

Get used to pausing

Here's a simple 5 minute exercise I give to clients. Many of them totally transform their delivery and confidence after doing this old drama school activity *one time only*.

Follow this simple exercise to accustom yourself to the pause. All the steps in total will take you no longer than 5 minutes to complete. Apply this exercise to anything in writing for this first couple of times.

Then you only need to pick this up again when rehearsing 1 minute of your talk, for example, the opening, to ensure that the pauses feel comfortable.

In time, you won't even have to think about it as you'll develop an intuitive trust for the pause.



Your Actions (5 minutes)

The 6 Step Exercise

1. Grab something to read aloud

Take a piece of literature, from a children's book, pamphlet or even an instruction manual. You only need about four sentences.

2. Mark the document

It's like someone waving at you to STOP, so don't omit this step. On your chosen section, mark in dashes as follows:

after . ! / ? mark one dash /
after , ; / : / - mark two dashes //
new paragraph - mark three dashes ///

Here's an example of one I've done below:



Be Less Vanilla, More Thriller

from The King Who Loved Carpet

Once upon a time,/ there was a king who never wore shoes.// He was forever bruising and scraping his royal feet.// One day,/ completely exasperated with this problem, / he turned to his trusty minister and ordered: / “I want you to carpet the entire kingdom by tomorrow morning or it’s off with your head!” ///

The poor minister sat up half the night thinking about this impossible task,/ knowing full well that he would surely lose his head come morning.

3. Record into your phone / voice recorder

When you're at one dash / - silently mouth 'one elephant';

at two dashes // - mouth 'one elephant, two elephants' and

at three dashes /// - mouth 'one elephant, two elephants, three elephants'

4. Play it back

Were the pauses as long as they felt while you were reading it?

You may notice that the pauses are correct but the reading is a little flat.

In that case, move on to...

5. Record it again,

This time focus on changing the pitch when you want to emphasise (see section on 'Using Vocal Emphasis to speak with greater conviction'.)



Be Less Vanilla, More Thriller

6. Replay it.

Play it back again. You may notice that adding this extra layer has sacrificed the pauses.

Leave it. A few days later, go back to the exercise, repeating steps four to six and you'll notice it becomes easier for both the vocal colour and pauses to synchronise so you don't sacrifice the energy in the piece.

Note: It's a bit like like learning to drive: you're able to drive smoothly but forget to look in the mirror. Another time, you look in the mirror frequently but stall.

By concentrating on only one factor at a time, you're behind the wheel in a few weeks, and it's all fallen into place. Thus, when you read only think of pausing the first time, then concentrate on emphasis the second time.

"Doesn't it sound a little patronising?"

This is what one of my clients said after he heard himself do this exercise with the excerpt from the children's story above. Well, yes, it would do if you use that vocal tone.

I then advised him to redo it, talking about his subject of data analysis in Marketing, which was more grown up.

He was to do it paying the same attention to emphasis and pausing.

"OK," he confessed, "yes, it does sound better. It's obviously the content and tone that changes but the pauses don't."

Exactly.

In as little as 5 minutes twice a week for two weeks, you'll nail the ability to use pauses effectively while sustaining the dynamism of your speech.