



Practicing Vocal Emphasis

OBJECTIVES

- To practice vocal expression and emphasis.
- To develop effective delivery skills.

EXPLANATION

Although words convey meaning, the particular meanings of words come from their use and their expression. People give meaning to words as they speak them. Using the same words, you can change the meaning by just emphasizing different words.

INSTRUCTIONS

In the following example, the italicized word connotes a different meaning. Practice reading the sentences aloud and emphasize the italicized word.

John is taking me to the dance. (John, not Sam)

John *is* taking me to the dance. (He is definitely taking me)

John is *taking* me to the dance. (He is paying for everything)

John is taking *me* to the dance. (I can't believe it, he chose me)

John is taking me *to* the dance. (He's dropping me off)

John is taking me to *the* dance. (The only dance this year, how exciting)

John is taking me to the *dance*. (Not the movie)

When a speaker puts vocal emphasis on different words, it will convey a different meaning than if the sentence spoken were simply read off a page. The speaker can change how their message is perceived by emphasizing different words in a statement as demonstrated above.

Adapted from Patricia Comeaux. *Workbook for Public Speaking*. 2nd edition, 1996.