

In the previous issue of *The English Teacher* (Vol. XII, No. 3, Dec. 1984), the topic, 'The Value of Public Speaking' was covered. In that article, the different components which make up the skill of public speaking were mentioned – 'confidence building', 'speech preparation', 'delivery techniques' and 'using the body to communicate effectively'. Out of these equally important components, the first component which was dealt with in detail was 'Confidence Building'.

In this article, another component which can help to perfect the skill of public speaking – Speech Preparation, is dealt with. Just as it is important for a person to speak with confidence, it is equally important that the area that is spoken on is well organised and is of interest to the audience. How does one go about doing this?

The first three basic questions that one should consider when asked to give a speech are:

- (i) What is the subject/topic?
- (ii) How much time has been allotted for the speech?
- (iii) Who will the audience be?

The speaker should find out whether he has a choice over the subject or whether it is one that has been assigned to him. If the speaker has a choice, it is imperative that he speaks on a subject that is interesting and one that he is quite knowledgeable about. To be able to carry over the enthusiasm and conviction for a particular subject, the speaker himself must believe in it.

The second point is to work on a speech bearing in mind the time allotted for the speech. A speaker's responsibility is to be certain what the time allotment is for the presentation of the speech and for question time (questions posed by members of the audience to the speaker). The speaker then works on the speech within the framework of the time provided. The irresponsible speaker is one who goes on talking well into question time and does not provide the opportunity for members of the audience to question him/her on points that may not have been very clear or related points which may not have been covered. Question time usually provides the opportunity for knowledge enhancement arising from clarifi-

cation of particular questions/points by the speaker. It is not excusable for a speaker to say, 'I got carried away', because it is the responsibility of any speaker to ensure that he sticks to the time allotted to him.

A very common mistake of speakers who are new to the game of public speaking is to select a topic which is too broad to be treated adequately in the time available. The tighter the speech is, the better organized the speech will be.

The third point is the analysis of the type of audience. To be able to pitch the speech at the right level, it is important to know who the members of the audience are and what they expect. This will help the speaker decide whether to talk more simply if it is a group that is new to the topic or to talk in greater detail at a higher level if it is to a group that has already been exposed to the subject area.

After having dealt with the above three points, and having zeroed in on the objective of the speech and the level at which it is to be pitched, then one should delve deeper into the subject. The importance of this step is expressed by the following quotation: 'Mediocre speaking is often the inevitable and inappropriate reflection of mediocre thinking and the consequence of imperfect acquaintance with the subject at hand.' Therefore it is an essential part of the process to spend time looking up material that will support the speaker's arguments from areas of history, statistics, economics, politics and from established authorities in the field. This will ensure that you do not merely skim over the surface.

We have often heard the proverb 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. In speech preparation the above principle should be adhered to through the use of audio-visual aids. It will greatly enhance a speech to have its points emphasised, clarified or summarised by using pictures, charts or diagrams. For example, it would be more effective to present figures/statistics in an organised chart form rather than to rattle them off in a speech.

Most people usually tend to hesitate talking about their experiences which may be related to

the topic of the speech. Speakers can be assured that most audiences enjoy listening to episodes of human experience in speeches. Speeches should be humanized and wherever possible experiences of either the speaker, his friends, family or persons he has read about should be introduced in as relevant a manner as possible. The only time audiences would get put off by the human element is when it appears in an egotistical, domineering form with the speaker saying, 'I did this....' and 'I did that....', 'I impressed so and so with....'

If a potential speaker follows the above procedures when preparing a speech, he/she should be able to write up an organised, interesting speech. This would provide the speaker with the content matter which he needs before he/she can deliver the speech effectively in public. But as has often been stressed, one needs to practise and gradually perfect the various components before one can become a successful public speaker.