

October 4, 2004

Dear Candidates,

Cheers to all of you for taking part in the Fukuzawa Trophy contest elimination, and congratulations especially to the finalists taking part in the contest at Keio Mita Campus on November 6.

I prefer to discuss speeches in person so we can exchange ideas right on the spot and I can get to know the person behind the manuscript. However, I will most likely not have a chance to meet many of you, due to many factors. So I decided to write a little memo to share my overall impressions with you and give you some idea of what I value in speech.

I listen to the tape first to test whether I can understand the spoken message, THEN look at the manuscript. If I cannot make out what the speaker is saying without a manuscript, I give the speech a very low evaluation.

Why? This is a SPEECH contest, not an ESSAY contest. You are judged solely by what comes into the ear. If the audience cannot recognize what you are saying because of poor articulation, your speech has no effect on the audience. Therefore, your score really should be a zero, *no matter how magnificent your manuscript is*. Have you ever heard of a speech contest where the manuscript is distributed to the audience for speeches to be delivered that day?

After listening to the tape recording, I review the “contents”---from an opposite point of view, as much as possible---and then look for any glaring grammatical mistakes and misspelling.

While re-reading the manuscript, as well as my notes from listening to the tape, I constantly ask the question “Why?” *Why should I think this way? Why is this action plan better than others? Why does it matter? Why does this issue remain unresolved, after so many speeches and lectures were given all over the place on the same topic?*

Why? I am interested in how much thought the speaker has put into the subject matter after gathering all the facts. I believe that’s a big part of where originality comes

from. Anyone can state the same facts and give the same action plans, but I feel that the “Why?” process behind it can be quite varied from person to person.

Asking yourself, “Why?” is a very painful process when you do it to the fullest...I remember so well those nightmarish days when I got totally stuck before the Fukuzawa contest 12 years ago. Even while I ate, bathed, and rode the train to school, all I could think of was, “How can I make my message convincing?” (One *sempai* told me my mind was 50% speech and 50% girls, but that’s another story.)

But when you overcome that struggle and find your own personal answer to that “Why” question rising inside of you like magma, that is when your speech begins to bear life and burn with spirit. It affects the way you speak (some of us call it “delivery”). Your speech is no longer just a carbon copy of a news article.

Well, that’s enough for high-minded lecturing. Below are the main things I noticed, in bullet-point format and no particular order:

- My impression of a speech is formed in the first 10 seconds. When the articulation is poor in these seconds, or I cannot make out the key word of the message, I lose the desire to listen.
- Have you ever had someone review your speech for grammatical mistakes and inappropriate word usage?
- Have you ever had someone listen to the taped recording of your speech (WITHOUT reading the manuscript) to see if he/she can understand what you are saying?
- Gender equality, self-defense, and other divisive topics: Watch out for one-sidedness! There is ALWAYS someone who disagrees with you 100%. If you alienate the audience (and especially the judge), your speech is “dead on arrival.” You’re taking up the audience’s precious time. You have no right to alienate the audience, or to attack the listener for thinking in a way opposite from you.
- Even when speaking on a topic where *we tend to think* no one will disagree with what you say (disabled people, environment), NEVER assume that everyone will agree with what you say. There will ALWAYS be someone who disagrees with some point in your argument. It is the speaker’s responsibility to understand where their disagreement is coming from, and try to win them over to his/her side. At the very least, you must get them to think, “I don’t agree with what you say, but I see your point and I like the way you express it.”

How can we achieve this? Read each other's speeches and practice criticizing each other...to use a figurative expression, "tear each other's speeches apart!" To use an old-fashioned expression, do more mutual "bashing."

- **Quality of Recording:** Even when listening to the same side of one tape, I noticed that some speakers sounded loud and clear while others sounded fuzzy. I recommend that you double-check the quality of your recording before submitting to the contest managers. Also, I noticed several speeches with too much background noise (ex. People talking in the background, thumping noise), which adversely affects my concentration and gives quite a poor impression. Remember: A speech is different from an essay...it is only as good as it gets into the ear.
- Some of your voices sounded a little too small, resulting in your voice being drowned out by the tape noise. Voice training can help overcome this weakness...learn from Drama Section people, if possible. "You need to be heard in order to be listened to, and only when you are listened to will you be understood."
- "Changing attitudes:" Do you really know how difficult it is? If we really can easily follow your recommendation, there will be no more strife or tragedy in this world. Can YOU change your own attitudes so easily? Don't resort to this recommendation so easily. Instead, try to develop more specific action plans. Never underestimate the importance of a strong conclusion.
- "It is not sure weather the rate will increase or not..." Please spell-check your manuscript before submitting! Spelling errors can be taken as a sign that you are not taking the speech seriously.
- Too much "R:" Quite a number of speakers seem to feel that they will sound like a native speaker if they use "R's" wherever they like, even when a word has no letter R ("because" turning into "becurse"). Stop it! This is a fundamental misconception and only makes speeches uncomfortable to listen to. The speaker sounds almost like a fool.
- Misapplication of English terms to Japanese situations: A *yobiko* or *juku* (cram school) is NOT the same as a "prep school (US secondary school for elite students)." Try using all-English dictionaries (ex. Webster's, Longman) to double-check what the word really means in English. Avoid relying only on Japanese/English dictionaries.

Other judges may have different perspectives, and you might disagree with some of

my criteria and comments. Feel free to discuss with me. I will respond as much as time allows. Everyone evolves and grows with time, and speech judges are no exception. I would like to learn from your feedback as much as possible.

Before I forget...I realize that this may be the last ESS speech contest for some of you. Some of you unfortunately might have lost your last chance to speak before the audience as an ESS speaker. You may think, "Everything is over! What's the point in reading all these comments?"

While I do not blame you for feeling that way, there **is** one way you can make sure this experience is not wasted: Share with your underclassmen the experience you went through, the mistakes you made, lessons you learned! Then your *ko-hai* can use those lessons to take a shot at the 2005 Fukuzawa Trophy...when that speaker wins first prize, it will be thanks to YOU!

Thanks for reading my note. I hope this would be of help in making your speeches more exciting, more fun to deliver and listen to. May God bless all your endeavors and fill you with an ever-youthful spirit.

Sincerely yours,

Hyo Nakagiri