

COACHING GUIDE: RESOURCE 11

Do's and Dont's of Oral Feedback

Feedback should always be in service of helping public speakers improve; it should never be to show off what a coach knows.

While some feedback might be written, coaches should also be able to communicate feedback out loud in a way that is supportive and clear. Receiving feedback is one of the most sensitive and vulnerable times for any public speaking student. It is directly related to one of our greatest fears: being judged and being evaluated. Also, it is important to remember that feedback is based on an implicit assumption of what excellent public speaking is. Coaches need to recognize where their standards come from and question whether these standards are what is best for the speaker.

Principles of Feedback

Regardless of whether it is positive or critical, both written and oral feedback should be:

- Specific: clear about the focus of the feedback and where it is evident
- Helpful: improves the speech and enables the student to accomplish goals
- Kind: tone and language is supportive and productive
- Actionable: concrete enough to be able to immediately act on and improve and/or developmentally-appropriate so that action is possible.

Tips for Feedback

- It is important to first have a strong relationship with the speaker. Begin with a conversation about the speech before diving into the actual work. Ask the speaker what he/she is working on, what the goals for the work are, or what he/she is most afraid of. Validate speakers' concerns and anxieties, ideally by relating to them or by explaining to them that they are not alone.
- Ask the speaker what type of feedback you should give.
- Ask yourself: where is this person in the process of learning how to speak publicly? What will be the easiest and most concrete thing that this person can act upon?
- Make time for a second or third run-through of a speech, so that the person can practice acting on your feedback. Provide positive reinforcement when you see evidence of your feedback. If there isn't, don't lie – instead, use different words or examples to clarify your feedback without additional comments. Write down the feedback, or make sure the person is taking notes.

What to Avoid

- Too many comments around too many different areas (content, delivery, physicality, timing, memorization, etc).
- Saying phrases like, "I want you to..." – this makes it about you, not about the speaker's goals and progress.
- Pushing forward when the speaker's face or nonverbal cues are telling you he/she is overwhelmed (instead, this is when you go back to a section that went well or take a break and talk about a completely different goal).
- Too much vague positive feedback – people don't believe it.
- Feedback that mentions too much about you and what you do – sometimes, this is helpful, especially in the beginning conversation, but by the time you are doing a run-through, it should be all about them.

