

## Communication skills for presentations by Melinda Gamlen

<b>Age:</b>	Adults
<b>Level:</b>	Intermediate–advanced
<b>Time:</b>	60 minutes
<b>Objectives:</b>	To raise awareness of and practise non-verbal communication and sentence stress in the context of presenting
<b>Key skill:</b>	Speaking
<b>Materials:</b>	One copy of the Obama speech card for every three students (cut up as indicated); one copy of the Observation table per student

### Procedure

- Ask students to discuss these questions in small groups:
  - What's important in non-verbal communication when presenting in your first language? Is it similar to presenting in English, or different?
  - What do you find most challenging about your own non-verbal communication when presenting?
- Conduct some feedback.
- Elicit 'Barack Obama' and explain that he is considered a great orator (speaker). Tell the class that they are going to watch a short video extract that demonstrates his skill.
- Show students the video (link below) of Barack Obama with the sound OFF. Students note down his effective use of non-verbal communication.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA3O2VguXks](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA3O2VguXks)  
(watch to 35 seconds)

### Key (suggested answers):

- stance – facing audience, confident and stable, good posture*
- eye contact – inclusive of whole audience*

- facial expression – serious; appropriate for the 'tone' of the speech*
  - avoiding 'tics' – excessive movement of head, touching face or clothing, scratching, etc*
  - pausing – used to support structure and meaning, to keep the audience listening and allow them time to 'absorb'*
5. Give each student a copy of the Obama speech card, and show the video again, this time with the sound ON. Students mark up the card to show where Obama uses pausing effectively.

### Key (suggested answers):

*A more perfect union. / 221 years ago, / in a hall that still stands across the street, / a group of men gathered and with these simple words launched America's improbable experiment / in democracy. Farmers and scholars, / statesmen and patriots who had travelled across the ocean to escape tyranny and persecution / finally made real their declaration of independence / at a Philadelphia Convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.*

- Now ask the students to discuss these questions in small groups:
  - What is sentence stress (*the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables over a sentence*), and why is it important in English? (*it highlights important words in a sentence*)
  - Grammatically, which words are normally stressed? (*'Content words': nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc*)
  - What is the importance of stress when presenting to an audience? (*Conveying meaning and 'signposting' the structure of the talk*)

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7. Show the video again. Students underline those words that carry the most stress. Their answers may differ.

### Key (suggested answers):

*A more perfect **union**, 221 years **ago**, in a hall that still stands across the **street**, a group of men **gathered** and with these simple words launched America's improbable experiment in **democracy**. **Farmers** and **scholars, statesmen** and **patriots**, who had travelled across the ocean to escape **tyranny** and **persecution**, finally made real their declaration of **independence** at a **Philadelphia Convention** that lasted through the spring of **1787**.*

8. Pairs or small groups practise and then 'present' to each other using the Obama speech extract on the cards as their script. The listeners must observe the speakers' non-verbal communication and listen to their use of sentence stress. They should make notes in the Observation table.
9. Students give each other feedback. You should also give positive feedback, where possible.

### Optional extensions

- Focus on rhythm. Point out the importance of the schwa in achieving natural-sounding rhythm. Students listen and identify where Obama uses the schwa, then practise the speech again using the schwa.
- You could find another Obama speech in which he is not behind a podium, to include work on gesture.

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Communicative feature	Name and notes
1. Stance – facing audience, confident and stable, feet hip-width apart; good posture, arms relaxed at sides, not leaning	
2. Eye contact – inclusive of whole audience	
3. Facial expression – appropriate for the content (e.g. serious)	
4. Avoiding 'tics' – excessive movement of head, touching face or clothing, scratching, etc	
5. Pausing – used to support structure and meaning, to keep the audience listening and allow them time to 'absorb'	
6. Stress – stressing the correct words	