

GK TRAINING for INTUIT BOOST #1

The Five P's of Vocal Variety

We break Vocal Variety into five components, each beginning with a “P” (to make them easier to remember). They are:

Pace: Fast & Slow

Pitch: High & Low

Pause: Musical Rests

Power: Loud & Soft

Placement: Resonance

These are the elements of speech that humans use to convey meaning, add emphasis, display passion: all the different ways we use our voices to connect with other people. You do not need to learn how to use these tools from scratch—you already know them! —but you may need to learn how to bring them into a professional setting. For lots of understandable reasons, we tend to limit the expressive range we use when communicating at work. One of the easiest ways to make your message more impactful is to bring all of these Five P's to your spoken communication.

5 P's VOCAL VARIETY



PACE



PITCH



PAUSE



POWER



PLACEMENT



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Variety Is Key

There's a lot of conventional wisdom around some of these elements of vocal variety: a pitch in the lower third of your range is best, using a slower or more deliberate pace conveys credibility, louder voices command more attention. We encourage you to kick all of that reductive coaching to the proverbial curb. What you're really after here is *variety*, in all five areas. Variety is what makes spoken communication engaging, understandable, moving, and powerful. How do we know that? We studied it.

With some colleagues at Columbia University and other academic institutions, we looked at the effects of these five P's on an audience's perception of a political speaker's authenticity. Here's what we found:

- Deliberate **pauses** can heighten impressions of the speaker's credibility and gravitas.
- Greater **pitch** variation (intonation) leads speakers to be judged as more thoughtful, rational, and intelligent. It gives rise to a more favorable impression of the speaker.
- Studies of vocal volume or **power** find that staying at a typical speaking volume (~60 decibels) is less persuasive than making periodic shifts to higher volume or shifts to lower volume.
- **Placement** of resonance in throat and chest makes a voice more attractive, a subjective but consensual dimension that in turn predicts the attribution of favorable personality characteristics (in particular emotional stability rather than neuroticism). Less attractive voices of politicians cause them to be judged as less personally attractive, competent, trustworthy, and lower in leadership ability.

Pausing is important. Check. Varying pitch, power, and placement is key. Check. Pace is... Where is pace? The findings on pace were interesting in this context. Speakers with a faster rate of speech and no non-fluencies (Uhms, Uhs, wrong words, restarts, etc.) were perceived as more intelligent, but the listeners' comprehension of the message suffered—an argument for varying pace as well. Variety is your friend.