

Why Public Speaking and Articulation Matter More Than Ever

By Nethra Naresh



Last week, I shared my journey: from shaky arguments at my first tournament to finding my voice through debate. This week, I want to talk about something deeper: the difference between public speaking and articulation, and why it matters.

Every Word Counts

In the world of debate, every little word, every pause, and every hand movement means something. Learning this idea made me recognize that every little bit counts in being both an effective leader and communicator. Strong communicators can bridge divides, simplify complex issues, and inspire action. In contrast, even groundbreaking ideas can fall flat if they are not conveyed with clarity and confidence.

Think about Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. His message of hope and change wasn't new - many before him had spoken about unity, progress, and a better future. But it was how he delivered that message that moved millions. Through his pacing, tone, and carefully chosen language, he made complex challenges feel personal and hopeful. He didn't just speak but he connected. And that connection fueled a movement.

Or, take for instance, the case of Rosalind Franklin, the brilliant scientist whose work was critical to discovering the structure of DNA. While her research was groundbreaking, she wasn't the one who communicated it widely. It was Watson and Crick, who presented the findings with clarity and confidence, that became the faces of the discovery. How we share ideas determines the impact that the idea itself has.

Within the Classroom

Public speaking is widely recognized as an essential skill in education, leadership, and professional life. We're encouraged to present, participate, and speak up. But while we practice managing nerves or structuring speeches, we rarely focus on the skill that makes our ideas stick: articulation.

In our current system, public speaking is taught mostly through repetition and prepared scripts. That works - until it doesn't.

What about impromptu speaking? What happens when we're asked a question we didn't expect? When we have to think on our feet in a meeting, classroom, or interview?

It's like when you're at the doctor's office, and they ask about your symptoms, but you just look at your mom to explain. That moment? It's not about not knowing what's going on but it's about not being ready to articulate.

In fact, a 2024 study found that 73% of students who practiced impromptu speaking felt more afraid of being asked questions, afraid of being judged, and afraid of making mistakes. 87% reported losing ideas, forgetting words, and feeling nervous when speaking on the spot. That's a huge indicator that while students may perform well with preparation, they're not always equipped to think and articulate on the spot.

Beyond the Classroom

This gap doesn't disappear after graduation. In fact, it only grows more noticeable in professional settings. Whether it's explaining a bill in a policy meeting, making a pitch in a business setting, or presenting data in a scientific discussion: poor articulation can mean the difference between being heard and being overlooked.

Articulation is not just about speaking loudly or confidently; it's about the how of communication. Are your words coming across as intended? Are you engaging your audience? Are you ensuring that complex ideas are understood by everyone, not just the experts in the room?

Even in professional settings, it's not uncommon for someone to deliver a really clean, well-researched presentation, only to get tripped up by a follow-up question that maybe they didn't prepare for. The energy shifts and the message gets lost. That moment shows an important truth: the ability to think and speak clearly in the moment is just as important as the message itself.

Looking Ahead

In next week's blog, I'll dive into how articulation can be actively implemented in the classroom- not just as an add-on, but as an essential part of how we teach, learn, and lead. From small changes in how we structure presentations to larger shifts in classroom culture, I'll explore tangible strategies that empower students to speak with clarity and confidence.

CITATIONS:

Maulida, Neng & Faridah, Didih & Tarwana, Wawan. (2024). An analysis of students' speaking anxiety in performing impromptu presentation. Journal of English Education Program (JEEP). 11. 21. 10.25157/(jeep).v11i1.13554.