

01

RATE

How fast or slow your words land.

Influence begins with pace: too fast makes people chase you; too slow makes them drift. The right rate makes you sound clear, prepared, and easy to follow.

1. Put the point across

Rate controls cognitive load. When you speed up, you create urgency and energy. When you slow down, you signal importance and give the listener time to process.

The danger: very fast speech can feel anxious or salesy; very slow speech can feel unsure, bored, or over-rehearsed. Your goal is not speed - it is controlled momentum.

2. What the science shows

Classic persuasion research found that speech rate can change how credible and persuasive a speaker seems. Later work showed the effect is not one-size-fits-all: faster speech can help under some conditions, but when listeners need to think carefully, too much speed can interfere with processing.

A practical takeaway: use a moderate default pace, then slow down only for names, numbers, decisions, and the one line you want remembered.

3. How to apply it today

The 3-speed method: 1) Normal rate for context. 2) Slower rate for the key point. 3) Slightly faster rate for easy background details.

Voice-note drill: record a 60-second answer. If you sound rushed, add a breath after every full stop. If you sound flat, shorten your sentences instead of speeding randomly.

Coaching target: for interviews, meetings, and reels, aim for a controlled conversational pace - often around 130-160 words per minute - but adjust for audience and complexity.

4. Concrete example

Before: "I have experience in teaching, content, interviews, and communication training, and I can help your team."

After using rate: "I help teams speak with more clarity. [slow down] Especially in meetings, interviews, and high-pressure conversations. [resume normal pace] That is where small delivery changes create visible confidence."

Source note: Miller, Maruyama, Beaber & Valone, "Speed of Speech and Persuasion" (1976); Smith & Shaffer, "Speed of Speech and Persuasion: Evidence for Multiple Effects" (1995); Jiang & Pell, "The Sound of Confidence and Doubt" (2017).

02

TONE

The emotional colour behind your words.

Tone tells the listener how to feel about your message before they have fully analysed your words. It can make the same sentence sound warm, defensive, bored, excited, or threatening.

1. Put the point across

Tone influences trust. People do not only ask, "What did you say?" They also ask, "Are you safe? Are you respectful? Are you serious?" Your tone answers these questions quickly.

The danger: a technically correct sentence can fail if the tone sounds cold, irritated, superior, or apologetic.

2. What the science shows

Amy Cuddy, Susan Fiske, and Peter Glick argue that people rapidly judge others on warmth/trust and competence/respect. Tone is one of the fastest ways your listener senses whether you are approachable and capable.

Research on emotional prosody shows that emotion is carried not just by words but by vocal qualities such as pitch movement, rhythm, loudness, and timing. In simple terms: your voice leaks your emotional stance.

3. How to apply it today

Pick your tone before you speak. Do not enter every conversation on default mode. Choose one: warm, firm, curious, calm, energetic, or serious.

Use the warm-firm formula: warm opening + clear point + collaborative next step.

Reset trick: before a difficult sentence, release your jaw, lower your shoulders, and silently think, "I am here to solve, not attack." Your tone usually follows your body.

4. Concrete example

Cold tone: "You still have not sent the file."

Warm-firm tone: "I want us to close this smoothly. I still need the file by 4 pm today, so I can send the final version without errors."

Same message. Different emotional signal. The second one makes cooperation easier.

Source note: Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, "The Dynamics of Warmth and Competence Judgments" (2011); Cuddy interview on warmth/trustworthiness and competence (Wired, 2012); Liebenenthal et al., review of language, tone and prosody of emotions (2016).

03

PITCH

How high, low, rising, or falling your voice sounds.

Pitch is not about pretending to have a deeper voice. It is about using your natural range with intention so your statements sound complete, confident, and alive.

1. Put the point across

Pitch shapes authority and emotion. A rising pitch can make a statement sound like a question. A falling pitch can make a point sound complete. Too little pitch movement can sound robotic; too much can sound nervous or theatrical.

The danger: trying to artificially deepen your voice usually sounds strained. Influence comes from steadiness, breath, and controlled endings.

2. What the science shows

Klofstad, Anderson, and Peters found that listeners tended to select lower-pitched versions of both male and female voices for leadership roles. This does not mean everyone should force a low voice - it means pitch affects social perception.

Recent persuasion research also shows that falling intonation at the end of sentences can signal confidence and, when the argument is strong, can increase message processing.

3. How to apply it today

Use your comfortable lower half. Take a low, silent breath before important sentences. Speak from steadiness, not throat pressure.

End statements downward. Practise: "I recommend option B." Let the final word land, instead of lifting it like a question.

Add pitch variety. Lift slightly when you introduce possibility; settle downward when you make a decision.

4. Concrete example

Uncertain pitch pattern: "I think we should maybe go with option B?" (voice rises at the end)

Confident pitch pattern: "My recommendation is option B. It is faster, cheaper, and easier to execute." (voice lands at the end)

Pitch tells the listener whether you are asking for permission or offering a decision.

Source note: Klofstad, Anderson & Peters, "Sounds Like a Winner: Voice Pitch Influences Perception of Leadership Capacity" (2012); Vaughan-Johnston et al., "Falling Vocal Intonation Signals Speaker Confidence and Conditionally Boosts Persuasion" (online 2024).

04

VOLUME

How much space your voice takes.

Volume is not shouting. Volume is audibility plus presence. It tells people whether you believe your message deserves to be heard.

1. Put the point across

Volume influences perceived confidence and dominance. A voice that is too soft can make good ideas disappear. A voice that is too loud can trigger resistance because it feels like pressure.

The goal: be easy to hear without making the listener feel pushed.

2. What the science shows

Tusing and Dillard studied vocal cues in interpersonal influence messages and found that mean amplitude and amplitude variation were associated with dominance judgments even after controlling for the words and visual content.

Jiang and Pell found that confident expressions tended to show higher mean amplitude and amplitude range, while unconfident expressions had different pitch, rate, and pausing patterns.

3. How to apply it today

Use the 3-zone rule: Zone 1 = private conversation. Zone 2 = meeting table. Zone 3 = room voice. Most people underuse Zone 2.

Speak to the farthest friendly face. Do not aim your voice at your own laptop or notes.

Use volume for emphasis, not aggression. Increase volume slightly on the action word: "We need to decide today." Then return to normal.

4. Concrete example

Soft version: "I had one point... maybe we should decide who owns this."

Present version: "Can we pause for a decision? Who owns this by Friday?"

The second version is not rude. It is audible, specific, and easier for the group to act on.

Source note: Tusing & Dillard, "The Sounds of Dominance: Vocal Precursors of Perceived Dominance During Interpersonal Influence" (2000); Jiang & Pell, "The Sound of Confidence and Doubt" (2017); Hodges-Simeon & Steinhilber, "Speech Volume" (Springer, 2016).

05

PAUSE

The silence that gives your words weight.

A pause is not an empty space. It is a signal: "Think about this." Used well, it makes you sound calm, deliberate, and easier to follow.

1. Put the point across

Pause creates control. It gives your brain time to choose words and gives the listener time to absorb meaning. It also stops you from filling every gap with "umm", "like", "basically", or nervous over-explaining.

The danger: random long silences can feel awkward. Purposeful brief pauses feel composed.

2. What the science shows

Van Zant, Berger, Packard, and Wang found that brief pauses in collaborative conversations can encourage listener assents such as "yeah" and "uh-huh", which can make speakers seem more helpful. They also note that long pauses can create negative impressions.

Confidence research also shows that pauses can be read differently depending on pattern. Frequent hesitant pauses may signal doubt; deliberate pauses after key points can signal control.

3. How to apply it today

Use four pauses: 1) Thinking pause before answering. 2) Meaning pause after your key sentence. 3) Transition pause before a new idea. 4) Boundary pause before an ask.

Replace fillers with breath. When you feel "umm" coming, close your lips, inhale quietly, and continue.

The five-word stack: slow the rate, choose the tone, let pitch land, use enough volume, then pause.

4. Concrete example

Interview question: "Why should we hire you?"

With pause: "Because I can make communication practical. [pause] Not just polished - practical. [pause] I help people speak in a way that changes what happens in the room."

The pause makes the answer feel owned, not memorised.

Source note: Van Zant, Berger, Packard & Wang, "The Power of Pausing in Collaborative Conversations" (2025); Jiang & Pell, "The Sound of Confidence and Doubt" (2017); Vaughan-Johnston et al., falling intonation and vocal confidence research (online 2024).