This book on Impromptu Speeches is written based on a study done by the author for one year. It is also based on the author’s vast experience of teaching impromptu speeches to undergraduates in the University of Malaya. It is a personalized experience of local lecturers and local undergraduates and thus has a local, personal flavor to it. It discusses what is an impromptu speech, the present assessment method for impromptu speeches, fears in delivering an impromptu speech, opinions of lecturers and undergraduates on the present assessment method, strengths and weaknesses of undergraduates when presenting their impromptu speeches and finally twenty strategies to improve impromptu speech presentation. The author has written in simple English language for anyone who wants to make impromptu speeches for any occasion. As such this book can be used by students, teachers, public speakers and anyone who wants to make impromptu speeches for any occasion.

Kulwindr Kaur Sidhu

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Impromptu Speeches
A Malaysian Experience

Kulwindr Kaur Sidhu

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 5

CHAPTER 2: PRE-IMPROPTU SPEECH PREPARATION 10

CHAPTER 3: DURING IMPROPTU SPEECH 14

CHAPTER 4: POST IMPROPTU SPEECH 30

CHAPTER 5: ANATOMY OF GOOD IMPROPTU SPEECHES 49

CHAPTER 6: MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE 59

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION 65

IMPROMPTU SPEECH TITLES 68

REFERENCES 67
PREFACE

This book on Impromptu Speeches is based on a study of impromptu speeches among undergraduates taking the TCEE 1371 - Spoken English for Professionals course at the University of Malaya. One hundred students taking the course responded to a questionnaire on Impromptu Speeches. The author did this research during her sabbatical leave in 2008. This course is conducted in classrooms at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya for every semester. Ten students were interviewed and eight teachers teaching this course were also interviewed. The author too added her own experience as she too has taught this course for the past six years. This book is about impromptu speeches and it is divided into an introduction, and the whole process of delivering impromptu speeches. The process of impromptu speeches is divided into pre-impromptu speech preparation, during impromptu speech, post impromptu speech, and an anatomy of good impromptu speeches. Besides these the Malaysian experience and some impromptu speech titles by the author are given for students to ponder on. The author also discussed students’ fears while delivering an impromptu speech, and the assessment criteria for impromptu speeches. Twenty strategies are also provided to enhance impromptu speech presentation.

For the lecturers teaching this course, the author investigated the number of years they have been teaching the course, their comments after their evaluation on the strengths and weaknesses of their students when presenting their impromptu speeches.

Ten students were also interviewed on their experiences while delivering their impromptu speeches in class and their suggestions on how to improve their impromptu speeches given another chance. The results show that sheer nervousness is their main problem. Other problems include their lack of knowledge of current issues tested due to
their lack of reading and lack of communication skills in English. Twenty strategies have been suggested to further enhance students’ performance in impromptu speeches.

The researcher also interviewed Ms. Ainun Rozana, the lecturer involved in the setting up of this course – *Spoken English for Professionals*. She has been teaching this course since its birth in 2000. She designed this course with her colleagues. They did a survey on the **needs analysis** of a spoken course, and they realized that there was a need for a communication course to be offered to all students. They went to all the faculties and presented their findings, and different aspects of their research results were presented. Now this course is offered as an outside faculty elective course to all undergraduates in the University of Malaya. Since its birth, this course has been performing well with a good intake of around 250 to 300 students every semester. Since then, it also has become a compulsory elective course for students in the Faculty of Business and Accountancy. We have been having 20 to 24 groups per semester with a student intake of between 150 to slightly more than 200. This course has been popular with students. It is interesting, very useful and practical for them. It involves the soft skills such as communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, life-long learning and information management skills, entrepreneurship skills, moral and professional ethics skills and leadership skills. Presently this course is a two-hour course but now we are working to make this a three credit hour course to meet the university’s needs. The components tested in this – *Spoken English for Professionals* course include:

1. One Public Speaking Activity – one persuasive speech of seven minutes

2. Two Impromptu Speeches of three minutes each

3. One Interview with a professional based on the Public Speech Content

4. One Group Discussion based on current issues
For this book, the author will only discuss impromptu speeches. She feels that a mastery of impromptu speeches is essential in today's world to solve our daily problems.

This book is suitable for any reader who wants to make a good impromptu speech. It can be for a student, educator, housewife or just about anyone in our society who needs to communicate some information to other people. It is also important for phatic communication or small talk to get along with people in our community.

This book is divided into seven chapters for easy reading and understanding. It is written in simple English language and can be understood by just about any reader who needs to present an impromptu speech. To start making good impromptu speeches, start reading this book immediately and start practicing the principles and ideas in it.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS AN IMPROMPTU SPEECH?

According to Webb (1975, p. 312), “Impromptu speaking is a speech (made) on the spur of the moment, without advance notice and little opportunity for preparation. It is useful during an emergency although the idea of having to get up and speak without much warning may sound frightening, remember that most of our everyday communication is impromptu-talking with friends, rap sessions, committee meetings, telephone conversations. Impromptu speaking can often be superior to prepared speaking, since it may exhibit the excitement, enthusiasm, and sparkle that may be lacking in a formalized presentation.”

Lucas (2009, p. 246) proposes that “Impromptu speech is speech which is delivered with little or no immediate preparation. The examples of impromptu speeches are when you informed a new student how to register for classes, explained to your boss why you were late for work, or answered questions in a job interview. The best way to become a better impromptu speaker is to practice.”

Zarefsky (2004, p. 316) suggests that, “Impromptu presentation is when you have little or no time to prepare specifically for a speech. For instance, someone at a meeting says something that inspires you to respond. Thereby, you give a speech without preparation at all. The structure of an impromptu presentation is simply and clearly. Impromptu speaking also often takes cues from previous speakers, referring to their specific points and suggesting how their message relates to yours.”
According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* impromptu means “done without preparation or planning – improvised”. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines impromptu as “done or said without earlier planning or preparation”. The *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* defines impromptu as “not planned or prepared, for example an impromptu dinner party.” *The Reader’s Digest Word Power Dictionary* defines impromptu as “without preparation or rehearsal; improvised for example: I made an impromptu after-dinner speech.” The synonyms provided for “impromptu” by *The Oxford Thesaurus* are “candid, extemporaneous, offhand, scratch, spur, stopgap and unpremeditated.” Dale and Wolf (2006) define impromptu speech as standing up and thinking on the spot and being able to organize your thoughts into words without having time to prepare well. In other words, it means being able to talk on a topic or answer a question coherently without actually doing research or taking a long time to prepare an answer well. Impromptu Speech is different from a Public Speech which is a prepared, well-researched speech with cited sources from credible resources.

To some people, impromptu speaking is public speaking on the spur-of-the-moment without preparation. The fact that it is done promptly instills fear, anxiety and panic in many people. In fact, rarely is an impromptu speech given without preparation. Actually it is a quickly prepared speech and if people can see it as such, much of the fear, anxiety and panic associated with impromptu speaking can be greatly reduced or, at the very least, controlled.
WHAT KINDS OF IMPROMPTU SPEECHES ARE THERE?

The four purposes of speeches are generally to inform, to persuade, to entertain, and for special occasions. In our daily living we make many kinds of impromptu speeches. These include informing others about something. It can also include questioning others for things they are doing and why they are doing these things. Impromptu speeches can also include persuading others to stop doing something dangerous such as smoking, drinking liquor, having free sex, talking on sensitive issues etc. It can also include advising others to change their habits such as not watching too much television and neglecting their studies, telling others to mind their own business, telling friends not to be glued to their computer sets but to involve themselves in exercise for a healthy body, advising people to inculcate the reading habit to increase their general knowledge and to know what is happening around them etc. Impromptu speeches are always present around us and we can often hear them in our daily living such as announcements on the intercom in schools and in our work place or on radio and television on urgent issues especially when a disaster strikes or an epidemic breaks out etc. Even winners of contests and for the Oscars are often required to give impromptu speeches to express their feelings to the audience. Sometimes, when a speaker for a special occasion is unable to make it, someone else has to stand up and deliver an impromptu speech in his place within a short period of notice and this is quite common in our society.

WHO MAKES IMPROMPTU SPEECHES?

All of us make impromptu speeches all the time. When we talk to our friends, parents, siblings, children, teachers, lecturers, colleagues, shopkeepers, bus drivers etc. we are actually conversing with them by asking and answering questions and these small interactions are actually impromptu speeches. Unconsciously, we are engaging
ourselves with everyone we meet daily by having a small communication with them or having impromptu speeches with them. We practice them every day and at all times.

**WHY DO WE NEED TO MASTER IMPROMPTU SPEECHES?**

We need to master impromptu speeches so that we will be confident of ourselves when we are involved in short interactions with people around us. We need to be able to speak coherently in order to be understood by the people around us. We should be able to tell them what we need and we want others to do for us. We should be able to carry out orders or instructions well if we are able to understand others. Questioning others at length is also a type of impromptu speech.

**HOW TO LEARN IMPROMPTU SPEECHES?**

What are the benefits of mastering impromptu speeches? There are a few steps to learn in order to be able to give good impromptu speeches. If you can give good impromptu speeches, you will be well liked by the people around you. This book will give you the art of being able to give good impromptu speeches, and will discuss the benefits of giving good impromptu speeches.

![Image](http://images.google.com.my/images)

**Figure 1.1**

Talking With Neighbour Kids

(Source: http://images.google.com.my/images)
Eating and Talking in Cafetaria

(Source: http://images.google.com.my/images)

The next chapter will discuss the preparations that a person has to make before delivering an impromptu speech.
CHAPTER TWO

PRE-IMPROMPTU SPEECH PREPARATION

In Chapter One, the author explained what is an impromptu speech, the different kinds of impromptu speeches, who does impromptu speeches, why we need to master impromptu speeches, how to learn impromptu speeches and the benefits of mastering impromptu speeches.

This chapter will discuss the preparations we need to make before making an impromptu speech.

HOW TO HAVE SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE ON ALMOST EVERYTHING?

To be able to give a good impromptu speech, you should have sufficient knowledge almost about everything that is happening around you. To be able to do this, you should read newspapers and magazines. You should keep yourself updated or abreast about news in Malaysia and around the world. To be knowledgeable, you should read books on various subjects such as History, Geography, Science, Economics, etc. In other words you should practice extensive reading whereby you try to read anything that you come across in your daily life. You can also increase your knowledge by constantly listening to news and discussions over the radio and television. In this era of Information Technology or IT, you can always surf the internet and get access to many sources to get a better knowledge of current issues.
PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION

You must be prepared psychologically, that is mentally prepared, before making an impromptu speech. You must say to yourself that I am confident and can give a good impromptu speech. Take a deep breath from your stomach, and be confident. Say to yourself, “I can do it!” Then I am sure you can concentrate and speak at least something on the topic posed to you. Learn breathing techniques from the stomach and this will relax you and make you more alert and prepared to speak well. Learn to pronounce and enunciate your words well so that you will be intelligible.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Stand facing the audience in an upright position with your backbone or spine straight. Stand at ease with your feet about one foot apart, that is do not stand at attention with your feet joined. This good posture will allow good blood circulation. Your eyes must be on your whole audience. Get to know your audience - their educational background, their culture, their age, their socio-economic background, their occupation, their role in society etc. Knowing the audience relaxes you and you can speak comfortably with them.

OTHER PREPARATIONS

Always talk to friends and get their feedback on your performance. Learn from your weaknesses and improve on them. Learn to talk to your mirror and see how you look when you talk – your facial expressions, your gestures, your pronunciation and enunciation of words etc.

Check on your clothing, by making sure that you are decently dressed, your clothes are clean and well-washed and do not smell. Smelly clothes will make other people not want to come near you. Make sure you avoid transparent, obscene clothes. The
colour of your clothes too should be soothing and try to avoid wearing too bright colours like red, orange etc which strike the eye and cause pain.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 2.1**

**Be Decently Dressed Always**

(Source: http://images.google.com.my/images)

Also, be careful of the jewellery you wear. Avoid dingling dangling ear rings that make too much noise. Other accessories like bangles, brooches, necklaces and pendants should not be too heavy or noisy. Wear decent jewellery in which you look simple and nice and do not attract too many people’s attention. Make sure you dress up according to your gender. If you are a female, avoid wearing men’s attire. Be feminine and make other people understand that you are a female. If you are a male, dress appropriately as a male and avoid pretending to be a female.

Hair styling too is important. Avoid having long fringes which cover your eyes when talking. This gives the impression that you are trying to hide your face and may thus not appear honest to the second party listening to you. For ladies who have long hair, it is best to tie up into a pony tail or to plait it. For men, avoid having long hair. It is best to keep it short. However, for Sikh boys they can wear turbans to cover their long hair.
Chapter three will discuss what you have to do during an impromptu speech.
CHAPTER THREE

DURING IMPROMPTU SPEECHES

In Chapter Two, the author discussed the preparation before an impromptu speech. This included increasing one’s general knowledge via extensive reading of newspapers, books, magazines, and surfing the internet. Other aspects covered included psychological preparation, having eye contact, body movement, facial expression and practicing voice modulation.

This chapter will discuss what you have to do during an impromptu speech delivery.

When you are called upon to deliver an impromptu speech, be psychologically or mentally prepared for it. Think for about a minute on the topic. Be confident and speak to the best of your ability on the topic given. Be generous and honest about your answer. Say that is all you know about it and cite sources if you know them for further information, if the audience is interested in knowing more about the topic.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPROMPTU SPEECHES

Various organizations use different ways of assessing impromptu speeches depending on their goals. The assessment criteria for Impromptu Speeches used in our classrooms is as follows:

A student is called to the front of the class. He/She is allowed to choose one topic from a box. Upon getting the topic, the student is given one minute to prepare mentally on the topic and he/she is timed. After the one minute is over, the student has to speak for three minutes on the topic and he/she is also timed and told to stop once the time limit is up.
Students are assessed under three headings namely Delivery, Content and Language. Teachers just circle the marks obtained for each section under Delivery, Content and Language. A sample evaluation form used is given in Table One on the next page. This assessment criteria sheet can also be extended to anyone who wishes to make a good impromptu speech.

**Under DELIVERY the following items are assessed:**

**Volume of Voice**

Can the student’s voice be heard by the whole audience. Is he/she able to project his/her voice so that it is audible to the whole audience. No microphone is provided and the student has to project his/her voice so that everyone in the audience is able to hear him/her.

**Voice Modulation**

Voice modulation refers to the speaker’s ability to go high or low, fast and slow according to what is being said. The voice should be modulated to show anger, excitement, sadness, etc. In other words, it should be aligned to the different emotions portrayed in the speech.

**Rate of Speech**

Rate of speech means that the student is able to go at a pace whereby the audience can follow his/her line of thought. The student should not go too fast or too slow but just at a right pace so that the audience understands what he/she is trying to convey.
TABLE ONE

IMPROMPTU SPEECH EVALUATION FORM

| Name: |
| Topic: |
| Date/Time: |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DELIVERY</th>
<th>RATING</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volume of Voice</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice Modulation</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Speech</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Language</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligibility</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation of words</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enunciation of words</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CONTENT | |
|----------| |
| Attention-Getting | |
| Opener | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Organization | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Supporting Ideas | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Graceful Conclusion | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

| LANGUAGE | (both Lexis & Structure) | |
|----------|--------------------------| |
| Range | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Accuracy | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATING KEY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 = Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3=Acceptable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Body Language

Body language includes posture, eye contact, movement, facial expressions and gestures. **Posture** refers to the way you stand. One has to stand upright with the backbone or spine straightened, head erect, shoulders back and hands placed at the sides, and both feet flat on the floor and slightly apart (See Figure 3.1). A student should not slouch while presenting his/her speech. If using a rostrum or lectern, your hands can be placed at the sides of it but avoid leaning your whole body on top of it. If possible try not to use the rostrum or lectern but come and stand in front of it. If a microphone is given to you, make sure that it is six inches away from you and it should be pointed at your larynx and not at your face. This is to ensure that the audience can see your full face and you too can have eye contact with the audience.

![Figure 3.1](image)

**Figure 3.1**

**Good Posture and Bad Posture**

(Source: Taken from http://images.google.com.my/images)

Eye contact means that a student must look and rest for a second or two on every member in the audience. By eye contact it means the speaker must be able to make every member in the audience feel that he or she is seen and is spoken to by the speaker.)
A speaker need not stare at the audience but can look at the left cheek, right cheek, left eye, right eye, nose, chin, forehead or in other words any part of the face and this includes having eye contact with the audience. A speaker has constantly to look at the audience from the left of the classroom to the right of the classroom and vice versa.

Figure 3.2

Make Eye Contact With Audience

(Source: Taken from http://images.google.com.my/images)

Facial expressions will vary as you proceed with your speech, so as to show the different emotions such as excitement, surprise, sadness, happiness etc which must be aligned and relevant to what you are saying. Always start your speech with a smile to relax yourself and the audience. If you are saying something serious, then show a serious face, if it is something humorous, then laugh with the audience and show a cheerful face.
Figure 3.3

Make Facial Expressions to Show Emotion

(Source: Taken from http://images.google.com.my/images)

Movement is also important while delivering an impromptu speech. While speaking, take one or two steps occasionally to the right, left, forwards and backwards as this movement will keep you relaxed as it allows proper blood circulation in your body. Sometimes you can step forward to emphasise an important point, then move one step backwards once it is completed. In this way, you will be relaxed and not rigid and this puts the audience at ease while listening to you.
Figure 3.4

Movement to Relax – A Step Forward

(Source: Taken from http://images.google.com.my/images)

Do not hide your hands in your pockets and play with the things or items in your pocket as this is distracting to the audience. Also avoid playing with your necklace, pendant, or other items of jewellery. Avoid constantly pushing your spectacles up on your noses. If they are loose, get the screws tightened so that they do not fall or slip down on your nose. If you have long hair, tie it up in a plait or pony tail and avoid fringes which cover your eyes.

Figure 3.4

Avoid Putting Hand in Pocket

(Source: Taken from http://images.google.com.my/images)
Intelligibility

Intelligibility refers to whether your message makes sense or not to the audience. It refers to whether you used appropriate words for the context that you were talking about. For instance did you use “effect” instead of “affect” when talking about the consequences of air pollution. You must speak in simple language so that the audience will be able to understand you. Avoid too much jargon as this will make the audience be distracted. Avoid using bombastic language when simple words will do the trick of attracting the audience to you.

Pronunciation

You have to polish up your pronunciation so that the words come across to the audience clearly and are understood by them. Learn to say the words in a particular way according to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The IPA shows you how a word is pronounced. A list of the symbols used is always given in an English Language dictionary such as Macmillan, Oxford, Cambridge etc. You can refer to a good dictionary to know how to pronounce the English words correctly. Learn to differentiate the long and short sounds for example /tin/ and /ti:n/. The pronunciation of all words are given within slashes next to the word described in all dictionaries.

Enunciation

Enunciation refers to the act of pronouncing the words or parts of words clearly so that they can be easily understood. In other words, it refers to how you say the words. Sometimes when you do not pronounce the words well, you are misunderstood.
Under CONTENT, the following items are assessed:

Attention-Getting Opener

A student must be able to start his/her speech with an attention-getting opener and a preview of the body to lure the audience to listen to his/her speech. Based on the topic given, a speaker can use a joke, quotation, an exercise, statistics, an anecdote, a humorous story, ask a question, use a startling fact, express a suspense statement etc. as a “hook” to catch the audience’s attention to what he/she has to say so that they remain interested for the rest of the speech.

Organization

The speech must have a preview, two or three main ideas and a good conclusion which are all cemented together with appropriate transition signals (showing addition, contrast, time, reason, cause and effect, example, sequence, emphasis, similarity etc.).

Supporting Ideas

For each main point in the speech, it must be supported with supporting ideas. According to Dale and Wolf (2006, p. 47) each supporting point must relate to the main point, must contain only one idea, must not be repeated or restated and each supporting parallel point has an equal level of importance. In other words, each main point must be further supported with examples, facts, short stories etc. so that the main point is well understood by the audience.

Graceful Conclusion

A good conclusion should give a summary of the main points whereby the purpose of the speech is briefly reviewed and the main ideas are repeated or restated. The speech
can be ended with some memorable concluding remarks after the summary so that the audience will leave thinking about what you have said or delivered.

**Under LANGUAGE, the following items are assessed:**

Language includes both lexis (words) and structure.

**Range**

Range refers to all the different words used in the speech from the beginning to the end.

**Accuracy**

Based on the context of the topic given, are the words chosen relevant and appropriate to the message. Accuracy also refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences.
FEARS OF STUDENTS WHEN PRESENTING AN IMPROMPTU SPEECH

Based on the feedback given by the respondents, undergraduate students face the following fears when delivering an impromptu speech:

A. Being Nervous and Afraid

The main fear of the students was that they were nervous. The reasons given for being nervous were:

i. lack of ideas/information/knowledge of the topic on which they were asked to speak on for three minutes. They felt that given only one minute to prepare was too short.

ii. Some teachers refused to allow them to write down their ideas and they had to prepare mentally and because of this they were afraid that they may lose their ideas while presenting the impromptu speech.

iii. Some were afraid to face the audience – standing in front of the class and facing the whole class.

iv. A few were afraid that their minds would go blank when facing the audience and the fear of even losing the ideas they had thought of at the beginning. Some felt that the three minutes were like three hours to them. When all the ideas they had thought of had been presented, they started to mumble to themselves because they had nothing else to say.

v. To recall the correct words, lack of vocabulary, audience may not understand what they are saying made them become nervous as they felt that they could not express themselves well.
vi. Some were having test phobia. They knew they were being assessed and this made them become tensed and anxious and they became more conscious of their presentations and thus were not natural.

**B. Being Not Confident**

Most of them were not confident or lacked confidence because of the following reasons:

i. they felt that their English Language is not good, their grammar is poor and maybe their pronunciation also may not be too good

ii. some were just shy to face the audience even though they were all undergraduates coming from different faculties

iii. there was a sense of being panicky for no reason as some said they felt cold, with their hands and feet becoming frozen or numb

iv. they felt that their points were not enough to stretch for the three minutes

v. some suffered the “tip of the tongue” phenomenon that is they just could not come up with the precise word required for their presentation – their minds just went blank and they had to pause for the word which they felt had suddenly been erased from their mind

vi. some were afraid that the topic that they would be given would be sensitive like on race, religion, politics and this may make them get stage fright because they are not used to expressing themselves well on technical or sensitive matters

vii. they have the main points but find it difficult to elaborate the ideas well by giving appropriate examples to support the main points

viii. some were scared that their speech is not organized and they lack the fluency in the language to speak smoothly
ix. some felt that they could not speak critically and creatively on the topic given as they lacked knowledge and the fluency in the English language.

x. others felt that they suffered from stress from having to speak in front of an audience as they did not get enough time to prepare for the talk. In the time given to prepare – only one minute they were unable to think of the best ideas.

xi. some were afraid that the audience may not understand what they are saying.

xii. those who were weak in English had to translate their ideas from Malay to English and thus they were nervous because they lacked the use of appropriate vocabulary, lacked ideas, of having to present in front of an audience and were unable to express themselves well.

xiii. a few felt that getting a good attention-getter was a problem to them and thus they felt that they were unable to catch the attention of the audience.

Even while delivering the impromptu speech, some students said that they were afraid of losing ideas, could not speak well in English, had no ideas at all on the topic given because they were not well-read and it was not within their experience and felt nervous of their friends’ impressions of their speeches. Thus they were suffering from a nervous breakdown as they were unable to express their ideas well and were thus under an enormous amount of pressure to deliver well. There were a few who had a lot of ideas to say and felt that three minutes was too short a period for a speech as they felt that they could speak more. On the other hand, some were afraid that they might go off topic as they could get a “black-out” and without realizing may go off-tangent. Thus they would stutter, be repetitive, make grammar errors, have too many hand gestures, fail to grab the audience’s attention, pronunciation and accent may go wrong and all these assumptions made them nervous which led to trembling hands and legs. Some even said they felt that their
appearance was not good and this may make the audience dislike them. Other assumptions made by them were having a lack of ideas, lack of accurate vocabulary, having a bad style, being not confident and their ideas may not be properly organized. Some were even worried that their conclusion was not done well. Generally, they felt that all these factors led them to lose confidence in delivering their speeches. Most of them felt that they were not proficient in the language and thus tended to lose their ideas as they lacked the grammar and vocabulary to express themselves clearly and concisely.

Some excerpts from my interviews which show that most students are nervous are as follows:

**Student 1** who was interviewed said, “It seems like nothing came out from my mind when I got my topic. While giving the speech, I was really nervous. Seems like lack of vocabulary, grammatical errors were all around, and I had to elaborate those points effectively”.

**Student 2** said, “Personally, I couldn’t think of anything at first because I was really nervous. I was blank, in the beginning but managed to sort myself out.”

**Student 3** said, “During the impromptu speech, I felt very nervous. I am also afraid because I do not know what topic I will get.”

**Student 4** said, “My experience on the first time impromptu speech is I am worry about what points to come up with after receiving the topic entitled “How to be thrifty”. It is difficult to me to come up with ideas in one minute of preparation. In addition, I’m also worry about the words – how to speak in English… Before my turn, I’m really no mood to listen to other presenters’ presentations because I felt nervous for my every time presentation even though for my assignment presentation. During my presentation, I really nervous. I can’t speak smoothly.”
**Student 5** said, “During the three minutes speech delivery, I was nervous because I know I’m not prepared thoroughly for the topic and the only thing I could speak out is the points that I prepared from the one-minute preparation earlier.”

**Student 6** reported, “When it was my turn to present, all of a sudden I felt so nervous.”

**Student 7** said, “My mind went blank with no idea. It is really irrelevant in my thoughts. I do not know how to present. However, I manage to squeeze out three points to talk. I am very nervous from the first till my turn. It is really torturing to my body mentally.”

**Student 8** said, “When my name was called, I’m feel very nervous during that time. I actually don’t know what to talk about because really not prepared with that topic. When I speak I start with the greeting fluently but when start with the topic, I suddenly can’t speak and don’t know what to say. I always keep repeating the same word.”

Even from their reports, the researcher can see that their English has a lot of grammar errors. This is actually how the average and weak students speak in class. The author too has taught students and realizes that by being nervous they also commit a lot of grammar errors which results in them getting lower marks.
Figure 3.5

Prepare a Good Impromptu Speech

(Source: Taken from http://images.google.com.my/images)

The next chapter deals with post-impromptu speeches. It deals with self analysis, peer analysis, professional analysis and a plan for better impromptu speeches.
CHAPTER FOUR

POST IMPROMPTU SPEECH

Chapter three dealt with things we have to consider during the presentation of an impromptu speech. This included psychological preparation, and an analysis of the evaluation form comprising delivery, content and language.

This chapter will deal with post impromptu speech reflections.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF UNDERGRADUATES WHEN PRESENTING THEIR IMPROMPTU SPEECHES

Undergraduates are told to reflect on their first performance, learn from their weaknesses and improve their presentation for their second impromptu speech. Lecturers too give feedback on their students’ performance so that they can perform better for their second impromptu speech. In fact everyone who has given an impromptu speech at one time or another should also ponder on it and work out a strategy or strategies to improve on it the second time they are asked to give one.

Eight lecturers teaching the Spoken English for Professionals course were interviewed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their students when presenting their impromptu speeches. The author too who is teaching this course added to the input. The reader too can benefit from this input. Our feedback is as follows:
PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS

Staff 1

She has been teaching this course for the past two semesters. According to her the strengths of the good students are they are able to brainstorm quickly, think of very strong points and manage to develop the ideas and organize them into certain patterns, for example the topic “Sports” - they can talk about the past, present and future of sports or the benefits of sports to students, adults, and children. They have a good introduction – a good-attention getting opener and a good concluding remark. Overall, their speech is well organized.

Their weaknesses are that their points that they want to deliver are not strong. They do not have ideas – sometimes they remain silent, and sometimes they talk on points without elaboration. They are not able to express themselves well in English as their language proficiency is poor. They are not able to find the right word to say. They make a lot of mistakes in their sentence structures. For the weaker students, they finish faster that is within two minutes. Good students can speak up to three minutes or more if not stopped. They are timed and are given half a minute to conclude. Pronunciation for the weaker students is a problem. Regarding time adherence, weaker students tend to finish faster, say thank you and finish – this results in lower marks for them. Their conclusion is only one sentence, and they have no organization.

For gestures, generally all have hand movements, but no movement by walking. Where facial expressions are concerned, good students show more facial expressions that are related to their speeches. They are comfortable while speaking, and they are more confident. I can tell from their faces. Weaker students are more tensed, and conscious
of themselves. Where eye contact is concerned, all try to establish eye contact. They refer to notes but always look up. I allow them to write short notes for their one minute preparation. Those who do not read sound more natural. The weaker students who tend to read sound artificial. Accent is strong especially for the Chinese and Malay students, and they find problems in pronouncing certain words. The ‘r’ sound is pronounced as ‘l’ by some Chinese students. This is not obvious but their accent is very strong. The Malays use Malay accent when speaking in English. Actually, it depends on where they come from – those coming from Kuala Lumpur are okay but not those from Perak, Kelantan, and Kedah, where their Malay dialectal accent in English is very strong.

Staff 2

She is one of the designers of this course and has been teaching it since 2000. Presently, she is teaching two groups of around 15 students each. According to her, there are very few good students who have good grammar, organization and a good organizational structure in their speeches. She only had one good student from the law faculty, whose language was structured, and pronunciation was okay. She is of the opinion that Law students generally have good oracy skills. Regarding time, she feels that all her students can speak up to three minutes.

Their weaknesses generally are that they face an English language proficiency problem. Their English language is a real problem, and also their pronunciation is not good. They really have to prepare. They have difficulty in speaking English. This can be compared to just like asking you to speak in a foreign language that you are not proficient in. You will definitely not perform well as you do not have a good vocabulary in that language. You will have a limited vocabulary, so how can you speak well. In her groups over the past years, she has only got a few good speakers.
Generally, she feels that the students from the Science, Arts, Law, Business and Built Environment are weak. Malay students’ accent is okay but the Chinese have an accent. Even pronunciation, and vocabulary is a problem to quite a number of students. Some find it difficult to focus on their topic and talk too generally about it instead of getting two or three main points and giving enough elaboration on them. All have anxiety and are nervous. They stutter, are stiff, have no eye contact- just look at the ceiling, are very rigid or frozen, have no movement and some have while some do not even have facial expressions.

She goes through their weaknesses for the first impromptu speech and marks them down for the second evaluation if they do not perform well.

**Staff 3**

She has been teaching this course for the past five years. Presently, she is teaching only one group comprising 19 students. The strengths of her students are, for good speakers, language is there, they have ideas and know what to talk about. They know how to organize their speech within three minutes, and they are confident. The good students make occasional grammar errors.

Their weaknesses according to her are that some students do not understand their task well. When asked a question requesting to give one problem on some issue, they give more than one problem. Thus, they do not answer the question accurately. Language is also a problem. There is no organization of their impromptu speeches. They have poor vocabulary. The weak students lack ideas and so they cannot speak for the full three minutes allocated to them. They speak less, say thank you and leave and thus obtain less marks. Other aspects include having few gestures, and facial expressions. They keep smiling all the time. There is not much leg movement. For the weaker students their basic pronunciation is not good. The Chinese students tend to have Chinese accents.
The weak students have all kinds of problems for example they tend to use the plural form in all their words, and also have lots of grammar errors in their speech.

**Staff 4**

This is her first semester teaching this course. Presently, she is teaching one group of 15 students. The strengths of the good students are that they have a very good introduction which made them stand out. They had clear organization and they used good transition signals. Their thoughts flowed well. The points that they gave were relevant to the topic they were speaking about. They were confident and gave a good conclusion.

Regarding the mistakes they made, some of the students went straight to the topic as there was no attention-getter despite being taught and given practice. It may have slipped their minds. The supporting points that they gave actually did not support their main points. As an evaluator, I had to make out what they were trying to say. There was also not enough elaboration. The language and pronunciation were weak especially of those students coming from a Chinese school background. They have certain ways of pronouncing words which are not clear and accurate. Language and pronunciation is what they have to focus on. Also, they cannot find the exact words to express themselves – they pause and waste time. Most of them however can speak for the full three minutes. I had only one student who stopped after speaking for two minutes, said thank you and left. Some spoke for slightly a few more seconds. Some were initially nervous, they put their hands into their pockets and when they remembered what I had advised them, they slowly took them out again. Some of them did not have a good outline. I think they should have a clear outline. The audience should know where they are going. Some forgot to do this. They should have a better introduction and conclusion.
Regarding gestures and facial expressions, some have them while others do not have them. Those who used gestures and facial expressions well, gave more life to their speeches and thus their speeches became more interesting. Generally they used hand gestures a lot, but not shoulder gestures. Regarding eye contact, those who did not refer to their notes had more eye contact. Some who read kept on looking at the table where they placed their notes and thus lost eye contact with the audience. The shy students just kept looking at the time-keeper and did not practice looking at the whole audience and thus lost marks. About leg movements, most of them were weak here, as they froze at one spot. Some moved one or two steps sideways and not backwards or forwards.

**Staff 5**

She has been teaching this course for the past three sessions that is since 2005/2006. Presently, she is teaching one group of nine students. The strengths of the good students are that generally their delivery is good. They do not rely on notes. I allow them to write down their main points for one minute during the preparation time. The students are timed. I usually have a time keeper as sometimes I lose track of time. Their hands are free to perform gestures and they have good facial expressions. They are able to develop their topics well and give relevant examples and elaboration. They are more confident and have a better grasp of the English language. The good students are able to relate the topic to themselves and to their own feelings. In other words, they can personalize their topic whereas the weaker students are unable to do this.

The weaknesses in their impromptu speeches, are some do not develop their topic or there is inadequate development of topic. Sometimes the conclusion is not clear, as the delivery is poor. Their grammar is also poor.

Coming to non-verbal language, the better students had more natural gestures and facial expressions. Regarding movement, they are usually frozen on one spot. Eye contact
with audience – generally they look at the evaluator and not at the others. Gestures were present; however, there were those who held their papers in their hand, and thus only one hand could be used of gestures. There was however no shoulder movements among the students performing their impromptu speeches in class.

Staff 6

She has been teaching this course for the past three sessions. Presently, she is teaching one group of 14 students. The strengths of the good students are they show that they are relaxed in delivering their speeches. They show confidence. They are able to see that they are nervous, but are able to hide it. They are able to narrow down a broad topic given during the preparation time of one minute. For example, if their topic is, “Reality TV Shows”, they can narrow it to talk about the way the participants are rated, or even about the judges involved, and how they evaluate the participants, the response to reality TV shows etc. They have to narrow down. Good students can narrow down and organize the topic given. They have gestures, and the language, but their grammar may or may not be good and with this comes the confidence. They are able to relate, speak to the audience, and make contact with the other students. In class they can get the other students to get involved.

Regarding the mistakes they made, some went out of topic, spoke too generally, and grammar too was out a bit. Some finished well before their three minutes were up. Some showed real nervousness – smiled a lot, had too many hand gestures, did not know what to do, there was a lot of fidgeting like touching their body here and there, they walked a lot – showed tenseness, used lots of vocal fillers like er..., uh.. etc.”

Some had too many general points with not enough elaboration on specific points. Their gestures were not much, and there was also not much of shoulder movement. Where leg movement was concerned, weak students moved a lot. They did not make
much eye contact. For the weak students, they looked at the teacher, and had wild eye movements, not specifically at the audience. They had facial expressions. For the weak students, they have less expressive tone and stress, are too straight-forward, have no stress in their voice, and are rather monotonous.

Staff 7

She was one of the designers of this course and has taught it since its birth in 2000. Presently she is teaching two groups comprising 14 and 16 students each. According to her, the strengths of the good students were that they were creative. They have a good introduction – a good opening statement. Their ideas are organized and well elaborated or supported. She has given ample practice in giving a speech with the correct format – with introduction, body and a memorable conclusion. With a grasp of the language, this boosts their confidence. For example, they can start with not so important ideas and later say my next point of even greater importance is…. They are thus able to manipulate their ideas.

The mistakes the weaker students made are they generally do not have good eye contact with the audience, they have bad pronunciation, they also like to fidget a lot, put their hands into their pockets and sway their body too much. They tend to move a lot. There are a lot of periods of silence. One student was just too nervous and started crying because she was too scared. Some of them do not have hand movements, their hands are just intact to their body. She had to remind her students to take out their hands from their pockets while presenting their speeches.

Staff 8

She has taught this course for four semesters. Presently, she is teaching two groups comprising 15 students each. The strengths of the good students according to her are, their language is generally good and they have points, their speech is well organized
with an introduction, body and conclusion. Depending on the topic, they have strong, matured and intelligent points – two to three which they develop well. From their speech, she can see that they read a lot and keep abreast with current information. They are confident and have a sense of humour, and are able to manipulate the topic given.

According to her, their weaknesses were that they used poor language and poor grammar. There was poor organization or no organization and some even spoke out of the topic. They were not able to manipulate their ideas. Some did not even have a conclusion. They just stopped abruptly. Some paused for ideas for too long. They also used a lot of Malaysian slang words like “lah”, “mah”, “okay”, etc.”

**Staff 9**

The author has been teaching this course since 2003. The strengths of the good students from my evaluations are that they have a good command of the English language which makes it possible for them to express themselves well irrespective of the topic that they get. They also show that they are able to adjust the topic to their own experiences or from experiences they have heard from their friends. They also have a good idea of the current issues and show that they have been reading newspapers, magazines, books etc. They are able to illustrate their main points with relevant examples and anecdotes. Generally, they are able to speak fluently with good grammar and appropriate transition signals for the three minutes given to them.

The weaknesses I find in my weak students are they have poor grammar and a poor command of the English language. They lack knowledge of idiomatic expressions. There was a case when a student was given the topic “An important lesson I have learnt in my life.” The student instead of talking about the lesson (an experience which acts as a warning to you or an example from which you should learn) he had learnt actually resorted to talking about a subject that he had learnt in class and was thus totally out of
point. Some do not know the meaning of “Gambling” and had to be told the meaning of it. The weak students lacked knowledge of the real world and current issues and thus could not speak for three minutes. Some stopped after two minutes. Others continued with long pauses, hesitations and vocal fillers. Where gestures, eye contact and facial expressions were concerned, the weaker students had less of these and clearly showed a lack of confidence. I had two students who started crying and became too emotional to continue on their topic “A memorable experience”. Both dealt with deaths in their families and were totally shaken up and had to be given another chance. Again the same problem arose of poor organization of ideas and no smooth flow of ideas due to inability to use transition signals effectively. These weak students are tensed, stressed and do not know how to relax. If they can learn to relax, a free flow of ideas can come into their heads.

**SELF ANALYSIS**

When ten undergraduates who were interviewed were asked what they would like to improve on given another chance to perform their impromptu speeches again, they realized their mistakes for the first impromptu speech and gave the following answers:

**Student 1:** “Read more to gain more information. Improve communication skills to speak fluently.”

**Student 2:** “If I were given another chance to redo the impromptu speech again, I would firstly give some more supportive and convincing points. Besides, I would remember to smile while giving the speech, and also pay more attention to eye contact. This could gain more attention from the audience. Also, be more natural.”
Student 3: “For my second impromptu speech I thought I could communicate more with the viewers to lessen my nerves.”

Student 4: “Given another chance to present the same topic again, I would of course hope I can give longer elaborations to each point and also more interesting examples. In terms of my speaking, I learned from my friends that I was moving around a lot while speaking. Now knowing this, I will improve my body language and not move around too much while I am speaking even when I’m feeling nervous.”

Student 5: “For the second time I shall try to be more relaxed – I must try to be more relaxed to avoid being nervous/afraid to present in front. I can try to calm myself first. Be prepared – I also must prepare many topics before the day I do the impromptu speech. I can refer to the textbook to get the topics. Try to think faster/spontaneously – I must think of the points faster/spontaneously during the one minute I have to prepare. Practice more – I must practice more to be prepared in the second time for my impromptu speech.”

Student 6: “I must learn to become confident and speak well.”

Student 7: “If I were given a second chance, there are a few things that I will prepare. Firstly, is to quickly write down all the points that I could think of about the topic. Then try to build short sentences of points so that I could elaborate from the short points I’ve made, and try to relate the points to the happenings of the world where this could bring me more spontaneous speech and also that I will not worry about the lack of points or stop at a certain time to think and search for points. Preparations like remember to speak clearly and loudly, planning the delivery of speech and also the attire that I wear will be the earlier preparation that I do. Try to read up more so that I will get more information from different topics and issues and also this will eventually boost my vocabulary skill.”
Student 8: “If I have another chance to perform the same impromptu speech again, I would like to be more focused on my title by not giving too many examples, control my time so that I may finish presenting my speech – introduction, body and conclusion in time, have eye contact with the audience, make the audience to have interest in my speech and improve my proficiency.”

Student 9: “I’ll choose to be the first rather than the last to present. I’ll think of a better and more interesting introduction to attract the audience. I’ll try not to go too fast as the audience cannot react and follow my points. I’ll try to be more relaxed. Also I’ll try to have more eye contact, have better posture, that is stand straight. I’ll try not to sway and move too much.”

Student 10: “I’ll take a deep breath to calm down first. I’ll be very critical of the topic – try to handle something on your hand to settle down the nervousness. I’ll try not to repeat the same word. I’ll try to make eye contact with the audience. I’ll also try not to move around too much as this distracts the attention of the audience.”

PLAN FOR A BETTER IMPROMPTU SPEECH NEXT TIME

We (including the reader) can see how students size themselves up and come up with the correct strategies to improve themselves, namely reading, socializing more to increase their general knowledge, taking a deep breath to achieve confidence and relaxation, have more body language (better posture, movement, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures etc.), prepare better speeches with better organization and have better time management skills.

Based on the feedback given by the 100 student respondents via a questionnaire, nine staff via an interview and 10 students via an interview, the following strategies can be
used by students and teachers to improve their presentation of impromptu speeches. People who want to present an impromptu speech too can use these strategies to improve their performance. The recommended strategies are as follows:

1. Use videos to show some examples of effective speakers such as Martin Luther King, Oprah Winfrey, Larry King etc. This will make the class relaxed and less tensed up. Students can be asked to point out the characteristics of effective speakers. Imitation of these speakers should be encouraged to instill confidence in the students.

2. Students should be encouraged to read a lot of resources such as newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, articles in the internet by surfing the internet etc. to enhance their general knowledge of local and foreign news. When they have a good resource of knowledge, they will become more confident when presenting their impromptu speeches in class because they will be more confident of voicing out their ideas clearly and precisely.

3. Students must be told to learn relaxation techniques such as breathing in deeply before starting a speech and by doing other light stretching exercises to relax their muscles. In this way they can be calm and can think of the ideas needed to present a three-minute speech on a topic given.

4. Students have to learn to be confident of themselves by thinking positively and by having a positive attitude of themselves. They must learn to say “If others can do it well, I too can do it well.” They must be brave to face an audience and to speak up. They have to take impromptu speech as talking to their own siblings and friends in a usual, normal situation, then there will be no fear.

5. “Practice Makes Perfect” is the saying that they must always remember. They must learn to speak with friends, siblings, lecturers and others always in good, proper English. Current issues can always be discussed in English with their friends so that
they can be at par with what is happening around them. They must learn to speak up in class and not be afraid of their own classmates. They must learn to converse frequently and well in English. If they continue doing this, they will become better speakers during their impromptu speech presentations which will be evaluated. They can boost their confidence if they are better read and better informed.

6. They must listen to the news over the radio and television. Just by listening to programmes such as “Hello on 2”, “Larry King Live”, “Oprah Winfrey” etc. they will get to know how local and foreign issues are discussed and this will increase their general knowledge and will make them be better prepared for their impromptu speeches. They should also watch more English Language interviews, movies and listen to the lyrics of English songs to improve their own English Language.

7. In class, teachers should give more practice to all the students to speak up in front of the class. By giving more real practice in impromptu speeches in class, students will be less nervous on the real presentation day. There should be a weekly discussion of current issues in class where everyone is allowed to come and speak up their minds in front of the class. This will make the students be abreast of the current issues in the country and will help increase their general knowledge. In this way they can be trained to speak on a variety of topics in a broader perspective.

8. Teachers should practice teaching by using a slightly more casual style. In this way, students will feel less stressed and be under less pressure if their teacher opens up to them. In other words to lessen the gap between teachers and students, teachers have to be more casual and learn to be approachable. When students are in a less tensed environment and get to treat their teachers as their friends, they will learn to open up their minds and learn to speak out more confidently. They suddenly become more
comfortable with the surrounding and do not see their teachers as a threat to their opinions.

9. Teachers should teach their students on how to organize a good impromptu speech by having an interesting attention-getting opener, have two main points which are well elaborated via anecdotes or examples, and a good conclusion by summarizing the main points and giving their own final memorable thoughts on the topic given. Students must be taught on how to use appropriate transition signals to cement all their ideas together to ensure unity and fluency of thought and expression in their impromptu speeches. By teaching them all these skills, students can come up with more structured speeches which will make it easy for the audience to follow.

10. To make the delivery more interesting, students must be taught to have good eye contact with the audience. They should try to look at every member in the audience instead of fixing their eyes on one or two people in the audience. Besides eye contact, they should learn to have good facial expressions that are well aligned to the emotions portrayed in their speech. Instead of staying frozen in one spot which is bad for their blood circulation, they should be encouraged to move sideways one step at a time or move a step forward and backward. Instead of putting their hands at their sides or inside their pockets they should be asked to use hand and arm gestures well to express themselves. By using body language, students can enhance their delivery of their impromptu speeches as well as make their speech more interesting and in an indirect way make them become relaxed as their body is at ease and is exercising. By improving on their posture, learning the importance of non-verbal skills and by smiling a bit at the audience, will help make them become better speakers.

11. The students have to involve themselves in activities inside the campus such as societies, associations, and games so that they get to converse with other students from
other states, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and religions. By involving themselves in co-curricular activities, students learn to express themselves better and learn more about their country and people living in it. Later when they join international tournaments they can learn to express themselves better and become more confident speakers. Their general knowledge too will be greater in these aspects. They should learn to travel and see places and in this way too they can broaden their general knowledge and learn to speak of different places and cultures. By indulging in games, societies and travel they should be able to speak on topics such as “The Importance of Travel”, “Outdoor and indoor activities”, “Importance of Exercise”, “Importance of Co-curricular Activities” etc.

12. They have to read up on idiomatic expressions, proverbs, sayings etc. They should know how to use metaphors and similes well. Presently, some students lack the command of idiomatic language. If they do more reading, their speeches can be spiced up with these terms and this will make them become more fluent speakers of the English Language. Sometimes, they make embarrassing mistakes when they misinterpret the meaning of these idioms due to their ignorance of the English language.

13. For pronunciation, students can be told to look at online dictionaries which can teach them how to pronounce words. All dictionaries are available online now. They have to hear the correct pronunciation first in order to be able to speak better.

14. Students should be told to ask their friends to monitor their speech, as they are talking. Ask them to note down how many times they say “okay” and “lah”. They have to learn to stop using these slang words in their speech.

15. Students must be taught the different organizing patterns for speeches which they can apply for their impromptu speech. Being familiar with such patterns will make it easier for a student to present a speech impromptly. It will make it easier for a student to think
of things to say and examples to elaborate his/her ideas. Mental processing will be easier if the ideas follow these patterns as put forward by Dale and Wolf (2006, p. 212). These organizational patterns include the following:

a. **Past-Present-Future**: to describe how something was, how it has now changed and how it will be in the future

b. **Time**: to describe chronological events or processes in sequential order

c. **Problem-Solution**: to describe a problem and methods to solve it

d. **Location**: to divide a topic into different geographical settings

e. **Cause-Effect**: to describe a situation and its effects

f. **Effect-Cause**: to describe a situation and its causes

g. **Related Subtopics**: to divide a topic into different parts

h. **Advantage-Disadvantage**: to describe positive and negative aspects of a topic

16. Students can also brush up their grammar by going online or reading grammar books from the library. Good grammar is an asset to a speech, and those students who are weak in grammar must make it a point to polish up their grammar.

17. Teachers should give feedback to their students after their first performance. A teacher said, “I told them about their performance, their speech development, and body language, opening and closing. Who developed their speeches better and who didn’t? I gave them examples of poor students - those who truncated their speeches that is those who ended before the time limit. I told them of the importance of developing their speeches. I told them not to worry too much about their first performance but to do a better delivery – that is I need to see more improvement for their second performance.” It is important that students be given feedback so that they can improve on their
performance the second time round. If teachers or friends do not give feedback, students will not know their weaknesses and will not work to improve themselves.

18. Students have to be told to overcome their shyness and become more confident in the real working world. Impromptu speeches are made in our routine life and if someone were to ask us to speak in front of an audience, one should take it up as a challenge and speak naturally and accurately to them. Everyone makes mistakes, and one does not need to be shy or afraid because of this. Please remember “nobody is perfect”, we all make mistakes and we learn from our mistakes to improve our presentations the second time round.

19. Articulation of words is important so that the audience understands us. This needs practice. Learn to open your mouth and form your words well. Removing accents, improving pronunciation of words all takes time and practice. Slowly, one will learn to speak clearly and be comprehensible to the audience. Just keep on trying and trying until you succeed. Get your teachers, siblings, parents and friends to give feedback all the time until you become near perfect.

20. Mix with or socialize and talk to the real society around you in the real world and you will slowly become a good impromptu speaker. Just do not give up hope.

All the 20 strategies listed above if practiced will lead to you becoming a good impromptu speaker. People’s feedback on your speeches should not fall on deaf ears but be used to do your reading, researching, conversing, and discussing to improve yourself so that slowly you will become an even better speaker!

The next chapter will deal with an anatomy of a good impromptu speech.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANATOMY OF GOOD IMPROMPTU SPEECHES

Chapter four dealt with post impromptu speeches and the author discussed self-analysis, peer analysis, professional analysis and a plan for better impromptu speeches by coming up with 20 strategies that can be put to practice.

This chapter deals with the different kinds of introductions, the different organizational patterns for the body and different kinds of closings.

Basically a good impromptu speech will consist of the following parts:

1. Attention-Getting Introduction

2. Preview – a thesis statement telling what you are going to talk about

3. Body – comprising main ideas and supporting ideas

4. Summary – a wrap-up or restating of your main points

5. Memorable concluding remarks relating to your speech topic

The body of your impromptu speech can be analysed as:

I. Main Idea 1 – Topic Sentence
   a. Supporting detail one
   b. Supporting detail two

II. Main Idea 2 – Topic Sentence
   a. Supporting detail one
   b. Supporting detail two
III. Main Idea 3 – Topic Sentence

a. Supporting detail one

b. Supporting detail two

The topic sentence states what the paragraph is all about. The supporting details explain the main idea through a short story, statistics, explanation, examples etc.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF INTRODUCTIONS

At the start of your speech, it is of utmost importance for you to catch the attention of your audience and make them want to listen to you. You can start an impromptu speech by any one of the following different kinds of attention-getting introductions:

1. **Ask a Question**

   You can ask the audience a question. No answers are required from the audience. You trigger their minds to seek an answer from you. For example:

   *How can you become a millionaire?*

   *What are the steps to a successful business?*

   *What are the keys to a happy marriage?*

   *How to lose 14 kilogrammes in two weeks?*

2. **Tell a Story**

   You tell a short story on the topic about your own experience or a story you heard from a friend. For example:
On a tour to Paris, France, my friends decided to use the underground railway from their hotel as they were feeling bored. They started off in the morning and decided to come back in the evening. However, they got confused of which train to take back to their hotel and started asking the workers there in English. However, all of them spoke French and they did not understand what my friends were saying. They had a difficult time explaining that they were lost and could not find the correct line to take back to the hotel. As a result of their inability to speak French, they had to spend the whole night underground. The next morning they started telling their woes to the workers again. It was only at 10.00 am that a worker who knew a little bit of English understood them and helped them get back to their hotel. From this story, we learn the lesson of the importance of knowing a foreign language especially when you are travelling to a country where English is hardly spoken.

3. Give Statistics

It is good to create interest by giving statistics to the audience for example:

*Do you know that 30,000 graduates are unemployed in Malaysia?*

*Are you aware that 2,000 deaths occur as a result of road accidents?*

*Do you know that 40% of Malaysia’s population is made up of the elderly who constantly need care?*
4. **Start with a Quotation**

Depending on the topic given, you can always make an introduction an attention-getter by giving a quotation as follows:

*Never a borrower nor a lender be.*

*Make hay while the sun shines.*

*Money is the root of all evil.*

*Procrastination is the thief of time.*

*Do unto others as you would others do unto you.*

5. **Start with a Joke**

Depending on the topic given, you can opt to start your impromptu speech with a joke. A joke is actually a short, funny or humorous story. An example of a joke is the following story:

*I am sure you have heard of this story about the donkey and the man where the man who was going to sell the donkey in the market constantly listened to the people around him and did not use his own intelligence to solve his problem. He even at one time carried the donkey on his back and was foolish enough to obey what other people told him to do without thinking.*

6. **Start with an Exercise or Action**

You can get the attention of your audience by making them do an exercise for example:

*Can you spin your pen on a table and keep it spinning for one minute?*

*Try turning your hand without turning your wrist.*
Make the audience do it and then start your impromptu speech for example “Practice Makes Perfect” etc.

7. **Start with a Suspense Statement**

   *Do you know that a dead human being can be brought back to life?*

   *Do you know that face transplants can be done today successfully?*

   Today I am going to share with you about how this is possible.

**PREPARING A PREVIEW**

After mentally preparing your main points and attention getting introduction, you need to prepare a preview or thesis statement of your impromptu speech so that your audience will be able to follow your train of thoughts. For example, in a speech on “What to do in the event of a flood” you could state:

My purpose today is to tell you what to do in the event of a flood occurring in your housing estate. I shall discuss three major points:

1. First, how to prepare for a flood.

2. Second, what safety measures to take during a flood.

3. Third, what to do after the flood.
ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS FOR BODY OF SPEECH

There are many organizational patterns that you can choose for your impromptu speech. Some of them as suggested by Dale and Wolf (2006) and the examples of which are provided by the author are as follows:

**Past-Present-Future:** For example if you want to talk about the development in Malaysia you can talk about:

a. Malaysia in the past.

b. The present modern Malaysia.

c. The future developed Malaysia.

**Time:** Use chronological order to discuss about historical events, for example:

a. How Malaysia attained its independence.

b. How Malacca got its name.

You can also use time order to narrate an event for example:

a. My sister’s wedding.

b. A landslide, an earthquake, a robbery etc.

You can use time order to describe a process for example:

a. How to make a cake.

b. How pineapple is canned.

c. How to change a tyre etc.

**Problem-Solution:** You can speak about a problem and then give the solutions. A problem can be also a positive situation for example finding a suitable house for a
family of four. For example for the problem of air pollution, you can talk about the following solutions:

   a. Avoid open burning.

   b. Practice car pooling.

   c. Incur heavy fines for vehicles emitting heavy, black smoke.

**Location:** you can use this pattern for dividing a topic into different geographical locations. For example, in speaking about education systems, you might use the following order:

   a. Education system in Malaysia.

   b. Education system in America.

   c. Education system in Canada.

**Cause-Effect:** you can use this pattern to describe a particular situation and its effects. For example, in speaking about the effects of the economic crisis you might talk about:

   a. The retrenchment of workers.

   b. The merging of companies.

   c. The selling of property.

**Effect-Cause:** you can use this pattern to describe a particular situation and its causes. For instance, in discussing the bad effects of air pollution, you might speak on the causes for example:

   a. Too many vehicles on the road
b. Too many factories situated near housing estates

c. Too much open burning of rubbish in housing estates

**Related Subtopics**: you can use this pattern to divide one topic into different parts for example when talking about sports you may talk about:

a. Sports Indoors.

b. Sports Outdoors.

c. Sports in the Water.

d. Sports in the Winter.

**Advantage-Disadvantage**: you can use this pattern to discuss about the positive and negative aspects of a topic in an objective manner for example when discussing watching television, you may want to talk about:

a. Advantages of watching television

b. Disadvantages of watching television.

Besides the above organizational patterns, certain topics expect you to **develop a premise or stand** for example when asked to speak on **Capital Punishment** you may want to follow this order:

a. Define capital punishment first.

b. State your position - whether you agree or not that it should be practiced for certain crimes in your country.

e. Give reasons or justify your stand.
DIFFERENT KINDS OF CLOSINGS

You must end your impromptu speech with a good conclusion. You have to give a summary of your main points and leave the audience satisfied that they have learnt something from your speech. Also, you must end with some memorable closing remarks of your speech.

Give a summary: As a conclusion, you can remind the audience of what you talked about in your speech by restating your main points. For example, in your speech, “What to do in the event of a flood”, you may conclude by saying:

*After listening to my speech, I hope you will be better prepared in the event of a flood occurring in your housing estate. You now know:*

1. *How to prepare for a flood.*
2. *What safety measures to take during a flood.*
3. *What to do after the flood.*

Another example of a summary for a talk on “Watching Television” could be:

*Watching television is a past time hobby for many people. In brief, please remember of all the pros and cons of watching television that I have told you today.*

Prepare Memorable Concluding Thoughts

Just like preparing attention-getting introductions, remember to end your speech finally with some memorable remarks on your topic. You can end with questions, short stories, a joke, surprising facts, statistics, quotations, a call to action, etc.
For example, on your talk on “What to do in the event of a flood in your housing estate”, you may end with “Better safe than sorry”.

On your talk on “Watching Television” you may end with “Too much of anything is not good for you.”

On your talk on unemployed graduates in Malaysia you may want to end with some questions such as “Why should I be a burden to my parents?” “Why should they support me after making me a graduate?” It is time I ask them “What can I do for you now?”

The next chapter will deal with the Malaysian experience. The author will discuss impromptu speeches by students on different occasions, the ordinary man on different occasions, and factors affecting better impromptu speeches.
CHAPTER SIX

MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

Chapter five dealt with the different kinds of introductions, the different organizational patterns for the body and different kinds of closings. In chapter five, the author discussed the anatomy of impromptu speeches. This included preparing a good attention getting introduction, a preview, a good body using different organizational patterns, and a good conclusion comprising a good summary and some memorable concluding remarks.

This chapter will discuss the Malaysian experience involving students on different occasions, non-students or the ordinary man on the street on different occasions. The author will also write about the factors affecting better impromptu speeches and finally lecturers experience and suggestions.

An impromptu speech will unnerve anyone. One of the most daunting experiences a person can face is the request to deliver a speech without notice. When caught off guard, many people can suffer extreme anxiety and fear about speaking off the cuff. That's why it is important to be always prepared.

IMPROMPTU SPEECHES BY STUDENTS ON DIFFERENT OCCASSIONS

To enhance performance in impromptu speeches in English, Malaysian students should try their best to discuss current issues in English language. Students should make it a point to talk to each other in English language. They should discuss their plans, homework, courses, lecturers, family and personal matters with each other in English.
They should learn to communicate with their peers, lecturers, siblings, relatives, and family members in English. In class when asked to answer questions, they should be courageous in giving extended answers. In this way they can practice their impromptu speeches. Students do make impromptu speeches when participating in their societies, associations and during sports. Among themselves they do give impromptu speeches for their friends’ birthday parties, farewell parties, get togethers etc.

**IMPROMPTU SPEECHES BY PEOPLE EVERYDAY ON DIFFERENT OCCASSIONS**

Impromptu speeches are given all of the time. In our daily living, we are making impromptu speeches in our communication with other people during our daily routine duties. The man on the street will be making impromptu speeches when he asks his fellow citizens for direction, when ordering food in cafeterias, when discussing issues or having phatic communication in the coffee shop with his friends, when buying and selling goods in the market, road stalls, supermarkets, grocery shops, and hypermarkets. At home, he will be making impromptu speeches with his wife, children and sometimes with his neighbor. Impromptu speeches are being made when we need to inform, persuade, entertain or for special occasions such as during wedding dinners, birthday parties, get-together parties during festive seasons, at annual affairs such as end of year parties at the workplace, new year parties, parties to celebrate a promotion, a successful project etc.
FACTORS AFFECTING BETTER IMPROMPTU SPEECHES

Often, we are requested to stand and deliver at social events, business meetings, club meetings, and family gatherings. There are various factors affecting better impromptu speeches. This section will discuss these factors which speakers of impromptu speeches should take into consideration in order to deliver better impromptu speeches.

**Analyze Your Audience.** To make effective and better impromptu speeches, people must analyse their audience. They must take the trouble to know the age, gender, occupation, economic level, and general background of their audience. By general background, the author means the religious beliefs, and customs of your audience. Be tactful when giving an impromptu speech and do not talk on sensitive issues, use sexist language or belittle a particular caste or race. Be careful of the language you use, for example addressing a woman as a girl. This may offend your audience who may not want to listen to you.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- "Who is my audience?"
- "What are the needs of the audience?"
- "What does the audience hope to gain from the speech?"
- "What is the level of expertise of the audience members?"

Once you have the answers to these questions, you can prepare a suitable speech to satisfy the audience's needs.

**Dress Well.** To boost your own self-confidence always dress up well. Good dressing will give you confidence in yourself to deliver a good impromptu speech. Your
audience will like to look at you and they will listen to you because they like looking at you.

**Well-Groomed.** Make sure that your hair is well tied up in a pony tail or plaited if you are a girl or a woman. For men too ensure that your hair is short and well combed. Do not have fringes covering your eyes. Ensure that your clothes are comfortable, of the right colour and are well-ironed. Your shoes should be polished and for ladies avoid wearing too high stilletoes. If you are well-groomed you will not be self-conscious about your own self when presenting an impromptu speech.

**Visualize Yourself Giving a Successful Speech.** When asked to give an impromptu speech, always accept it with enthusiasm. Visualize yourself as being victorious and getting a roaring applause. This will ensure that you stay focused on the topic and present it well.

**Organise Your Thoughts Well.** Usually, you are given some time to prepare mentally or to jot down notes or your speech points before presenting your impromptu speech. Quickly use an acronym (an abbreviation consisting of letters that form a word) or a mnemonic (a sentence or short poem that you use for helping you remember something) for your three main points for your speech. Add an attention-getting introduction, a preview and wrap-up or conclude with a summary of your main points and end with some memorable closing remarks and voila you will have presented well.

**Do Not Apologise or Give Excuses.** Just like a public speech, an impromptu speech should never be started with an apology or an excuse. If you do this, you are warning the audience that you are going to give them an average speech which is disheartening for them. Remember the audience is there to cheer and applaud you, so please give your best to them.
Do Not Be Tongue-Tied. Do not be frozen or tongue-tied when called upon to give an impromptu speech. When asked to give an impromptu speech, learn to relax, take a few deep breaths, walk a bit and warm yourself up. Learn to speak up. Do not be tongue-tied and remain silent when asked to say something for an occasion. Learn to relax and try your best to give a short impromptu speech with whatever knowledge or experience you have gathered in the past. No one is expecting a perfect speech from you because remember “Nobody is Perfect.” If you opt for perfection, you may not succeed as this may lead to paralysis, with no words come out from your mouth.

Figure 6.1

Do Not Be Tongue-Tied

(Source: http://images.google.com.my/images)

Be Cooperative. When asked to give an impromptu speech, be cooperative. People will like you if you are sporting and are cooperative to speak up for a group of people for a particular occasion. Sometimes if a speaker does not turn up because of some unforeseen circumstances, and you are called upon to say something, please learn to accept the honour of giving an impromptu speech on the absent speaker’s behalf to save the day. Just churn out an impromptu speech - the best you can.
Articulate Your Words Well. An impromptu speech scores high marks if your articulation of words is clear. Have the correct diction, good pronunciation and enunciation of words. People find it difficult to understand speeches of people who stutter, stammer and use the incorrect words.

Avoid Empty Talk. We know of speakers who keep rambling on and on and are not focused. Thus it is best to be straightforward and present your three major points well instead of repeating one point and annoying the audience because you just do not have the content.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This book looked into the definition of impromptu speech, the kinds of impromptu speeches, who does impromptu speeches, and how to learn impromptu speeches. Chapter 2 discussed pre-impromptu speech preparation involving how to gain knowledge, psychological preparation, physical preparation, and self-image. Chapter 3 discussed during impromptu speech and assessment of impromptu speeches based on delivery, content and language. It also touched on the evaluation given by the teachers and the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduates when presenting their impromptu speeches. Chapter 4 discussed post impromptu speech involving self-analysis, peer analysis, professional analysis and a plan for better impromptu speech next time. Twenty recommendations have been put forward for lecturers to inform their students so that the students can improve their presentation of impromptu speeches. Chapter five discussed the anatomy of a good impromptu speech comprising how to write attention getting introductions, previews, different organizational patterns for the body and how to write a good conclusion. Chapter 6 discussed the Malaysian experience involving students, the public, and factors affecting better impromptu speeches.

To be a better speaker of impromptu speeches, it is good to either tape record or video record your own speech and do a self-analysis of it. Also always get your friends to give you feedback on how you performed. In this way you can constantly improve your impromptu speeches.
Impromptu speeches are important in our daily life and it is with impromptu speeches that communication is kept alive and problems are solved. We must learn to express ourselves well so that our society can be a better place to live in for all of us. We must learn to use impromptu speeches to unite ourselves with the different races and cultures. To avoid aggressive behavior, impromptu speeches can be used to inform, persuade, entertain, advise, counsel, warn, negotiate, investigate, and correspond with other people in our society who come from different socio-economic backgrounds, and different schools of thought.
REFERENCES


SOME IMPROMPTU SPEECH
TITLES FOR PRACTICE

1. CONVINCE A FRIEND THAT WATCHING TV IS A WASTE OF TIME
2. CONVINCE YOUR BROTHER THAT SMOKING IS BAD FOR HIS HEALTH
3. CONVINCE YOUR PARENTS TO LET YOU GET A PART-TIME JOB
4. CONVINCE YOUR PARENTS THAT YOU ARE NOT TOO YOUNG TO GET MARRIED
5. CONVINCE YOUR BOSS TO GIVE YOU A RAISE IN SALARY
6. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED NATIONALLY
7. DOGS MAKE BETTER PETS THAN CATS
8. YOU SHOULD DONATE BLOOD AT THE CAMPUS BLOOD DRIVE
9. BEING MARRIED HAS MORE PROBLEMS THAN BEING SINGLE
10. MONEY IS VERY IMPORTANT IN TODAY’S WORLD
11. IT (INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY) KNOWLEDGE HAS MORE ADVANTAGES THAN DISADVANTAGES
12. WORKING IN A TEAM HELPS SOLVE MANY PROBLEMS
13. LIVING IN A CITY IS BETTER THAN LIVING IN A VILLAGE
14. A LOVE MARRIAGE IS BETTER THAN AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE
15. DATING IS GOOD FOR COUPLES BEFORE MARRIAGE
16. BUILDING OF HOUSES ON HILL-TOPS SHOULD BE BANNED BY THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT
17. UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG LOCAL GRADUATES IS THE RESULT OF THEIR OWN DOING
18. INTER-RACIAL MARRIAGES SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED IN MALAYSIA
19. SOFT SKILLS SHOULD BE MADE COMPULSORY FROM FORM ONE ONWARDS
20. CARING FOR OTHERS SHOULD BE MADE A SUBJECT AT SCHOOL LEVEL
21. SEX EDUCATION SHOULD BE MADE COMPULSORY FROM PRIMARY ONE
22. COMPUTER KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO ELDERS AS NIGHT CLASSES FOR FREE BY THE GOVERNMENT
23. DRIVING A CAR IS A SKILL THAT SHOULD BE MADE COMPULSORY FOR ALL STUDENTS ABOVE 18
24. NATIONAL SERVICE HAS BROUGHT IN MORE ADVANTAGES THAN DISADVANTAGES FOR MALAYSIAN YOUTH
25. MORAL EDUCATION SHOULD ALSO BE MADE COMPULSORY AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL
26. THE TEACHING OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS IN ENGLISH SHOULD BE CONTINUED IN MALAYSIA
27. HEALTH EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT AND SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS
28. CHILD ABUSERS SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE SEVERE PUNISHMENT
29. PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN TODAY’S COMPETITIVE WORLD
30. PICK-POCKETS AND SNATCH THIEVES SHOULD BE DEALT WITH MORE SEVERELY BY THE POLICE
31. POLICE BRUTALITY ON CRIMINALS IN PRISONS SHOULD BE MONITORED
32. RAPISTS SHOULD BE GIVEN COUNSELLING
33. PEP TALKS ON VARIOUS CURRENT ISSUES SHOULD BE GIVEN BY THE HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS TO THEIR STAFF TWICE A MONTH
34. MALAYSIANS SHOULD LEARN TO BE MORE COMPETITIVE IN ORDER TO SUCCEED IN THE BUSINESS WORLD
35. TERRORISTS SHOULD BE HUNTED DOWN TO THEIR VERY ROOTS
36. THERE SHOULD BE MORE HOMES FOR THE ELDERLY IN MALAYSIA BECAUSE NOW WE HAVE MORE PEOPLE LIVING TO A RIPER AGE BECAUSE OF BETTER MEDICAL FACILITIES
37. HOUSE BREAKING CRIMES SHOULD BE BETTER ADDRESSED TO IN MALAYSIA
38. IDENTITY THEFTS BRING IN A LOT OF PROBLEMS TO US
39. HAVING LESS CHILDREN IS BETTER THAN HAVING MORE CHILDREN
40. PARENTING SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MARRIED COUPLES
41. THE INTERNET HAS BROUGHT IN MORE KNOWLEDGE THAN WE EVER THOUGHT OF
42. GROOMING SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO ALL FINAL YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WHO WILL SOON JOIN THE WORKING WORLD
43. COMMUNICATION SKILLS IS A MUST FOR ALL PEOPLE TO SUCCEED IN LIFE
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