



Speaking Too Quietly or Loudly

HOW TO SPEAK AND BE HEARD

Volume Variation:

When you're alone, experiment with your volume potential to see what you're capable of. Without straining your vocal muscles, say the phrase "I feel fine" as if you're speaking to someone three feet away, at the other end of a long conference table, a room away from you, and then half a block away.

Enlist a friend or colleague to be your coach for a five-minute conversation across a medium-sized table. Tell her to signal a need for greater volume by raising an index finger. Do the same exercise with your eyes closed to help you develop a feel for your ideal volume. This time your coach can signal with a verbal cue such as "volume" or "more." Ask your coach to note any pattern of inaudible volume - you might have a habit of lowering your volume at the beginning or end of sentences or when you're speaking about yourself.

Advanced practice: Repeat the previous exercise with a radio or TV playing in the background. This will help you adjust volume for a noisier environment.

Support volume by keeping a relaxed and open throat, breathing from the abdominal area, and keeping your mouth as open as possible when you speak. Observe and evaluate these tips by projecting the following phrases with adequate volume to an area ten feet away:

- "My throat is relaxed."
- "I'm breathing deeply and relaxed."
- "My voice is filling my mouth."

ADJUSTING VOLUME CONTROL

Tune in: Ask a colleague or friend to help you discover your best conversational volume by signaling when your decibel level becomes deafening. Bring a tape recorder to a meeting and note how your volume compares to that of others.

Try it on: Contrast different volumes by saying words and phrases at various settings: softer than average, average, loud, and very loud. Remember that your “soft” may be someone else’s “average,” and so on. Your goal is to begin to develop sensitivity to the range of volumes and an internal sense that lets you know when it’s time to tone down.

Take it around: Use your new, softer volume in routine situations, such as answering the telephone, greeting people, or making a request. Observe people’s reactions and decide if your volume control has improved.

Laurie Schloff and Marcia Yudkin. *Smart Speaking: Sixty-Second Strategies*, 1991.