesitation - straight into it. I haven't ruined the first part of the reading by worrying and I haven't ruined the second part. Sometimes I even get the word right!!

To avoid losing my place when I look up on the important words, I hold the piece to be read with two hands. I let my left thumb move down the page as I read so that I can look up on the important words without losing my place.

Even if you don't feel confident enough to look up during the reading remember to look up on the first and last sentences.

Don't rush as you get towards the end - you might be very pleased to reach the end but your listeners need to hear the last bit otherwise none of your reading will make sense. It would be like telling a long joke and then rushing the punch line so no-one can hear it.

You may find that you have to turn the page when you are cold reading, just practice at home reading the last few sentences on a page and then turning over and continuing with the next page.

The problem most people have is that they start off too quickly and then get tongue tied. Try to imagine a metronome in your head that is slowing you down. You need to read at about 14 - 16 words in a five second period. This may seem slow to you but your audience need time to listen.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The National Curriculum**

As part of the National Curriculum in England and Wales, children are assessed on their speaking and listening skills. One of the ways teachers do this is to ask the children to give presentations in front of their classmates. The following pages are written especially for children.

#### 5 STEPS TO PREPARING A SPEECH

1. Choose your topic. Your school may have given you a title or you might have to choose your own. If you're stuck for ideas see card 10 for a list of ideas.
2. Know what you want to say. If it's a talk for school, write it down first or talk about your topic to your mum or dad and ask them to write down what you are saying in note form. You can write it out in full later.
3. Once you have your talk written down read it out loud and get someone to see how long it takes you. If you've been asked to give a talk at school or college you should have been told how long it should be. Make sure that when you read your speech out for the first time it is shorter than the time you have been given.
4. If you need to use photos or objects in your presentation now is the time to find them. Make sure that you can carry the objects to school safely. If you are using photos or pictures make sure they are big enough for your listeners to see. You might need to enlarge them on your computer.
5. Find out if you are allowed to read your speech or if you have to use just notes or if you need to memorise it.

## 5 STEPS TO PRACTISING A SPEECH

1. If you are reading your speech practise holding the paper. Make sure that you hold it up high enough so that you're not looking down at the floor but don't hide your face.



2. I always stick (or print) my talk onto card and it is easier to read if it is on A5 paper rather than A4. (A4 can hide your face very easily.)

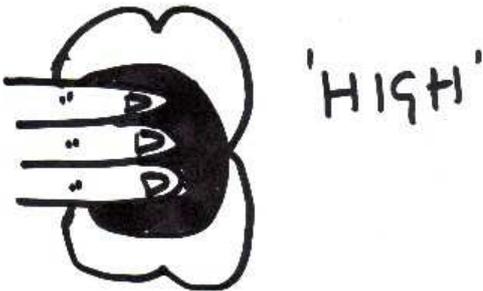
3. Now underline the title and the first and last sentence.

4. Next underline any important words that are in your speech. These are the things that you think your listeners should remember from your talk or anything that you think is exciting in your talk.

5. Now read your speech out loud and when you get to a word or a sentence that is underlined – look up at your listeners.

## OPEN YOUR MOUTH

1. If you want the listeners to hear you, the sound needs to get out of your mouth so the first thing you need to learn is how to open your mouth wide enough!
2. When you say a word that has an 'eye' sound in it (such as night, style, kite), you need to be able to put two or three fingers in your mouth – vertically!



3. I would suggest that you try to get three fingers in your mouth when practising and two when speaking in public – otherwise you might look a bit daft!
4. The same applies to the 'ah' sound that we find in car, farm, star etc.
5. There are two ways to practise opening your mouth – the first is by saying these sentences out loud:
  - a) My kite is flying high in the sky.
  - b) My fast car is great for driving to the farm.
  - c) A bright light can damage my eye.

OR

You can make funny faces in a mirror – see how wide you can open your mouth.

## 2 STEPS TO SLOWING DOWN

1. Most children speak too fast when they get excited or nervous. If you practise your talk you won't be too nervous but you might feel a bit shy about talking in front of other people. One way to slow down is to open your mouth wider (as shown on card 3).

2. If you are reading your talk (and this is also great if you have to read aloud in class from a book) an easy way to slow down is to say 'comma' or 'full stop' to yourself every time you see one in your reading.

An example is:

An old woman was sweeping her house, (say comma to yourself) and she found a little crooked sixpence. (Say full stop to yourself)

'What,' (comma) said she, (comma) 'shall I do with this little sixpence? (question mark) I will go to market, (comma) and buy a little pig.'(full stop)

You'll find that this simple exercise will slow down your speaking and improve your reading aloud skills more than you thought possible!

### A VERY IMPORTANT STEP TO SLOWING DOWN

When you are practicing your talk, every time you come to the end of a paragraph or idea, take a breath. Imagine you are a famous footballer and you've just scored a goal. What would you do? You'd stop and let the crowd cheer and they'd say to their friends 'what a great goal!'

Then you would get your breath back and make your way back to your position to restart the match.

You wouldn't score the goal and rush back to position and restart the match in a few seconds!

The same is the same when reading. We get to the end of an idea and we take a breath.

There are 3 reasons for doing this:

i) So that your listeners have a chance to think about what you have just said. If you've said something funny they'll have a chance to laugh – make sure you give them time.

ii) So that you can take a breath.

iii) So that you can get ready for the next thing you want to say. You might want to pick up a photo or object that you need to talk about next.

### 5 STEPS TO STANDING CORRECTLY

1. When you stand up to say your talk, stand with your feet apart.
2. Let your legs be relaxed, don't straighten your legs so much that your knees lock.
3. Stand up straight but don't stand like a soldier on parade or a gymnast. Soldiers and gymnasts look very smart but they don't have to talk at the same time as they are standing to attention.
4. Keep your head up – you don't want to talk to the floor.
5. A good way to make sure your words go where you want them to is to imagine that your words are like balls. If you wanted to throw a ball at your listeners you would aim it at them not at the floor.

## 10 TOP TIPS FOR CHILDREN

1. Open your mouth. No one will know how clever you are if they can't hear what you have to say.
2. Be enthusiastic – if you sound excited about your talk your listeners will be excited.
3. Speak slowly and pause after each new thought.
4. If you go wrong – don't worry. I expect most people listening won't even notice, especially if you ignore it.
5. Practice your talk OUT LOUD.
6. Try to include one thing in your talk that the listeners won't already know. Then they'll go away thinking that they've learnt something new from you.
7. Look at the people you are talking to.
8. If you say 'um' or 'ahh' when you can't think of what you want to say next, try to think 'um' or 'ahh' instead of saying it.
9. Try not to fidget when you are speaking.
10. If people ask you questions at the end of your talk, make sure you listen carefully. It's a lot easier to answer a question when you've listened to it properly.

## TOPICS FOR YOUR TALK

1. How to use a computer
2. How to make a birthday card
3. Why children like Christmas
4. How to stop hiccups
5. Why I like listening to Robbie Williams (or any other singer)
6. How to play Monopoly
7. The importance of a healthy diet
8. How to write a letter
9. All about Harry Potter
10. Why it's important to brush our teeth
11. My Neighbours
12. Things I like
13. How I would run a school
14. Leisure
15. Dreams
16. My lucky day
17. Pets as therapy
18. Choosing clothes for other people
19. Grandparents
20. Uninvited guests

## POEMS WRITTEN TO BE READ ALOUD BY CHILDREN

My Puppy by S. G.

I love my little puppy  
With his big brown fluffy ears.  
I take him for a walk each day  
But all he wants to do is play.  
His little legs just run and run  
Until it's late and time for bed,  
And then we snuggle up together.  
He's my best friend and will be forever.

My Football Team by S.G.

Some football teams wear red and white,  
They look amazing, what a sight!  
But what about their football skills,  
Are they boring or full of thrills?

We tackle, shoot, then score a goal,  
We look a mess, but we're in control.  
Our kit is strange, a cricketers cream.  
But do we care? No, we're the winning team.

Teddy Bear by S.G.

My teddy bear sits at the table  
And behaves as well as he is able.  
He loves to eat a piece of cake,  
And gets rid of crumbs by having a shake.  
I have to help clear up his mess  
Because when asked to work, he's motionless!

## Jumping by S.G.

I love to jump up on my bed  
But mum gets angry, her face goes red.  
My bed won't break, I'm only small,  
But mum says I'll break if I fall.

## Dragon by S.G.

Underneath the castle lives a dragon in the cold.  
He's very very grumpy and very very old.  
He hides away from children who visit just to stare,  
And roars a roar so loud, that it gives us all a scare.  
He keeps his dungeon hot by breathing out a flame  
And if he happens to frighten you, he's very glad you came

## Sleep by S.G.

When I'm tired I try to sleep,  
I close my eyes and dare not peep

## I'd love to be a Pirate by S.G.

A pirate journey is thrill after thrill  
With big strong waves (that make me ill).  
The ride is bumpy but they still steer the ship,  
Tie knots galore, wash decks, each trip.  
Their reward is treasure, money and gold  
that they love to count until they're old.  
Yes, I'd love to travel with Captain Nick,  
But all that excitement might make me sick.

## Old Lady Remembers by S.G.

An old lady sits by her old garden fence  
She looks at her flowers and thinks it makes sense  
To plant some more Tulips, where once was a shed.  
The favourite place of her husband, now dead.  
She sits and she smiles as remembers the past  
How she and old Albert would sit on the grass  
They'd picnic on cakes she'd made to save pence.  
The money they saved bought the new garden fence.

## Noises by S.G.

A cow says moo  
A dove says coo  
A Cockerel says cock-a-doodle-doo

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Get more form your sports or dance teacher**

You've looked through the phone book, spent hours on the Internet, asked everyone you know, and finally you've found yourself the best coach in your area. He has the right qualifications and plenty of experience so how can you make sure that you benefit from all this expertise?

It's easy – make sure that you talk to your coach and more importantly, make sure that he can understand what you are saying. We all know how important it is that coaches can communicate well but spare a thought for the coach – if you don't speak to him or if your speech is muddled and unclear how can he help you? Your coach will have to guess how you feel and if you don't speak to him he may guess wrong! Don't pretend that you understand if you don't. He's there to help you but can only help if he knows what's wrong.

#### **Fear**

A lot of children are too frightened to speak to their coach – they think that what they have to say will be considered irrelevant and consequently they speak very quietly, very quickly and often look at the ground rather than at the coach. Children also have a habit of leaving things to the last minute, so they'll try to speak to the coach at the end of the lesson when, perhaps, the coach needs to be somewhere else and doesn't give the child his full attention.

If you know you have a problem (perhaps you've been practising something all week and it just won't go right or you might have a niggling injury) tell your coach at the start of the session, this gives you the time to explain properly and gives him the time to put things right. If problems are left until the end, both you and your coach will end up rushing and this can cause misunderstandings. If you try and speak to your coach at the end of the lesson, you'll make him late for his next lesson, imagine how annoyed you'd be if he was always late for your lesson because someone always stopped him from finishing on time. You wouldn't be very happy. You may also have parents waiting for you and they'll get annoyed if you're late out of your lesson.

## **Aim**

The sound that comes out of your mouth needs to be directed where you want it to go. You wouldn't hit a tennis ball down the line if you wanted it to go cross court. Think of words as tennis balls – don't direct them at the ground (unless you're talking to a mouse), aim them where you want them to go. Look at the person you're talking to – direct the sound at them. There really is nothing more irritating to a coach than not being able to hear what you're saying. If you had to ask your coach to repeat everything he says to you, you would either give up or just guess what he was saying. Your coach will feel the same about you if he can't hear what you are asking him.

## **Open Mouth**

Don't forget to open your mouth – this seems obvious but it's surprising how many people (especially young teenage boys) attempt to speak without opening their mouths. If your mouth is shut the sound can't come out! Try hitting a ball and not moving your arm – it's impossible. You can't speak clearly if you don't move your jaw. Ventriloquists manage to talk without opening their mouths but I doubt if they could be heard across a tennis court or above dance music. If you get the chance, watch a good singer singing, an opera singer is ideal but some modern or pop singers sing properly. See how they open their mouths so the sound can come out. If you like singing, this is an ideal way of exercising your mouth. Sing along with your favourite songs, making sure the sound can come out of a very open mouth. If you hate singing try opening your mouth as wide as you can and making funny shapes. The funnier the face the more you will be exercising the muscles around your mouth.

Or try saying:

'My ball is flying high over the line.' With every 'eye' sound open your mouth as wide as possible.

These exercises also help prevent getting a double chin later in life!

## **Slow Down**

When people (children and adults) get nervous they always talk too fast and blurt things out in a hurry.

If your coach is trying to get to another lesson or tidy up, make it easy for him to listen to you.

Speak slowly, the wider you open your mouth the slower you the slower you will speak. How many times has your coach shouted 'don't rush your stroke?' Well, don't rush your words.

Give your coach a chance to take in what you have said. Stop between each new thought. This will give you a chance to take a breath and think about what you're going to say next.

In tennis, imagine you hit you a winning backhand down the line, you stop to get your breath back, you let the crowd cheer and then you walk back to serve the next point. You wouldn't dream of running back to the base line immediately and starting the next point. You must have noticed how some tennis players bounce the ball before they serve. It's like a full stop in speech, they are pausing and waiting for the time to be right to start again. Do exactly the same when speaking. Pause, get your breath back, give the coach a chance to acknowledge what you have said (even if he only nods) and then you can start the next sentence. Speaking slowly is quicker in the long run. If you speak too quickly, you will be asked to repeat what you have said. If you had spoken more slowly in the first place you would only have had to say it once!

## **Practice**

If you know before your lesson that you want to ask your coach about a particular point and you're a bit worried about asking him - practice saying it out loud. Don't assume that thinking about what you're going to say will be of much help. You need to say it out loud! You wouldn't expect to improve your serve by thinking about it - you need to do it.

Practice talking to an object. Talk to your bed or your clock. If your coach is a lot taller than you are, make sure you practice talking to an object that is about the same height as your coach. Don't be frightened of the sound of your own voice, practice talking loudly and quietly, get to know your voice and don't try to change any accent you might have - it's part of what makes you what you are.

## **Listen**

Always listen to what your coach is saying. You can't return a tennis ball if you don't concentrate and watch it coming towards you. I'm sure you're all aware of what happens if you take your eye off the ball even for a second - the result is that you'll miss. You'll find it very difficult to do what your coach says if you don't listen.

Don't guess what the coach is saying, if you do, you'll probably be wrong and then you'll look and feel stupid. You expect your coach to listen to you so do him the courtesy of listening to him. When you do answer him talk in sentences, not one word answers and avoid just nodding if possible. If you're not sure if he's joking or being serious, look at his face – is he smiling?

## **Look**

Always try to look at your coach when he's talking to you. It's very easy when you are running around to try and gain a few minutes rest by avoiding your coach.

Be careful not to turn your back on your coach when he is talking to you. You'll probably say 'but I wouldn't dream of doing that'. But, think of all the times you are running back to start the next drill – I bet the coach is either praising you or correcting you and if you're running back into position you'll have your back to the coach. If he's going to help you to improve he needs to be able to see your face. Your expression will show if you are pleased with what you have just done or annoyed and he'll be able to tell from your facial expression if you understand what he's telling you. If he can see that you realise you have gone wrong he won't have to spend time explaining it to you. This means there will be more time to work on things that need working on.

The solution is simple - when you're returning to your starting position run backwards so that your face can be seen.

## **Correcting you**

If your lesson has finished and your coach wants to talk to you, be polite, if it is not possible to stay and talk (perhaps you have parents waiting for you) or you really are much too tired to concentrate on what he's saying, explain this to him. Your coach will appreciate that you want to be alert so that you can concentrate on what he says. It is better to explain to your coach that you can't listen at the moment than to try and listen while you are worrying about what your parents will say. When your coach corrects you, don't get annoyed with him. Listen to what he has to say, you never know, it might make sense and don't pretend to understand if you don't – it's not worth it. He's doing his job and don't forget the reason you attend his lessons in the first place, if you don't want to be corrected then you shouldn't have lessons!

**Thank you**

Finally, it's strange how coaches always get the blame when things go wrong. If a player wins, though, it's because the player is 'talented' not because the coach is brilliant and has worked incredibly hard to get the best out of the player. Remember to thank your coach from time to time. You want him to take time and help you improve your game, you want him to praise you when you do something good, so take the time to tell him that you enjoyed your lesson. If you want to be a successful tennis player you'll need a good relationship with your coach and if you can talk to each other you've got a good start.

At the end of each session don't be frightened to ask your coach if there is anything particular you need to practice before your next lesson. If the coach can see that you are trying to help yourself he will be more inclined to help you.

It has been said that we have bad teachers' not bad pupils, this is debatable. Pupils who can communicate with their coach stand a much better chance of success. Remember that communication is always a two way process.

**Chapter 10****31 TOP TIPS FOR A GREAT STRESS FREE SPEECH**

1. Open your mouth. It doesn't matter how brilliant your ideas are, if the sound can't get out of your mouth no one will hear you.

2. Listeners always remember the last thing you said best – so decide what you want to end your speech with and work backwards.

3. Find out who will be in the audience. Are they young with a very short concentration span, are they elderly with hearing problems, are they knowledgeable about your topic.

In the case of a wedding speech do they know the bride and groom very well. If it's a sports presentation do they know about your sport? Adjust your speech to suit the audience. Don't use jargon if the audience are unlikely to be familiar with the terms.

4. Make sure any speech or presentation has a beginning, a middle and an end.

5. If you are giving a wedding speech, eulogy, farewell speech etc. find out from friends and family of the people honoured if there are any details that they don't want to be made public and any information that they would like the guests to know about which will make the speech more personal.

6. At the beginning of your speech explain who you are and why you are giving this speech. It is not unknown for the audience to miss the first part of a speech because they are too busy wondering who you are. A simple, 'I'm John and I'm the Grooms best friend' or 'I'm Dorothy and I am the deceased's sister'.

7. Get straight to the point.

8. Be enthusiastic about whatever it is you're talking about. If it's your sport – sound excited, if it's about a person be warm and friendly. Your audience won't get excited if you sound fed up!
9. Try to keep each point in your speech as brief as possible - don't ramble!
10. Include at least one point in your speech that the audience don't already know. They'll go away thinking that they've learnt something from you.
11. Pause after each new thought to give your audience the chance to take in what has just been said.
12. Look at the person you're talking to. Don't look over their heads or down at the ground.
13. Listen to what other people say to you – you'll then be able to respond in an intelligent way.
14. Speak slowly.
15. Breathe correctly. Keep your shoulders down and keep your neck muscles relaxed. Use your diaphragm to control the air.
16. Exercise your organs of speech. The tongue and lips need daily exercise so that they can move from one sound to the next quickly and effortlessly.
17. Stand and sit correctly. Let the muscles in the back of your legs relax – don't lock your knees. The only people who stand to attention (soldiers, ballet dancers and gymnasts to name a few) don't have to talk at the same time!

18. Stand or sit still. A speaker who fidgets all the time can annoy the listeners.

19. Wear comfortable clothes. Don't try to squeeze into clothes that are too tight. If you're at a wedding, you might not have too much say in what you wear. If they're a bit uncomfortable remember to loosen the neck, take off your shoes etc in a discreet way just before you have to say your speech!

20. Avoid saying 'um' and 'uh' by thinking them instead of saying them.

21. Be aware of any favourite words you may use. Do you say, 'okay' or 'yeah;' at the end of every sentence? If you do – try thinking the word instead of saying it.

22. Practice out loud. You wouldn't expect to be able to learn to swim without getting in the water or learn to drive without getting in the car. You can't expect to be an expert at speaking out loud if you only ever practice a speech by reading it to yourself!!

23. If, during the course of your presentation or speech you are trying to explain a point – don't get annoyed if the audience don't understand you. Things always take longer to explain than you think and it might be your fault – not the audience.

24. Think before you speak. Are you likely to upset anyone by what you are about to say?

25. If you feel more comfortable using notes – do so- don't try to hide them or be too frightened to look at them.

26. Pause. Don't be frightened of silence. Being able to pause and be silent is a sign of confidence.

27. Smile – all the time. Except, perhaps, at a funeral. Smiling causes saliva in your mouth and this will stop your mouth from drying out.

28. If you want to read your speech – make sure you practice your reading aloud skills. This includes looking up on the important words.

29. Look upon your speech as an extended conversation in which the audience don't get a chance to verbally join in.

30. If you do go wrong – don't make too many apologies (if any). The chances are that the listeners won't have noticed and even if they have – if you carry on as though nothing has happened they'll soon be thinking about the next point you're making.

31. Please don't wear sunglasses when you are talking to people. Sunglasses were introduced so that judges could pass sentence without people seeing their facial expression. As a good communicator you'll want everyone to see your facial expression – won't you?

## **Chapter 11**

### **Voice Exercises**

Doing these vocal exercises daily will not only help your voice but keep you young looking as well!!

All of these drills must be said out loud. Repeat each one twice a day.

#### **Tongue agility**

Work the tongue hard

1. Two little toddlers playing table tennis
2. Twenty two players taken out for a treat
3. Fifteen meter tracks are shorter than fifty meter tracks
4. Adults who play table tennis are extremely fit

#### **Consonant sounds**

Sound all the consonant sounds in each word

1. Badminton racquets are lighter than cricket bats
2. Isn't it time you tried the high jump
3. You need to attack if you want to win
4. Hitting tennis balls while sitting down is terribly difficult

#### **Resonance**

Hum the 'm' and 'n' sounds

1. Now is the time to introduce netball
2. Swimming is fun in the summer months
3. My martial arts instructor always smiles when he wins
4. Mini tennis is fun for small children

**Lip agility**

1. Betty plays competitive badminton
2. Weightlifters acquire many muscles
3. Boys love to play billiards
4. When I play polo I usually win

**Vowel Sounds**

Open the mouth as wide as possible for all the vowel sounds

**i (eye)**

1. My smile is wide as I cross the winning line
2. I cried when they scored a try
3. I'm too frightened to try and jump that high
4. I try to smile even while I am losing

**o (oh)**

1. Throw it slowly into the yellow box
2. Follow the arrows to avoid the snow
3. My coach is called Joe
4. Go and show Flo a Judo throw

**a (ay)**

1. I'm afraid you didn't make the relay team
2. Croquet is played at eight
3. There isn't enough space in this place for a race
4. Stay there Jay and pick up the weight

**a (ah)**

1. Martial Arts won't harm my arm
2. Stay calm, don't argue, I'll spar with you
3. My car can go fast
4. I can't lift the bar very far with my bad arm

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm Serena and I live in Dorset, England with my two daughters and my dog.

When I was about ten, my school had a parents evening - you know the type of thing -the parents go along and chat to the teachers to find out how their children are getting on.

I remember my teacher well - he was young and not very chatty (at least not with ten year olds). During the course of the conversation with my mum, he told her that I seemed happy enough but that he couldn't remember speaking to me during the year!

My mum was **furious**. I was an incredibly shy girl and if he didn't speak to me I certainly wasn't going to go out of my way to speak to him.

As a result of this I was taken to elocution lessons - my mum had gone as a young girl. I thoroughly enjoyed these lessons and took - and passed - various exams in speech and drama and bible reading and took part every year in the Bournemouth Festival.

These lessons gave me confidence but didn't change the way I sound - I still have a Dorset accent and I believe we shouldn't all sound the same. You shouldn't be able to pick out people who've had elocution lessons because you think they sound 'artificial'. Both my daughters have slight Dorset accents and I have to admit that I feel very pleased with myself when people say to me 'Don't you daughters speak nicely!'

I was still a very shy girl but I knew how to speak when I had to. At my senior school, the different classes used to take it in turns to participate in the morning assemblies. We had a very elderly Maths teacher who claimed that the only time he could hear the assembly was when I did a reading! In return for this I was excused Maths tests in his class. (Luckily my maths didn't suffer - I went on to pass 'A' level Maths).

I took a degree in Law and Economics and went on to become a trainee accountant - for all of 12 weeks!! Sitting in an office all day was not for me!

Years later when my daughters were 2 and 5 I went back to the same elocution teacher and studied to take my teaching exams and gained my **A.N.E.A.(Speech Training)**.

Since then I've taught sports coaches, business men, health care workers, stroke victims, in schools, privately and with national charities.

I've also written articles for various magazines worldwide.

I'm still a shy person **BUT** when I have to speak in front of groups or to strangers I know all the secrets to make it a bit easier for myself!

I understand totally how it feels to be frightened to speak and I still have trouble using the phone – I don't feel in control because I can't see the facial expression of the person I'm talking to, but I am getting better.

This book and my website explain how easy it is to speak confidently using common sense tips that I've used over the years.

I hope they help you as much as they've helped me!!