

### **Workshop # 7: Effective Public Speaking and Technical Presentation**

Speaker: Ms. Amber Erickson, Adjunct Instructor, Department of Communication, University of Cincinnati

Date: July 10, 2008

Time: 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

This workshop was given by Ms. Amber Erickson, Adjunct Instructor, Department of Communication, University of Cincinnati on July 10, 2008 from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. (3 hours). Ms. Erickson received both her degrees, a B.A. in English in 2000 and a M.A. in Communications in 2004, from University of Cincinnati. For the last five years she has taught speech. She is co-author of the instructor's manual for the best-selling speech textbook, *The Challenge of Effective Public Speaking*. This manual is currently used along with the text book in the Department of Communication. It is in use across the country. Currently, she is working on a new persuasive speaking textbook with three co-authors also in the department. The photograph in Figure 1 below shows the workshop in session.



**Figure 1. Ms. Erickson Presenting to the REU Students**

This workshop was organized after the REU participants had made their first bi-weekly presentation on July 3, 2008, which Ms. Erickson attended. This provided her an opportunity to understand the research topic being pursued by each REU team and observe each team's strengths and weaknesses and style of presentation as a baseline measure. She used these observations as a basis to start the workshop discussion. She also assigned a task to each REU participant to prepare a two to three slide presentation about a personal experience.

Ms. Amber Erickson, in her workshop, discussed the four main points of public speaking, Content/Organization, Visual Aids, Delivery, and Group Delivery. After a lecture on these topics, each REU student gave a presentation (see Figure 2) about a personal experience before the group in order to

gain a bit of experience and to have it critiqued by Ms. Erickson. Upon the conclusion of the workshop, each student received a 'cheat sheet' covering the essentials of each aspect of public speaking, and a sheet of paper with Ms. Erickson's comments on their individual presentation.



**Figure 2. REU Participant Making a Presentation**

The first of the above points, content and organization, concerns what material and how that material is presented to an audience. Ms. Erickson stresses that a strong start and end to a presentation is important because this determines not only how listeners feel about you and what you have to say, but also the extent to which they are likely to remember the essential information. A logical flow of material is also important. This will assure that your presentation is well remembered and understood. In order to organize the presentation outline two to five main categories within it, including, but not limited to, background, method, findings, analysis, and limitations. The introduction should grab the attention of the audience and inform them about the topic and what the rest of your presentation will be about. Credibility can be established during this time and the tone for the speech may also be set. The conclusion is the last thing the audience will think about and it will summarize what was said throughout the presentation. It is important to wrap up the topic, end strong, and thank the people who were involved in preparation of the presentation during the conclusion. The transitions within the body of the presentation should be smooth and specific. This will help the audience know when one topic is done, and the next has begun. Ms. Erickson presented examples to illustrate her points.

During the delivery of the presentation, there are three main ideas to remember: eye contact, confidence and conversational quality. One's delivery of a presentation very much affects how the audience receives the information and how they evaluate the authority of the presenters. The speaker should ideally come off as natural and enthusiastic in front of an audience. If the audience can relate to the speaker, they will be more likely to be receptive and remain interested in what is being said. Eye contact keeps the audience's attention. It is important to include everyone when delivering a presentation, do not just focus on one person or one side of the room. Confidence establishes credibility, to do this, speak clearly and loudly, do not fidget with things while speaking, have good posture, and avoid filler words like um. Conversational quality shows confidence in talking with people. In order to

accomplish this keep the rate of speech at a medium level and vary the tone of voice so that the audience does not get bored.

The use of visual aids during presentations was the second aspect that was covered. The common theme throughout this part of the lecture was 'cutting the fat' from your visual aids. The best visual aids are ones that do enough to look professional, illustrate your points, and nothing more. Presenting too much information will cause the audience to lose interest, and making your slides too busy or colorful will distract the audience from what you are saying. Visual aids should only be used if they help clarify your point, never use them if they are not necessary. Visual aids should always enhance a presentation and never distract or take away from it. It is important to know the audience size before choosing a visual aid so that a visual aid of the correct size can be chosen.

In order to prepare for the question and answer period, think about what was not completely covered due to lack of time, or the holes that were in the presentation that someone may need clarification for. Make up mock questions and prepare the answers. If the answer to a question is not known, look it up and get back to the person who asked the question.

As for group presentations, the most important thing is to be well coordinated. The handover from one speaker to another should be well rehearsed and smooth, without any break. Group members should dress similarly to create a professional, cohesive image. Care also should be taken to choreograph the responsibilities of each member during the presentation: who presents what information, who manages the visual aids when a given person is speaking, etc.