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Online Classes ~ Solution Or Filler

By, Srotaswini Bhowmick,
Assistant Professor, USLM



Spring this year hardly looks colourful or chirpy. Most of us are sitting at home abiding by the lockdown decision of the State. The Covid-19 crisis has reached its peak in many parts of our country. Economy, Health, Education — all these sectors are in a bad shape right now. Some of us are struggling to work from home amidst the global chaos.

Many educational institutions are striving to conduct online teaching sessions for their students. It involves Zoom or Skype classrooms, audio and video recordings uploaded on YouTube and institution websites, various quizzes and assignment submissions through email and the list is vast and varied. While the organisations and most of the teachers are enthusiastically at it, many students are not finding this easy.

A report published this week in The Telegraph says that the Vice Chancellor of a premier public university of our country is warning the education system about a clear digital divide.

One may say that it is a populist approach; that there are limits to digital divide alarmism; that online classes do not 'create' the digital divide; perhaps they are accentuating it. And we know that these days plenty of college students use smartphones. The question is whether the phone internet support is sufficient to substitute physical classrooms?

Ultra-urban population feels that everybody in the country is flooded with internet and that things like digital India has already happened. But we need to remind ourselves that having a smartphone is one thing, connectivity in that device is completely a different ballgame altogether. 70% of India, even most of the municipalities (leave aside the villages) get at most 2.5G connection, not even 3G which is alright for using WhatsApp, checking mails etc. but not enough for even downloading videos, leave alone live streaming. So as long as even 1% of students have problem with digital access, Indian Universities cannot endorse online classes for select group of more privileged students, and promote an alleged learning divide.

The moment we come to the talk of 'divide', we need to widen the scope of it. Divides are promoted by economic background, social community, family type, gender and last but not the least,

religion. To give an example, I have some female students who have sufficient internet access at home but are not comfortable to attend online AV sessions for more than half an hour. Honestly, these girls are brightest of the lot. Their family structure demands them to do household chores or at least be support for the older women who cook and clean, all the more when they are at home. These youngsters prefer audio lecture clips because they can access them anytime they wish to, maybe when the families doze off and no one can disturb or distract their academic commitment.

We as educators are sincerely trying and will keep trying our best to connect to our students through virtual media, in our professional and individual capacities, to ensure that there is some kind of academic interaction with learners during these unforeseen circumstances. But we need not assume that this attempt is a substitute for our regular lectures that are required to do justice to the completion of courses. These can act as mere support but surely cannot be an all-encompassing and sufficient alternative system to teach and learn.

We need to come up with better answers. Our country needs to take a decision to postpone one entire semester, if need be. The economic condition of the nation tells us that it will take a minimum of six months to revive the health of the job market. As far as graduating batches and their further admissions are concerned, if national education board decides a postponement then, by default, that will push all the semesters forward for six months for all. And it would fall in place in a cycle where a uniform policy may benefit students of all institutions in an even manner. Till then these online interactive sessions will remain in the discourse as favourable methods of experiment, not pebbles in the path of solution.

How Public Speaking Can Turn – Around The Way People Look At You

By, Girija Shankar Semuwal,
Assistant Professor, USLM



Well, certainly, there are two reassurances – one that these feelings of nervousness are experienced by even the most experienced speakers and, two, there is an entire body of serious advice and suggestions on how to overcome it.

Before we actually embark on a journey to encounter our subjective stage-frights it is really helpful to know what long-lasting benefits the practice of Public Speaking can bring to us. Public Speaking, as most would think, is not simply a way to impress people and become popular. From a higher perch, one can clearly see that it is a means to being remembered by those who listen to you and matter to you. So, when people pay compliments to your “wonderful, amazing” oratory or share their admiration of you with their friends and colleagues, it means the memory of your speech or address is still afresh in their minds. Quite literally, many people can come to know you better through your public speaking and it can become one of the foremost things they remember about you – all the more reason that what they remember about you better be good!

So, the first principle about Public Speaking is just this – it is not simply a way to impress but a way to influence the way people perceive you.

Many organizations and companies have realized this principle over the last few decades and have increased the frequency of public addresses of their CEOs and spokespersons made not only to their customers and shareholders but also to young students in schools, colleges and universities and even to the communities of strategically important villages, towns and large urban centers. Professional organizations realize that Public Speaking is a technique through which they can make the necessary impact and also directly influence the way ‘audiences’ think of their company and brand and the way they will remember it in the future. Probably, Jeff Bezos, the founder, CEO, and President of Amazon was following this principle during his recent India trip.

Because all these companies and professionals appreciate the importance of Public Speaking, they invest heavily in enlisting the services of expert speech coaches and speech writers who charge hefty consultation fees by the hour! So much so to the power of Public Speaking!

This trend of the increasing recognition of the power and impact of PS has also led to a plethora of training courses, programmes and workshops by experts. Most of these training programmes impart, more or less, the same broad principles to participants on overcoming stage-fears and speaking effectively. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to invest in any good PS program as they provide opportunities to practice in the presence of a coach, learn through one's own experience and also get customized tips and feedback from the expert.

Marjorie North, who is an expert speech consultant in the United States of America and has helped several politicians, lawyers and physicians with their public speaking skills recommends the same principles of practice and thorough preparation in **her writings and training programmes**. According to North, besides practicing and preparing, videotaping your speech rehearsals and getting feedback from friends is a great way of overcoming anxiety issues before a public speech. More importantly, knowing your speech's audience, understanding their likes and dislikes, and organizing and filling your speech with statements and ideas that they would appreciate works very well. In other words, creating speeches for your audiences, rather than for yourself, is an effective way to make your speech memorable.

Your audiences are sure to remember you if you give them stories to remember. When you tell stories, funny anecdotes or jokes your audiences can easily recognize, as they resonate with their lives, there would be a stark difference in how they perceive you before and after your speech. The indirect benefit is that they will keep that image of you in your mind. If you are to speak on a serious topic, there can always be memorable, motivational stories to narrate which your audiences will remember.

The other important principle about PS is that the more the number of speeches you deliver, the better are the chances of creating the perception you want to create. Avoiding or hesitating delivering speeches does not work in one's favour, and people should take every opportunity in their stride. Loving the process of preparation and then delivering speeches on schedule can build tremendous confidence in speakers.

Chris Anderson, a curator for TED talks – a highly viewed collection of insightful and inspirational live talks on Technology, Entertainment and Design that go with the tagline 'Ideas Worth Spreading', and that have brought some lesser known speakers from around the world into eminence – **recommends similar principles on Public Speaking**. He underlines the technique of creating your speech around one central new idea that listeners or audiences can clearly understand, and giving them a reason to care to listen to the new idea – that can only happen if the idea is relatable for the audiences, that it is indeed for them or does something for their knowledge or lives.

There is so much that PS can do for you. To revisit an old emphasis on its qualities, public speaking can hone your personality. This happens only when you allow your personality to come across through your speeches – only when there is personality, can it be honed! Because it matters so much to one's professional as well as personal lives, each public speech presents an opportunity to speakers to have their persona captured and remembered by people around them the way a speaker wants, especially people that matter the most. Public Speaking is thus an invaluable investment for students, professionals and leaders alike.

I Want To Write

By, Smit Soni,
Sem-2, USLM



**In these times I wonder what is there to write,
When the ink of feelings has dried,
I think I will write about how hopefully I picked up my notebook and tried to write,
But as I said the ink has dried, I can write about how desperate I am to write,
Inside it choked up but it doesn't want to come out,
I think I will write about love but for that, I need to feel love,
Still, the ink is dry and no amount of love will help...**

Karnavati University
907/A, Urvasad,
Dist. Gandhinagar-382422
Tel: 079 3053 5083, 3053 5084
www.karnvatiuniveristy.edu.in/uslm

