

Boost your professional communication skills

10 tips and techniques that you can put into practice right away

Plus a bonus hack to help you put these ideas into action pronto!



Hi! I am Lori Nagel...

As a trained speech-language pathologist with years of experience, I specialize in addressing the unique challenges faced by professionals like you.

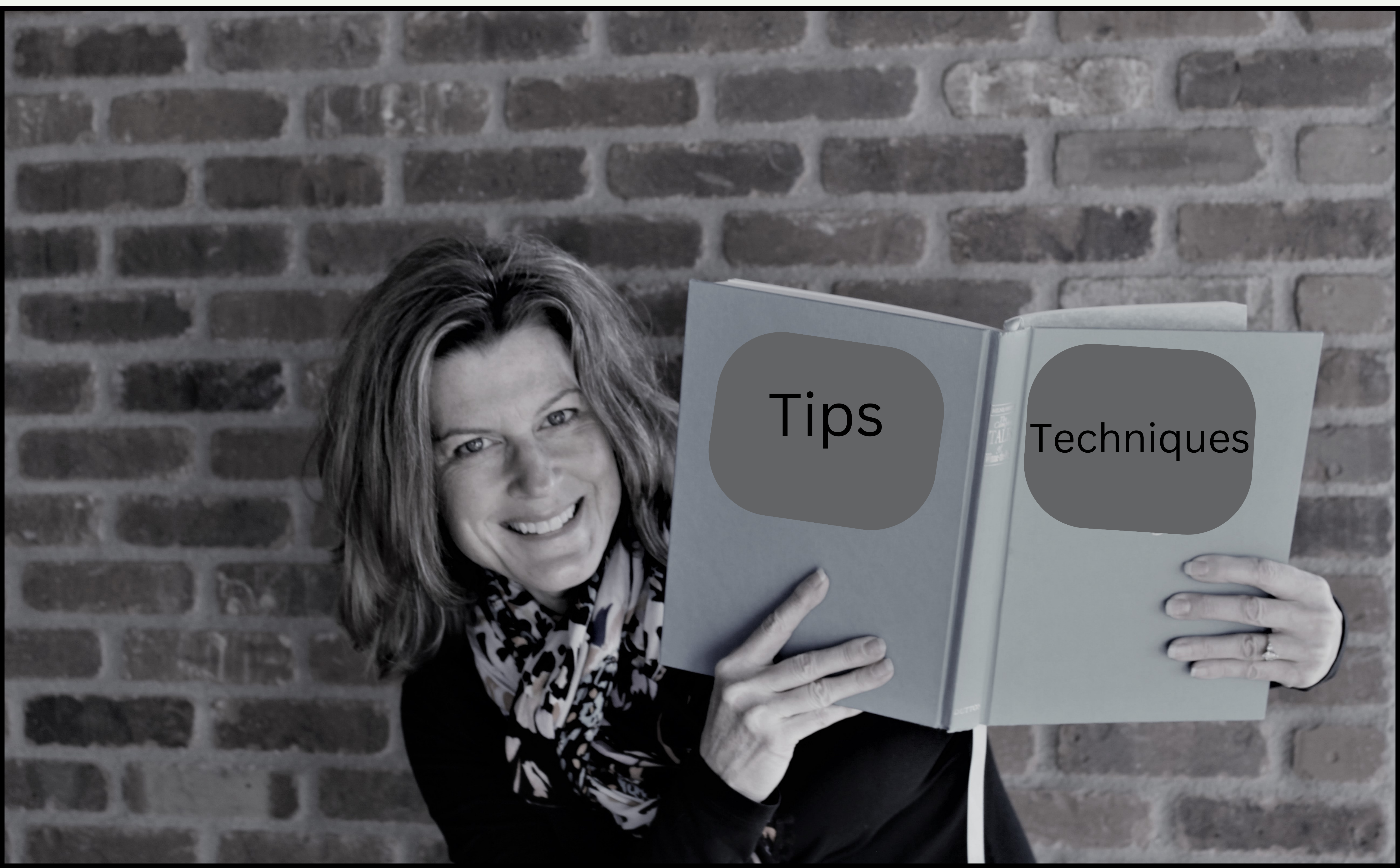
From refining pronunciation and language comprehension to enhancing written and oral expression, I am dedicated to empowering you to communicate clearly and naturally in North American English.

I believe that effective communication is the key to unlocking opportunities and connecting with others authentically. With a wealth of experience and a heart for overcoming language barriers, I am here to guide you on a journey of confident, North American English communication.

I've written these 10 tips and techniques with you in mind, a busy professional who wants to effectively communicate professionally in English. Take a look and try them out.

Wishing you success!

Lori



Tip # 1: Listen to others as they speak

In order to make lasting changes in the way we communicate, we need to be aware of what we are doing as we speak. One of the best ways to do that is by listening to others and making observations.

Listen to how the speaker begins and ends their sentences. Think about **pitch** which is the highness and lowness of our voice. What do you observe? Does it begin high or low? Does it rise and fall throughout their sentence or just stay about the same? What happens at the end of the sentence? Can you tell if the person is asking a question or making a statement just by listening to their pitch?

Next, observe the **quickness** at which a person speaks. What do you notice about the differences between a person who speaks very quickly compared to someone who does not? Do they pause? Do they slow down on particular words to make a point? When do they take a breath? How many words or sentences do they say between each breath? Speaking rate is critical to one's overall clarity of speech, and it is something we can have under our control.

Lastly, what do you observe about **emphasis**, whether it be on a particular word or a particular syllable within a word? In North American English, we use emphasis to drive the meaning of our message. We have patterns in which parts of words receive more emphasis relative to others. These things directly affect the clarity of our message and how well it is received.

Making observations of others' communication is the first step you can take to begin to make changes in your own speaking skills.



Tip #2: Face the person you are talking to

Make an effort to face the person to whom you are speaking. Directly face them. While this may seem obvious, many times we don't actually do this when communicating.

Think about a time when someone was speaking important information and your back was turned to them. Could you clearly hear what they were saying? Could you see their facial expressions as they spoke? What happened when they dropped their voice at the end of their sentence? Could you still hear them?

Also consider your audience. If you are speaking to someone who is elderly or hard of hearing, they might need to see your mouth as you speak in order to clearly hear what you are saying. Many times we may start in this position but continue to speak as we walk away. Someone who is elderly or hard of hearing is put at a disadvantage because now they can't get any information from your face as you speak. Plus, the strength of the speech signal coming from you isn't as strong as it was when you were facing them.

When we face the person we are speaking to, we have the opportunity to read their body language. We can see if they are giving us signals like a nod of the head to indicate we are being understood, or a frown of the brow telling us we better slow down and say that again.

Directly facing our listeners also allows us the opportunity to appear as the one in command of the conversation. We give our eye contact and corresponding facial expressions to add to the point we are making. We smile and that makes our listeners feel connected.

We appear as the authority of our message because we are standing, looking at our audience with confidence



Tip #3: Think about background noise

Background noise is the ambient noise in a room. It comes from a variety of places. Some examples are the conversations of others, a phone ringing, music, and traffic noise. Background noise can also be the sound emitted by overhead lights, footsteps in the hallway, road noise in the car, etc.

Consideration of background noise is important because the listener is hearing that in addition to the words that you say. When communicating in person, you are aware of the background noise and can work to project your voice over and above it. But when communicating via the phone, this can be more difficult. Phones can pick up road noise, music, and others talking and transmit that to the listener on the other end of the call.



If you are communicating in an environment with background noise that is competing with your message, take action. Move to a quieter setting to make your call or host your Zoom meeting. Take your in-person conversation into a quieter room, especially if the topic is a serious one.

You can also take action by eliminating any sources of noise before you communicate. Some instances where this may help include closing the door, turning off the television (or at least turning down the volume), and avoiding calls when you are on the road. Consider using a headset with a microphone for online meetings. Close the distance between you and your listeners if possible by moving off stage or asking them to sit closer to you. All of these suggestions may seem obvious but many times aren't thought of in the moment.

Managing background noise as best you can will eliminate unnecessary barriers to the communication of your message.

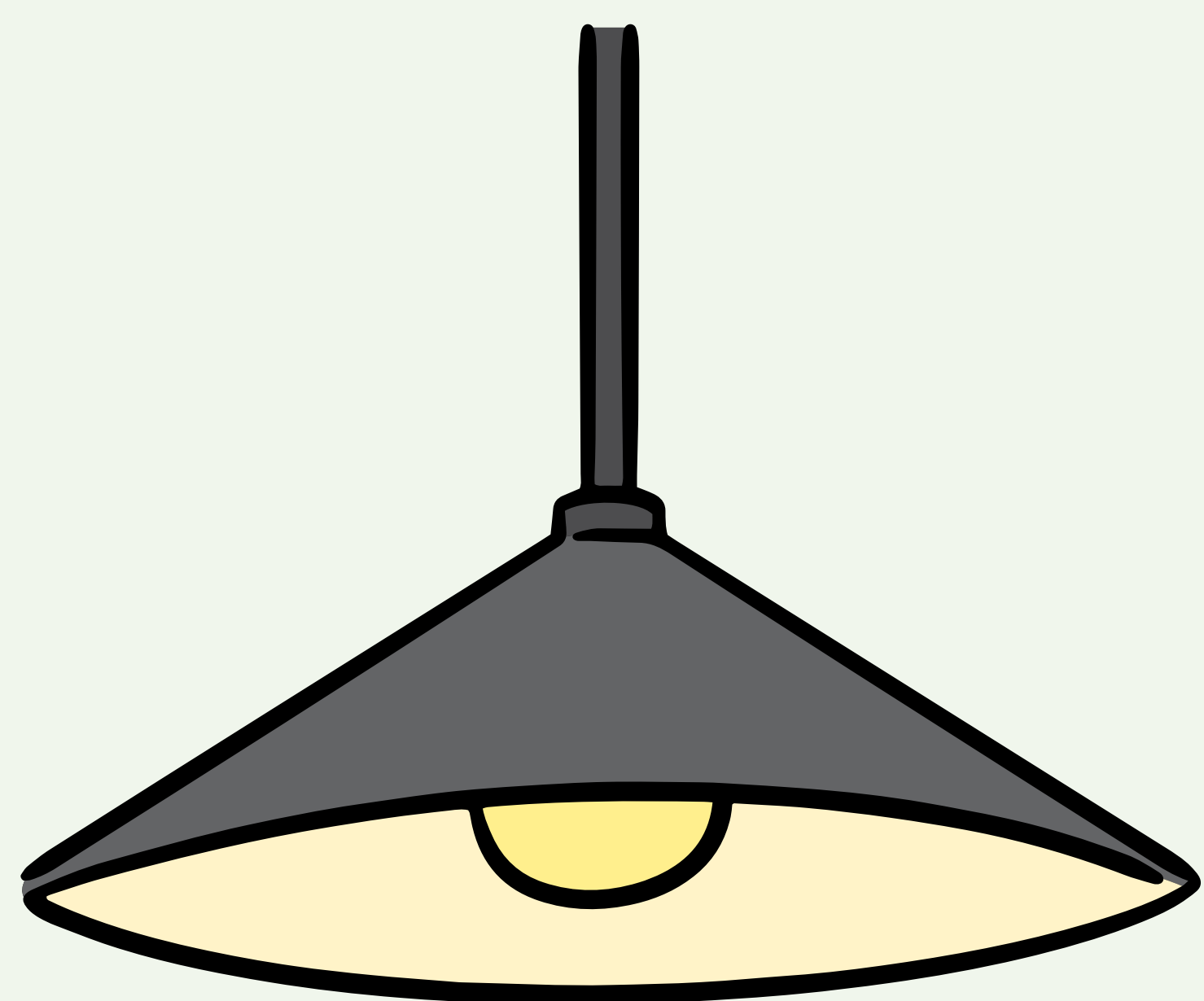


Tip #4: Think about the lighting on your face

Consider lighting when you are communicating, whether it be a presentation in a meeting, an online call, or a conversation in a coffee shop. The quality of lighting plays a role in the effectiveness of your communication.

With the emergence of remote work, most of us probably have been on an online call. Most of us have probably had our camera turned on so the participants could see us and we see them. Have you noticed the variability in lighting? Some people sit in front of a window. Others sit facing a window. Some of us use an external light on our monitor that illuminates our faces.

With that variability comes an added element of work the listener has to do in order to understand the speaker, and this is due to the shadows cast on the speaker's face. If one is sitting with a window behind them, the brightness of the light coming in the room casts a shadow on the speaker, on their entire face. This is true both for online meetings and in-person situations. It is very hard to see a speaker's mouth when there is bright light behind them. Add in background noise, such as the noise in a restaurant, and the message is even harder to understand.



On the other hand, if the speaker is facing a window, that light is now illuminating the face, taking away the barrier of shadows. Facing a window for in-person speaking situations is an adjustment one can make pretty easily. But for online calls, there is a better solution. When we face a window, the shadow is now on our monitor or screen, and this makes it difficult to see. A better option for remote meetings is to use an external light mounted on the monitor or standing next to the laptop. This will illuminate your face but not create brightness that interferes with your ability to see your screen and participants.

Obviously, there are many situations where either you won't be using an external light or sitting near a window. You might be assessing a patient in the emergency room, you might be presenting to the decision makers in your company, or you might be giving your dissertation. In those cases, assess the lighting and possibility of shadows on your face. Move if you can. Use an overhead light to your advantage.

Remember that listeners not only use their ears but also their eyes, and anything we can do as a speaker to eliminate a barrier for the eyes will enhance our communication.

Tip #5: Move your mouth more

Move your mouth more as you speak. Open your mouth. Let your jaw drop. Round your lips. These are all movements we naturally make as we are speaking. Depending on our native language, we might do this more or less than others. Americans tend to move our lips and jaw with wider excursions than speakers of other languages. This helps our message be understood.



How do you do this? Start with watching yourself in the mirror as you count 1 to 20. Observe the rounding and the pulling back of your lips as you say the numbers. Look at yourself straight on and then at your profile as you count. Can you see the different shapes your lips make?

Now put your hand under your jaw and count again. Feel your jaw moving up and down. Note the numbers where your jaw moves the most.



Try watching your lips and feeling your jaw again, but this time deliberately extend the movements. Round your lips a little bit more. Pull them back into a wider smile. Let your jaw drop even more on the numbers you noted before. Listen to yourself as you do this and see if you sound a little bit clearer and speak a little bit slower. That should be the effect.

When we move our mouth a little bit more than feels natural, we automatically slow down and project our voice. Our speech is more clear.

This takes some practice, but if you can make it a habit to move your mouth more, especially if you are wearing a mask as you are speaking, your listener won't have to work as hard to clearly hear and understand your message.

Tip #6: Project your voice

This tip pertains to any communication we are doing in person, whether it is in a small table discussion or in front of a larger crowd. Stating the obvious, in order for your message to be understood, it must be heard. That includes the listeners in the front row all the way to the back of the room.

Your words must literally travel out of your mouth. If you speak with a soft voice, you will only be heard by those sitting close to you, and that may be with some effort on the listener's part. Add in poor lighting or background noise, and your communication will be lost.

Voice projection is something you as a speaker can learn to do, and it adds to the authority of your message. If a person does not project their voice, the perception may be they are unsure of what they are saying. In a meeting, this is not how you would want to come across to others. What you say must be heard and received with confidence.

What is voice projection? It is not yelling, shouting or straining as one speaks. It is making your words leave your mouth and reach the listeners' ears. When we speak, we use air and acoustic energy to make our words. We start with good breath support in our lungs. As we speak, we formulate the sounds in our words on top of that breath as it travels through our vocal cords and into our mouths. We create an acoustic signal. As that signal travels, it leaves our mouth and enters the airspace on its way to our listener.



To understand how to project our voice, a little visualization helps. Imagine you take in a breath. As you exhale, your breath goes up your windpipe and into your voicebox and across your vocal cords. As it enters your mouth, your words are formed. They don't just stay there. The air and acoustic signal needs to keep on its journey. So your lips release those words with enough energy that they can be propelled into the airspace outside of your mouth. Keep them on track as they travel and imagine they make it to the ears of the listener farthest away. You direct that airstream.

To keep from yelling or straining in your throat, don't focus your words there. Instead, focus forming them in your mouth. The energy is resonating just behind your teeth, and it goes forth once released by your lips.

Direct the journey by focusing on a person or an object and aiming your voice there. Keep your breath support strong. Your words are traveling on a string to that object. Keep the string taut with no slack. Always remember that you must face your audience as you speak so that the string is able to transmit your message by the shortest route possible.

Obviously, this is not exactly what happens when we project our voice. But to put it into practice, having this image in mind helps. It can't be stated enough that no matter how great your message is, if you don't project your voice as it's delivered, you won't be seen as the one in authority, the originator of those ideas.

Tip #7: Use gestures

Use gestures to help you clarify your point, to get the floor in a conversation, to keep the floor, etc. Gestures can be very helpful.

Remember that much of our message is communicated nonverbally, i.e. in addition to our words. Nonverbal communication includes eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and gestures. We use these things both as the speaker and the listener when we communicate.

Gestures, in particular, are an important element to the message we are conveying. We can use gestures to emphasize an important point in what we are saying. We can point, count, move our hands back and forth, etc, and each gesture will reinforce what we are saying.

For example, a gesture that indicates a number can be helpful as it fits with your message. Maybe you are making three points in your lecture or you wish your patient to remember two important tasks you want them to do. Using a gesture along with your message will help your listener know they need to be thinking about that number of things which you will be saying to them. It will help them to hear your message, remember it and ask you to clarify if they don't understand.

We can also use gestures to gain entrance into a conversation or to keep our turn in the conversation if we have more to say. By holding your index finger point upward, you can indicate to the speaker you have something to ask. Doing the same gesture as you are speaking, you can indicate to your listener that you aren't quite finished and have just a bit more to say.

Gestures are rooted in culture and are not always universal. It is a good idea to observe your community first for the types of gestures others use. Read up on common gestures in American culture. Watch Ted Talks or other lectures where you can see gestures put into action.

Lastly, don't be afraid to use gestures. You will benefit from the clarity gestures will bring to your message. As an added bonus, using gestures will help you to slow down as you speak. If a fast speech rate is something you need to work on so others really understand your message, a few gestures here and there as you speak will help.

Remember the non verbals as you speak. Eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and gestures supplement the message you convey. Use them to your advantage.



Tip #8: Listen to yourself as you speak

Another way to boost your professional speaking skills is to **listen to yourself as you speak**. This takes some skill, but being able to do this will be a huge benefit to you, especially if you decide to work with a coach like me. In order to change the way we speak, we must speak. But we must also monitor ourselves, and the way we do that is by listening as we talk.



The things we listen to include our volume (the loudness or softness), our pitch fluctuations, our speaking rate, and our pronunciation. This is quite a bit to keep track of, but you can learn to do it.

Start with getting comfortable recording your speech. Pick something to either say or read. It can be something well-known, like the Pledge of Allegiance, a poem you've memorized, or a simple article that you read. Record yourself as you say one of these things, and then go back and listen.



As you listen, ask yourself these questions. Am I speaking too loud, too soft, or within an appropriate range? Am I fluctuating my pitch from where I start to where I end my speech, or is it pretty flat and monotone? Am I speaking really quickly or more deliberately? Do I pause? Am I pronouncing the words correctly?

Pronunciation of a language is learned by direct teaching and observation of native speakers in that region. There may be words where you aren't sure that your pronunciation is correct. Go ahead and monitor this anyway. The reason being if you do end up working with a speaking coach like myself, we will work very hard on monitoring this skill. To change our pronunciation, we not only have to gain the tools but be able to put them into practice, and the ability to monitor oneself in that practice will be the key that unlocks change.

One last thought about listening to yourself as you speak. Consider watching yourself at the same time. You can do this by creating a Zoom meeting and practice your speaking tasks. Record yourself and go back to watch. Analyze not only your volume, pitch, speaking rate & pronunciation, but consider your facial expressions. See how you look to others. It may feel really uncomfortable to do this as first, but it does get easier. With so much work now being done via web-based meetings, if you've kept your camera on, you have probably already been watching yourself. Honestly this is the best way to really improve. Be your own critic, make observations, and slowly implement some changes. You'll be surprised at the positive effect this has for you. Then when you get into real-life conversations, you will be able to listen to yourself as you speak and observe the reactions of your listeners. Based on that, you can make changes on the spot and see if this helps you be better understood.

The more you do this, the easier it becomes.

Tip #9: Ask if you were understood

This is a very important part of professional communication. The burden of the message is not on the listener but on the speaker. The listener doesn't know what they don't know. You are the authority in what you are communicating. **But you must check to see if your message is getting across.**

If we can see our listener's face as we speak, they might be sending us information via their body language or facial expressions that lets us know if we were understood. Nodding of the head indicates our message was received. Frowning of the brow might indicate disagreement or confusion. One on one, it's not too difficult to ascertain this.

But consider the dynamic of your situation. Maybe you are presenting to your direct reports in a meeting. They need to understand you, but they also don't want to appear that they don't. It's possible you won't get accurate nonverbal cues from them.

In a different scenario, you might be a physician of an elderly patient who either culturally does not question a doctor or has issues that impede comprehension (like a hearing loss or dementia). Most likely you won't get cues from them about whether what you said was understood.

In these cases, it is your responsibility to make sure your message was received and comprehended. The best way to do this is to literally ask the person if they understand. There are polite ways to do this. Say something like "I want to check to make sure I was clear. Do you understand what I was talking about". Ask them to repeat back to you what you said, like "I've done all the talking. Can I just check you got my message? Tell me back what you remember I explained?"

There is no one right way to do this. But it really should be done.



When we work with people, there is always the chance that we aren't understood. The listener doesn't know what they don't know. In other words, many times they don't know they need to have something repeated or clarified. If you ask, they may say yes I'd like you to repeat that or to explain it again.

By asking your listener if you were understood, a barrier is broken. A wall is taken down. You become human, and in many work situations, this is how you want to appear. Approachable. Humble. Human. *You will be remembered for that, and this is a benefit to you.*

Tip #10: Practice speaking

As I mentioned in a previous tip, **the only way we can change our speaking habits is by speaking.** In order to enhance our professional communication skills, we need to practice them.

You might ask what am I supposed to practice? The answer is something relevant to you. It can be names of people you collaborate with at work. It can be work jargon that you struggle knowing how to pronounce. It might be a lecture you are preparing to give or an important presentation that will be given to the decision makers of your company.

At risk of stating the obvious, practice makes perfect. The more you say something, the more comfortable and natural you will appear. Common phrases said in English are a good place to start because you not only will hear them said, but you will have many opportunities to say them. These common phrases can include greetings, conversation starters, orders you place for coffee, things you say to begin phone conversations, and much more.

Pick a few phrases, and record yourself. Put into practice questioning skills, like is my voice loud enough, is my pitch fluctuating, am I speaking too quickly, am I pronouncing the words correctly, and so on. Critique yourself, and say it again. Listen as you speak, and make changes in real time. Go back and review your recording. Ask yourself the same questions, and repeat. Do this several times.

Next, practice with a safe listener, someone who knows what you are doing. Get their feedback. Listen to yourself as you say it again, making changes in real time. As you get more comfortable, try it out in real-life, all the while monitoring yourself and paying attention to any feedback the listener gives you.

Do the same for more formal talks you may have to give. Practice speaking these out loud, in small portions, implementing self-monitoring skills as you go. Record and listen. Do this multiple times. Practice in an empty room, gauging where your audience will sit, and aiming your voice to reach the listener sitting farthest away. Speak from your slide deck. Gesture. Pause. Make a video-recording and watch it, analyzing again your loudness, pitch, rate of speech, pronunciation, and any non verbals you included. Take note of things you did well and things you'd like to change, and keep on practicing.

One last suggestion is to find a trusted person with whom you can practice, whether in-person or online. This is the best way to bridge the gap between what you know you need to do and can do by yourself, to putting what you know into real-life action. They can be your critic and your guide, helping you to boost your confidence as your speaking skills improve.



Bonus Hack: How to put these tips into practice



Use your calendar. Pick a tip and assign it a day for the week. Start with one on a Monday. Try it 3 times during the day. Once that's comfortable, make that your go-to for Mondays. Add a new tip for Tuesdays. Same thing. Start with the easy ones first.

Once you have filled your workweek with five tips, keep practicing those for a few weeks. When they become habit, add a new tip to Monday, keeping the old one as well. Now you'll have two. Practice those. Add a new one to Tuesday, and so on.

Set up reminders on your calendar to practice, such as three times throughout the workday. Pick logical times and situations to practice these tips. Make it simple for yourself.

Remember practicing is how you will make lasting changes in your communication skills.

There's much more you can learn. Book a FREE discovery call with me, and we will talk about how I can help boost your professional communication skills in English.

[BOOK YOUR CALL HERE >>](#)