

Struggling to say what you mean? Instead of tripping up on your words, here's how you can make them pack a punch, write **Edmund Ho** and **Nicola Chan**

Unleashing the true power of your voice

Edited by Charlotte Ames-Ettridge

If the thought of speaking in front of an audience brings you out in a cold sweat, you're not alone. Even if you don't dread the spotlight, you still might not be presenting the best version of yourself. Luckily, like anything else, to be a great public speaker, you just need to be equipped with the right tools.

So we consulted the experts: All Voice Talent offers voice coaching for young people at its workshop, "Speak Up! Voice and Confidence", and we decided to try it out. We prepared a speech ahead of the session, then delivered it, so voice coach David Pope could review it for us. Here's what we learned:

Take your time

One of my main problems at the start of the session, although I didn't know it, was that I speak too fast. Whenever I've given presentations in the past, I thought my rapid-fire speaking would make the presentation less stiff. Little did I know, this does the exact opposite. The weight of each word isn't clear to the listener, and they can't follow the flow of speech.

What David taught me was to slow down; by slowing down, the true meaning of the words come through, and the audience is more likely to give a second thought to what I am saying.

What's more, it's important to break down a piece into manageable chunks. Taking pauses whenever appropriate, or slowing down to give shape to a sentence will help the audience to understand an idea more clearly. If a speech is delivered in one headlong rush, the audience can't and won't make sense of it.

David made me practise reading out commercials accompanied by music; this ensures that the speed matches the tone. The exercise showed me that reading at the appropriate pace really enhances the presentation.

Another important lesson is the amount of acting required when delivering any speech. All forms of spoken

word, be it a presentation, a pitch, or an actual speech, involve the speaker's emotion. Nobody wants a person who drones on and on; the emotion has to match the words being said.

At the beginning of the session I had a lot of trouble adapting my voice to the written material; I found that my voice didn't match the emotion needed. I could do some really well, like sarcasm, but not others, like empathy. I learned it is important to decide on a tone before speaking, so you can really get into the mood of the piece.

The fundamental goal of any spoken piece is to communicate a message; your speed, pausing, and tone all contribute to how your audience understands you. Before the workshop, I never understood their importance; but now, I think I've taken the first steps towards being a good speaker.

Edmund

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Say it like you mean it

There's always at least a literal meaning in every word and phrase we say. But how we choose to say them can determine how our listeners interpret them.

I learned through practising with David that the same

sentence, spoken in different tones or with different emphasis on certain words, can have very different effects.

Imagine someone whispering "take care" in a soft, gentle voice. Now imagine it in a bland, monotone voice. The first would probably sound sincere and loving, but the second would feel cold and aloof. But don't worry, you can use this to your advantage. Do you want to come across as an authority figure, or someone who is approachable and friendly? You can convey either simply by changing your voice.

I learned that intonation also makes the meaning of your words clearer. For example, using a falling pitch at the end of a statement will make it carry more weight, while using a rising pitch at the end of a question might just help you get whatever it is you're asking for!

What's more, putting stress on, and pauses in between, the right words can help you avoid ambiguity and might just spare you from an embarrassing situation. In one exercise, David made us read out the words, "let's eat Grandpa". By stressing the word "grandpa" and not leaving a pause after "eat", the phrase goes from being a friendly invitation to a family member to making people think you're a cannibal!

The most fun part of the workshop was getting to be the voiceover for a theme park promo. The written text had to be read to jolly, upbeat music, so I needed to use more emphasis and make my tone sound more lighthearted to convey enthusiasm. It really made me step out of my comfort zone.

At the end of the workshop, I re-read the same speech I had read at the start, and realised I how much difference the session had made to the way I approached it. It's all about making the most of your voice.

Nicola

To find out more about the workshop, and other courses for teens, head to www.allvoicetalent.com