



YOU TOO CAN TALK LIKE A **SEASONED** **BROADCAST JOURNALIST**

There's a fascinating article that was written by Andrew Jacobs years ago for the New York Times entitled, "Novice Newscasters Get Voice Therapy." In the article, Jacobs exposes the extensive training some broadcast journalists have to go through to get their delivery just right.

Jacobs writes, "...those new to the medium say that delivering words in a way that holds viewers is the most frustrating aspect of broadcast journalism. Cadence, inflection, and projection are subtle skills, they say, ones that take years to get right."

Like broadcast journalists, your ability to hold your viewer during your speech or presentation has a lot to do with how you speak when delivering your message. And guess what? You can learn just by watching the best.

FREE EDUCATION

If you want to get a free education on how to properly punctuate your speech while telling a compelling story, watch a skilled broadcaster deliver the nightly news. According to Edie Magnus, a thirty-year TV news veteran who has served as an anchor for three major networks, one of the key tricks of the anchor trade is to treat words with proper emphasis, force, and feeling. Good anchors, in other words, punctuate their speech.

For example, in her nationally televised documentary *Cry for Help*, Magnus had the following narration: “Across the country, dozens of teenagers kill themselves.” Then she paused, before saying slowly, “Twenty-eight a week. That’s a rate of four per day.” She’s not just punctuating for the sake of punctuating. She wants people to feel the effects of the stories she’s presenting.

“I pause to emphasize things based on what I genuinely, authentically believe to be important about the story and why I’m telling it,” says Magnus. Everything is in the service of why. One speaker will offer one interpretation of the story. Another will emphasize other elements to arrive at a different conclusion. “Punctuation,” she insists, “is not a paint-by-numbers thing.”

As Magnus so succinctly put it, “It’s passion that drives punctuation.” Think about anything noteworthy in your life – anything that matters to you or those around you – you can’t help but communicate those messages with its accompanying feelings of excitement, sorrow, anger, concern, confusion, wonder, pride, etc. Isn’t that incredible to consider? Each feeling that you can possibly think of can be conveyed with varying emphasis, tones, pitch, etc.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PUNCTUATION

When we’re reading a book, characters can be described with detail that leaves no question of what they’re thinking and communicating to the other characters in the book. When we’re the ones writing, we use punctuation marks and typographic elements—like commas, italics, bold letters, exclamation points and question marks—to represent those rhythms on the page. It’s a consistent, universal and sensible system. Every punctuation mark has one or more particular function, and we learn when and where to place those punctuation marks as we learn how to write.

Since listeners can’t see commas, question marks, or exclamation points, speakers have to express them in ways that make them care. You can’t be shy. You have to be intense, sincere, and passionate. Stories and speeches must come from within and make their way to an audience with power and conviction.

And yet...there is such a thing as “broadcast copy” – which takes

our concept of written punctuation to another level. In essence, punctuation is used to help the broadcast journalist PUNCTUATE and deliver a message in the most compelling way. It’s pretty fascinating; google the term “broadcast copy” and you’ll get a number of university course guides on the topic. In fact, doing so may give you some tips in how to write out your next presentation or speech – helping you present more succinctly and effectively.

MORE THAN WORDS

Like the 1990 classic hit song...your message needs to be said with more than words. Your non-verbal communication is just as important as the words you choose – and they can put the extra punch needed for your “exclamation point” on the end of your message.

When giving a presentation, you can punctuate your speech in a variety of ways, including with physical gestures. You can raise your eyebrows. Furrow your brow. Take a moment to smile. All these physical movements can help you draw your audience’s attention to a particular element of your speech. It’s also a visual guide for your audience. Like mentioned above, they can’t see the punctuation written on your script or memorized in your mind or felt in your heart. They can however, see your expressions, gestures and hear the corresponding message.

Take time when you practice to look at yourself in the mirror and observe what you see. I realize this can be a little distracting at first; however, when you begin to see how you’re delivering your speech – from nervous habits to contradictory motions – you can fix your non-verbal message to support your verbal message... ensuring the message you are sending is consistent and that you aren’t unintentionally distracting from what you want your audience to hear.

To be a great speaker, pretend like you’re making a career change to be a broadcast journalist; doing so will force you to re-evaluate how you not only prepare your message, but deliver it. Remember our 30-year TV veteran? According to Magnus, the integration of speaking with punctuation and getting your audience to care has three key considerations:

No. 1: You are never just disseminating information.

No. 2: You tell a story you care about, which in turn drives how you tell it.

No. 3: You use punctuation to drive the meaning you want to convey.

In other words, great communicators speak with passion, intent... and punctuation.