Using Gestures and Movements

Learning the Skill

Tara smiled and said, “I’m so angry!”

Obviously, Tara’s expression does not match her feelings. When you give a speech, your expressions, gestures, and movements should reinforce your words. Gestures and movements include the use of your entire body, but especially your hands, arms, head, eyes, posture, and facial expressions. Used correctly, they will strengthen your presentation and keep your audience interested.

Follow these guidelines to use gestures and movements effectively:
• Memorize your speech. Familiarity with the material will allow you to focus on your delivery—not on trying to remember what words to say.
• Practice your gestures in front of a mirror until they feel natural.
• Be sure the gestures reinforce your words. For example, pounding your fist should not accompany a statement about penguins in Antarctica, but it might be appropriate if you are discussing the past injustices toward the Maori or Aborigines.
• When you get up to speak, walk confidently to the front of the room and stand with good posture. This lets your audience know that you have something to say and that they should listen.
• Look at your audience. Make eye contact and smile. This will help you immediately connect with your audience.
• Keep your hands free during your speech, not holding note cards. Use strong, deliberate hand gestures to emphasize main points. Open gestures—palms up, for example—can indicate new ideas. Closed gestures—folding your hands together—can signal an ending.
• Respond to questions or comments with movements—nod your head, lean forward, walk a few steps toward the audience, or open your hands in a welcoming way.
• Avoid gestures that signal anxiety, like clenching your hands or tugging on your ear.
• Vary your gestures and movements. Do not use the same ones over and over.
Practicing the Skill

Directions: The islands of New Caledonia in the southwest Pacific Ocean contain some of the most unique plants and animals in the world. Read the presentation below about New Caledonia’s habitats, and then complete the activity that follows.

The islands of New Caledonia are about the size of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined. New Caledonia’s main island, Grand Terre, is actually a fragment of the ancient supercontinent Gondwana. Until about 60 million years ago, Gondwana united Australia, South America, Antarctica, New Zealand, New Guinea, India, and Africa. Then the continents broke apart and drifted away. Surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, New Caledonia’s plants and animals evolved in isolation for more than 55 million years. For this reason, it is home to a large number of unusual plants and animals.

Grand Terre has diverse landforms—mountains, valleys, and several kinds of forests. Its rainfall also varies from one part of the island to another. This diversity is another reason for Grand Terre’s large number of native plants and animals. One plant species is the closest living relative to Earth’s first flowering plants. Several species of trees, like the parasitic conifer, only grow here. At least 68 different species of lizards—all geckos and skinks—live in the rain forest.

Animals grow larger on New Caledonia. Thus, the world’s largest gecko, the world’s largest pigeon, and the world’s largest skink (possibly extinct) all make their homes here. The large kagu can be found only on New Caledonia and is an endangered species, along with several other bird species. Only 1,000 kagu remain in the wild, but captive breeding programs are offering hope for its survival. Locals call this bird the “Ghost of the Forest,” perhaps because of the strange barking sound it makes early in the morning, or its warning hiss when it feels threatened. The kagu is basically flightless, using its wings mostly for gliding.

New Caledonia lacks some well-known animal species, probably as a result of its isolation. No native amphibians live here—only three snake species and nine mammal species, all of which are bats.

Scientists consider New Caledonia one of the world’s richest places in terms of its biodiversity. This biodiversity, however, is also seriously threatened. Rain forests once covered 70 percent of the land, but today large portions of the forests are gone. Fires, logging, mining, hunting, and the introduction of new species like dogs, pigs, and goats have harmed New Caledonia’s natural habitats. In some cases, only a few specimens of an entire plant species are left. Several conservation groups are working together to try to preserve New Caledonia’s unique ecological laboratory.

1. Analyzing Copy the paragraphs above onto a separate sheet of paper. Next to each sentence, note which gestures and movements you would use when delivering the presentation.

2. Simulating Practice delivering your presentation in front of a mirror. Use your notes as guidelines for gesturing and moving. Determine which gestures and movements feel natural to you and which ones do not. Focus on practicing the ones that feel the most natural. Revise your notes accordingly.
Speaking and Listening Skills Activity
continued

✔ Applying the Skill

Directions: In a small group or with a partner, take turns delivering the New Caledonia presentation. Use the notes about gestures and movements that you wrote and revised in “Practicing the Skill.” After each presentation, each speaker will receive feedback about the effectiveness of his or her gestures and movements. On the lines below, briefly summarize the changes you can make to improve your use of gestures and movements.

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Assessment Checklist
Assess your use of gestures and movements:

☐ Practiced speech in advance
☐ Practiced gestures and movements in front of a mirror
☐ Began speech with good posture and eye contact
☐ Varied gestures and movements
☐ Matched gestures and movements to speech content
☐ Used strong, deliberate, and appropriate gestures
☐ Used gestures and movements to respond to audience
☐ Avoided annoying gestures
☐ Focused on using gestures that felt natural