

8 WORKPLACE

Classically trained singer **Ruth Hansford** looks at how LIS professionals can raise their profile by increasing their confidence in their speaking voices.



Time to speak up in the library

WE DON'T SEE too many 'Silence' signs in libraries these days, but in my experience of delivering voice workshops I have met many LIS professionals who say they are stuck in their current jobs and unable to progress because of a fear of speaking up in public, in small groups or even with individuals, face-to-face.

Often this fear – let's call it stage fright – is caused by a lack of confidence in one's subject. But, assuming you know your lines, there are a few basic tricks that apply whether you are giving a presentation, making a Tannoy announcement, doing an interview, or giving a tour of the library. If you practise these tricks, you will sound more confident and you will be able to keep going for longer without feeling your voice is giving up on you.

Posture

The way you sit or stand makes a huge difference to how your voice comes across. The vocal cords are responsible for the noise you make, but you must give them all the help you can. Make sure you are properly grounded, with both feet planted firmly on the floor, and keep yourself as symmetrical as possible. Lengthen and widen your spine and imagine yourself being pulled up towards the ceiling by a marionettist in the sky. Postural techniques such as Pilates and the Alexander Technique are helpful but easily forgotten when under stress. Get used to how it feels to be standing or sitting well when not speaking. Observe yourself in a mirror if you can. Try and remember this position when in the spotlight. Pay particular attention to your head and neck – if your chin is jammed into your chest or jutting too far forward you are done for, vocally, and will wear yourself out in no time.

Breathing

Once you find an easy, confident posture, you will have much more space for the breath that supports your voice. You will be able to breathe from lower down – if your breathing comes from too high your veins stick out on your neck and your audience will feel you are struggling. Breathing low slows down your breathing – which helps you to speak more slowly. No matter how much of a hurry you are in to get your message across, you will be more comprehensible if you make your audience wait.

Gazette fact file

■ The Voice Care Network keeps a list of voice tutors around the country and publishes some reasonably priced booklets.

www.vcnmembers.co.uk

■ Ruth Hansford is a library and information professional and classically trained singer who runs workshops and one-to-one sessions on 'Making the most of your speaking voice'. ruth@tutti.org.uk

CAREERS



Giving seminars needn't be scary

The voice itself

Imagine your voice coming from low in your trunk, and resonating around your head. Learn to warm up your voice before you meet your public. Make the biggest space you can by yawning extravagantly. Not in front of your audience, obviously. Say discreetly 'ssss', 'ffff', 'mmmm' and make a noise like a siren, on a 'mmm' or 'ng' (as in 'sing') sound, from the lowest to the highest pitch you can manage.

Keep vocal cords lubricated by slowly sipping water (not tea or coffee as these can dehydrate you). Stay out of the way of air-conditioning vents: not only do they dehydrate your throat, you can find yourself competing with the noise they make. Don't upstage yourself by distractedly jangling your keys in your pocket or clicking a biro.

Eye contact matters a lot, as does varying the speed and pitch of your delivery; they let your audience know you are really interested in your subject. Address your audience, not the bookshelves or projector screen.

Many people I have worked with say they can't stand the sound of their voices. If you have a strong regional or foreign accent, so what? Give your audience a moment or two to register it, and you will be just as comprehensible as the next person if you speak slowly and with enough variety in your voice to keep them interested.

We all have more or less the same vocal equipment – Shakespearean actors and librarians – but some have learnt to use this equipment better. It's just like driving a car or riding a bike: if you are in the right gear, everything seems so much more efficient.

If you have real concerns about your vocal health, you should ask your GP to refer you to a speech and language therapist. Otherwise, a few one-to-one sessions or a group workshop can give you a chance to practise the techniques outlined above. It's also fun.

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Your personal brand

How can I stand out from the crowd when I'm applying for new jobs?

Always refer to the Person Specification provided. Pick out the precise skill you have which meets each criterion, and explain how you gained and developed it.

Many people find self-promotion difficult, but it's crucial in getting ahead of the competition. Your CV, personal statements and interview should reflect your best assets, so identifying these is the best way to start selling yourself.

You are who you are...

...not what you do. It's important to start thinking outside your current job description. You don't belong to your current employer, so don't define yourself by them: set yourself apart. There will be skills you've gained throughout your career, so draw on these as well as the ones you use now. If you have a diverse history, emphasise it positively.

What do you bring to the role?

Before you write your CV or application form, identify your unique selling point. What can you do that the competition can't? Identify your strongest areas. What do you do with your free time? Have you ever volunteered, taken on extra work or learning? It's the candidates who have proved they are willing

to go the extra mile who really wow employers.

Relate your skills to the job

Always refer to the Person Specification provided. Pick out the precise skill you have which meets each criterion, and explain how you gained and developed it. Highlight the skills you have that they are looking for.

Write a 'profile' section on your CV

This should come near the top, concisely explaining three things:

- Who you are, emphasising your qualifications and experience
- What you do now
- What you want to do, including (but only if it's relevant) what your aim is. For example, if you're a library assistant looking for Graduate Traineeship, mention your aim is to qualify as an information professional. It might feel awkward, but you need to brazenly highlight your strengths here! Read through this before your interview to bolster your confidence.

Your CV should bring everything you need to the forefront of your mind so you're ready to show off your credentials.

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