ESU SKILLS GUIDE

ESU ORACY GUIDANCE: THE FOUR SKILL SETS:

1. **Reasoning and Evidence**
2. **Organisation and Prioritisation**
3. **Expression and Delivery**
4. **Listening and Response**

1. REASONING AND EVIDENCE
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Statement of intent

Providing the audience with a statement of intent at the start of a speech lets them know what the speaker is trying to achieve with their speech. The statement of intent also gives the audience a glimpse of the content or subject matter of each section of the speech.

For example, consider the following statement of intent: "Ladies and gentlemen, by the end of my speech I hope to have convinced you, not only that global poverty must be eradicated, but that it is a goal which is achievable in our life time, and that we have a responsibility to strive for the achievement of that goal."

Note the three targets outlined in the statement of intent:
(1) to prove that global poverty must be eradicated,
(2) to prove that global poverty can be eradicated in our lifetime, and
(3) to prove that we have a responsibility to eradicate global poverty.

Using empirical evidence

There are various different types of evidence which a speaker may use in support of an argument in their speech: statistics from academic or scientific reports, statistics from newspapers or websites, quotations from academic journals or reports, quotations from newspapers or websites etc.

However, any empirical evidence used in support of an argument should:
(1) have a reliable source
(2) be up-to-date
(3) be relevant to the speech.

Irrelevant evidence, evidence that comes from an unreliable source, or evidence that is out-of-date will inevitably undermine the credibility of the argument and the speaker.

Speakers should avoid using too much empirical evidence. Speeches that contain large amounts of facts and figures or lengthy quotations are unlikely to be particularly persuasive, because the audience is unable to absorb large amounts of statistics, large excerpts from reports etc.

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Speakers should also remember that simply stating the evidence is not a substitute for explaining their arguments logically, providing the audience with certain pieces of evidence in support of those arguments, and analysing the evidence to demonstrate how or why it supports the overall thesis of the speech. Ultimately, any empirical evidence used should support or complement an argument in the speech, not dominate it.

Using examples and analogies

An argument does not always have to be supported by facts, figures, quotations etc. Arguments can also be supported by analogies or examples of things which people know to be true under the status quo (i.e. without reference to statistics or quotations from credible sources to demonstrate or prove the truth of the example).

For example, in a speech proposing to legalise the sale, distribution and consumption of marijuana (in a country where it was previously illegal), rather than citing statistics from scientific reports or quotations from academic articles, the speaker could support their arguments by reference to another country where the sale, distribution and consumption of marijuana is already legal (e.g. the Netherlands). Similarly, rather than spending a lot of time justifying age limits or explaining an intricate licensing system, the speaker could simply support their arguments by reference to an analogous system in the same country (i.e. the age limits and licensing system applicable to the sale of tobacco in that country).

Arguments supported by analogies or examples, which most people accept as true under the status quo, are often even more persuasive than arguments supported by statistics or quotations, the sources of which many people may be unfamiliar.

Using reasoned analysis and logic

Whether or not an argument is supported by evidence, examples or analogies, the audience and the adjudicators must be given some analysis explaining why what the speaker is saying is true and why what the speaker is saying supports the overall thesis of the speech.

When making an argument, speakers should try to avoid making assertions, assumptions or other errors in logic. Evidence, analogies, examples or other facts should be presented in a logical order such that they support the argument being made and lead to an obvious or logical conclusion. Crucially, each statement of fact or opinion should follow logically from the previous one and support the overall argument. Speakers should avoid presenting a series of seemingly disconnected statements.

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Dealing with conflicting evidence and opinions

Most speakers try to give speeches on issues which are topical and interesting. Many of those issues will be unresolved or debatable. There will be arguments on both
sides. During research, speakers will discover evidence or other information which does not support the conclusion of their speech or with which they disagree.

This evidence or information should not be ignored! An interesting speaker will invariably make statements which are bold or controversial. A brave speaker will acknowledge the existence of evidence or opinion contrary to the conclusion of their own speech and utilise their persuasive skills and their own evidence to persuade the audience of their credibility and the truth of their own arguments.

There are a number of ways to challenge or undermine pieces of evidence or information which support a conclusion contrary to that presented in the speech.

The speaker may argue that the evidence is out-of-date or that the source of the evidence is unreliable (e.g. blogs by unknown persons are usually unreliable, as is anecdotal evidence generally). The speaker may argue that the evidence is irrelevant (e.g. because it relates to a specific country or a specific set of circumstances not applicable to the speech). The speaker may also argue that the evidence fails to take account of other issues (e.g. unavoidable practical obstacles may negate the possibility of implementing a solution to a problem which is sound in principle).

It is important to remember that audiences aren't passive, even when listening online or on social media! They are made up of people who also have opinions about the things they see and hear in the world around them. Ultimately, an audience is more likely to be persuaded by a speaker who understands and has engaged with both sides of an argument, but can still justify their stance on one side or the other.

Credibility is key!

Credibility is an important part of public speaking. This doesn't mean being the most knowledgeable or qualified person on the topic ever! It means presenting strong, logical arguments in support of your position (remember that the audience probably won't have detailed knowledge or experience of the issues relevant to the speech either).

FOR EXAMPLE

A good deductive argument goes like this:

All men are mortal.
Socrates was a man.
Therefore, Socrates was mortal.

Whereas, a bad deductive argument goes:

All men are mortal.
Socrates was a man.
Therefore, all men are like Socrates.

2. ORGANISATION AND PRIORITISATION
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Why is structure important?

An audience is made up of people, even though all those for the ESU Festival of Speaking will be online or watching a recording of you speaking! Most people have relatively short attention spans. For that reason, if a speaker stands up, starts speaking and continues to speak constantly for five minutes, most people will tune out after about 2 minutes (at the most!).

Public speakers use structure to help maintain their listeners' attention. By telling the audience:

- at the start what they can expect to hear;
- presenting the arguments in order of priority, gravity or importance; and
- reiterating what they have heard at the end;
- the speaker gives their speech a sense of symmetry or unity and compounds the arguments in the minds of the audience and the adjudicators.

Structure can also be used by speakers to make their speech more interesting (and therefore easier to follow). For example, many speakers group their points or arguments into categories at the start of their speech (e.g. principled arguments and practical arguments). Another example is when speakers give each group of points or arguments a label which is part of a theme that runs right throughout the speech (e.g. the theme of the speech is "the passage of time" and the three points are labelled "past" "present" and "future" or the theme of the speech is "questions answered" and the three points are labelled "what," when," and "how.").

Using structure creatively (e.g. by categorising arguments in an interesting way or by giving the structure a theme) allows the speaker to incorporate their own speaking style into their structure and get their message across, keeping the attention of their audience.

THE OUTLINE OF A TYPICAL SPEECH

Introduction:

The speaker should tell the audience who they are, what they are speaking about, why, and what they want to have achieved or proven by the end of the speech. A 'map' of the main points in the speech should be provided. Each point should be given a label (see above) and perhaps a brief explanation of what will be analysed.

Main arguments:

The speaker should then move onto to the main points of the speech, remembering to deal with each point in order of priority (in the same order they were listed in the introduction), and remembering to signal to the audience when they are moving from one point to the next (this is signposting or flagging).

Conclusion:

The speaker should tie together all the main points of the speech at the end, remembering to refer back to the introduction (in particular, to any specific targets or goals that the speaker intended to achieve or prove).
The conclusion should not be a simple re-statement of the speech; rather, it should be a comprehensive but succinct summary of all the main strands of the speech in support of the overall thesis of the speech.

NB:

The outline described above is just one way of structuring a speech. You can organise your points any way that you like/in a totally different manner to the one presented above. In particular, the structure outlined above is not always suitable for speakers who prefer to use a narrative as a method of illustration. Crucially, the speech must be easy for the audience to follow and understand.

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Using notes effectively:

- Having a speech that is well structured makes it much easier for speakers to make their notes and refer to their notes during the speech. Some speakers prefer to use palm cards or cue cards and other speakers prefer to use sheets of paper. Either approach is acceptable and both have their advantages and disadvantages.

- We would suggest that you use one of these rather than reading your speech from pieces of paper held up by someone at home when you are filming your piece. . . Using an 'auto-cue', even a home-made one takes a great deal of practice!

- Speakers who use palm cards or cue cards can have one colour card for their introduction or opening statement (which they will usually write out in full, particularly if it contains a quotation or a statistic), another two or three colours for the two or three main points of their speech (usually speakers will not write out the arguments in the main sections in full, but will have key words to remind them of the progression of their arguments, as well as any statistics or quotations in support of those arguments), and another colour card for their conclusion or summary (which, again, should contain all the main strands of the speech and may be written out in full, particularly if it contains a quotation or a statistic).

- Speakers who use sheets of paper can have three sheets of paper, one for each of the main sections of their speech. The title of each sheet of paper could be the title (or 'label') of that section. Speakers could also have another sheet of paper with the text of the introduction and/or conclusion written out in full.

- The advantage of palm or cue cards is that they are generally smaller than sheets of paper, making it easier for speakers to hold the cards in one hand while still having the freedom to move and gesture with ease. The disadvantage of using cards is that they may get mixed up resulting in the speaker losing their position in the speech (colour-coding or numbering cards helps to avoid this).

- The advantage of using sheets of paper is that the speaker can put more supporting information on the sheet if they wish, and all the information pertaining to one argument is available to the speaker, on one sheet, at a glance. The disadvantage of using sheets of paper is that they can be cumbersome and distracting, making it more difficult for the speaker to move and gesticulate easily.

- The other option is to learn the speech entirely, but even with the option of having re-takes when mistakes are made, as when filming (as opposed to that being impossible when you are speaking live, in the flesh), this can lead to a speech being over-prepared and, thus, unconvincing. There is no substitute for being really familiar with what you are going to say, but having prompts with you as notes. Whatever you do, try to avoid having the speech written out in full when you give it as that tends to lead to reading which is never effective.

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Timing:

- Timing goes hand-in-hand with structure and notes. Once a speaker has established a good structure for their speech and has found the method of using notes which works best for them, it is important to practise delivering the speech within the five minutes which is the maximum suggested time.

- A good speaker will know exactly how long they are going to spend on each section of their speech (i.e. introduction, main sections and conclusion). Some speakers will write timings on each card or sheet of paper so that they know when they have to move on to the next section. Speakers should try to ensure that they spend a similar amount of time on sections of the speech of similar importance.

- Speakers should practice speaking for one minute, two minutes, three minutes etc., so that they know what it feels like to speak for different blocks of time and how much information they are able to cover in those blocks of time.

3. EXPRESSION AND DELIVERY
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What is the purpose of the speech?

There are many different types of public speaker: politicians, school teachers, university professors, comedians, TV and radio presenters etc. It follows that there are many different types of public speech: a wedding speech, a business presentation, a protest speech. The lists go on.

The purpose of the speech (or the purpose of the speaker) is what distinguishes one type of public speech from another. A politician seeks to persuade the voters. A school teacher or a university professor seeks to inform and inspire their students. A comedian seeks to entertain the audience.

Good speeches – such as those we hope to showcase in the ESU Festival of Speaking – should attempt to do all four: persuade, inform, inspire and entertain the audience (even when watched remotely)!

Make an impact from a start!

First impressions are important. The audience are at their most attentive at the very beginning of the speech. It is crucial to grab their attention from the very start with a confident and flawless opening.

Compare the opening lines of this speech: "Ladies and Gentlemen, today I will speak to you about global warming, caused by carbon emissions. I will show how the rise in global temperatures will lead to floods, droughts and food shortages in certain areas, as well as disruption to the ecosystem and civil unrest. I will then go on to tell you what can be done to prevent these effects from occurring."

With the opening lines of this speech: "Floods. Plagues. Famine. Death. War. Destruction on a global scale. No, Ladies and Gentlemen, not biblical prophecies, not scenes from a Hollywood disaster movie; but predictions for the real world in our lifetime if we continue to pump poisonous carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. By the end of this speech, I will have proven to you how crucial a role we all have to play in avoiding this doomsday scenario. Because this time, it's fact. Not fiction."

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The two opening paragraphs convey the same basic information (the audience knows the general theme of the speech, and that a problem is going to be outlined and a solution proposed). However, whereas the former paragraph is measured and dispassionate, the latter is dramatic and conveys a sense of urgency. An excellent way to grab the attention of an audience is to make the speech relevant to them (i.e. "how crucial a role we all have to play"). The use of single words or very short sentences at the start of a speech (i.e. "Death. War. Destruction on a global scale.") makes for a dramatic opening (a shocking statistic or quotation can have a similar effect). Note also the use of alliteration for emphasis (i.e. pump/poisonous and fact/fiction), the use of powerful or dramatic language (e.g. doomsday scenario), and the contrast between long and short sentences (i.e. the short sentence fragments at the start of the paragraph, then two long sentences, then two short sentences at the end; punctuating the end of a dramatic opening).

An opening that conveys a sense of humour or sorrow (or any other emotion) can also be effective. The most effective type of opening will be determined by the subject matter of the speech and the speaking style of the speaker.

Similar emphasis should be put on the conclusion of the speech. It should link back to the opening of the speech (e.g. the problems that were identified, the questions that were posed etc.). All the techniques identified above (and much, much more) may be used to help a speaker to achieve a dramatic or otherwise memorable conclusion. It is often effective, at the end of a speech, to finish with a rhetorical question (something for the audience to ponder during the applause – which, for the Festival of Speaking in lockdown, you will not, alas, hear!).

Verbal Skills:

Speakers should remember that delivering a speech is not like reading an essay. If the reader of an essay misses a line or misunderstands a phrase, they can go back and re-read it. If a person listening to a speech misses a line or a phrase, they don't get an opportunity to hear it a second time (often resulting in a loss of continuity for that listener and the loss of that listener's attention for the speaker). For that reason, when giving a public speech – especially when recording/filming it – it is imperative that speakers speak slowly, clearly and loudly. This will help to ensure that the audience and the adjudicators hear every word and can comprehend what is being said as they are listening.
Speakers should also attempt to vary their pitch and tone of voice, as well as the pace of their speech (where appropriate). These variations help to keep the audience alert and help the speaker to maintain their attention for the full five minutes of the speech.

Pauses can also be extremely effective. Two or three well-timed pauses can effectively juxtapose five minutes of constant speaking, and can be used to emphasise an important point or signal the transition from one section of the speech to another. The use of particular language in conjunction with the use of pauses can also be very effective (e.g. "that was followed by a pregnant pause" or "the silence was deafening").

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Non-verbal skills:

Much of a speaker's communication is non-verbal. For that reason, public speakers must be conscious of their body language if they are to engage the audience and the adjudicators.

'Open' gestures (which help to engage the audience) include facing the audience, and using hands and arms freely to demonstrate, emphasise or otherwise support the words being spoken.

By contrast, **'closed'** gestures (which often disengage the audience) include the speaker folding their arms, facing away from the audience or hanging their head.

The use of facial expression and eye contact are both related to good body language, but are uniquely important. If the audience and the adjudicators are to be persuaded or inspired by a public speech they must feel engaged by the speaker and must feel like the speaker is speaking directly to them. As a general point, speakers should smile; but facial expression may also be used to mirror the message or emotion being conveyed by the speech (e.g. a humorous quote, a shocking statistic, a sorrowful narrative etc.), adding a sense of sincerity or truth to the words being spoken. Eye contact – looking straight at the camera – is another important way for speakers to engage with the audience and convince them of their confidence and their credibility.

Movement is another technique which public speakers use to keep the audience alert. Similarly, the effect of changing your pace or tone of voice, or the use of pauses, physically moving your body during your speech has the effect of varying what the audience is hearing and seeing, which helps to maintain their attention. The use of movement can be particularly effective at certain points in the speech (e.g. taking a step forward when transitioning from one section of the speech to another) or when used in conjunction with particular language (e.g. physically taking a step back and saying "let's take a step back and look at the historical context of this issue").

Linguistic skills:

Speakers should ensure that their use of vocabulary is consistent (i.e. avoid using multiple words interchangeably to convey the same meaning, as this may lead to confusion). Speakers should also aim to ensure that the intended meaning is conveyed by the words they choose. English is full of synonyms (i.e. two or more different words that refer to the same object or concept). Different words, used in different contexts, often conjure up slightly different versions of the same idea. It is useful to examine the use of a word in the media to appreciate the full implications of its use (e.g. Does the US government refer to insurgents as "freedom fighters" or "terrorists?" Do animal rights campaigners refer to cattle farmers as "agricultural workers" or "murderers?").

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Speakers should also avoid the use of colloquialisms or slang, not because of any perceived lack of formality; but because those watching videos from the ESU Festival of Speaking will come from countries all over the world; to use colloquialisms or slang would be to run the risk of excluding certain audience members from the intended meaning. In a similar vein, speakers should resist the temptation to use overly lofty or ornate language, which often undermines the clarity of the speech. When trying to communicate an idea to a large group of people, it often helps to keep the language simple and clear.

Speakers who have spent a lot of time researching for their speech will probably be very familiar with the surrounding issues, as well as background or ancillary subject matter. However, speakers should bear in mind that most watching will not have their level of specialist knowledge on the issue and should therefore avoid the use of technical, specialist or abbreviated jargon or other unfamiliar terminology (without explanation).

Confidence and style:

Confidence and style are at the core of effective expression and delivery. Speakers feel more confident, and exude that confidence when delivering their speeches, by following the tips discussed above (having a clear purpose or goal, making an impact from the start with a dramatic or otherwise memorable opening, and using verbal, non- verbal and linguistic skills or techniques effectively).

A good way to practise projecting confidence is for public speakers to record themselves delivering their speech (audio-visual recording) before submitting the speech for the Festival. Try some trial runs! This will allow speakers to go back and assess their own strengths and weaknesses under the sub-categories identified above.

Once speakers have mastered the art of projecting confidence when speaking in public, developing a speaking style comes next. A compelling speaking style is what makes a speaker unique. Some speakers have an emotive speaking style, and feel most comfortable persuading the audience of important social, economic or global issues (e.g. environmental issues, political issues, humanitarian issues etc.). For such speakers, an ability to convey passion and emotion is a huge strength. Other speakers have a witty, light-hearted or humorous speaking style and feel most comfortable when entertaining the audience, often delving into satire and using rhetorical devices such as sarcasm and irony to great effect. Light- hearted speakers often prefer to use narratives to communicate their ideas, rather than structured arguments supported empirical evidence. Both methods of illustration can be effective, depending on the subject matter of the speech and the natural style of the speaker.

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Rather than writing out their speech in full and learning it by heart, speakers are advised only to write out the structure of their speech (see the section on structure elsewhere). Speakers should know their introduction and conclusion very well (i.e. learnt by heart) and should know the progression of the points in the main body of the speech well (but not learnt by heart). Speakers should use their notes (while they are speaking) to remind themselves of the structure of their speech and the progression of the points within the main body of their speech, so that they can construct each individual sentence and argument afresh every time they deliver the speech. It also ensures that when the speaker is speaking, their engagement is with their ideas and with the audience watching the recording; not with a collection of words that have been committed to memory in a particular sequence.

A NOTE ON NOTES

- Using notes effectively (or ineffectively as the case may be) is often what makes or breaks a good public speech. Most people who speak in public as part of their professional life (e.g. politicians, university professors etc.) usually rely on notes, palm cards, Teleprompters, PowerPoint slides etc., to a certain extent. It is entirely appropriate for speakers to have some notes.

- The key is striking the right balance between, on the one hand, being entirely reliant on notes (i.e. reading the speech from a piece of paper and failing to make eye contact with or engage the audience in any other way), and on the other hand, not relying on notes at all (i.e. reciting a speech, which has been learnt by heart, for the thirtieth time and sounding over-rehearsed or bored with the speech).

TOP TIPS TO ENHANCE CONFIDENCE AND STYLE

- Memorise opening line of speech
- Take a few deep breaths before you speak
- Wear comfortable clothing
- Have a glass or bottle of water with you during your speech

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4. LISTENING AND RESPONSE
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ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Most public speakers have to justify the arguments made in their speech at some stage (e.g. school teachers, university professors, politicians etc.). It may be that in the later stage of the ESU Festival of Speaking, we may want you to give your speech online in something such as a Google Hangout so that others can ask you questions and get engaged with your ideas directly. This question period would be designed to test your knowledge of the surrounding issues, as well as your ability to listen and respond to questions, justifying the position you have taken in their speech, but also giving ground where needed. Listening and response is a key skill set for life!

Speakers frequently have questions put to them which they did not anticipate. Speakers should start thinking about the answer as the question is being put to them (while remembering to listen all the way to the end), but should never answer the question immediately after it has been asked. It is important to pause for a moment or two, consider again the question that was actually asked, and make sure that the answer being given is relevant to that question.

The question period is a great opportunity for speakers to demonstrate extra knowledge (perhaps an extra piece of evidence that there was not room to include in the speech). However, answers should always be relevant to the question asked and ultimately support the position taken in the speech.

Questions from an audience can often be lengthy and a little convoluted! This can make it difficult to establish what the person is actually asking. Speakers should take a moment to try and break down in their head what the questioner has asked. Speakers should also be willing to ask the questioner to repeat the question in a shorter or simpler form if necessary (if the speaker didn't understand the question, there's a good chance that at least some other audience members didn't understand it either!).

HINTS & TIPS

As part of their preparation, speakers should have considered alternative points of view to those presented in their speech and considered how best to respond to those alternative points of view if presented in the form of a question.

Avoid giving prepared answers to anticipated questions!

When answering questions, speakers should avoid re-stating sections of their speech verbatim.

The best answers to questions are usually brief, succinct and to the point. Lengthy answers often lose the attention of the audience.

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Finally, all the tips that are given under the skill set of **Expression and Delivery** apply to the question period exactly as they apply to the speech. It is important to continue to use body language and eye contact etc. effectively during the question period and to maintain confidence generally. Speakers may be asked to justify their position, but should avoid becoming defensive or entering into a debate with a particular questioner.

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