Practicing proper speech etiquette

1. Read about the speaker before the event

Display the cultural calendar that you receive at the beginning of each term on a wall so that every time you need to see a speaker, you can read a synopsis about the speech. The cultural calendar online gives links to the speaker’s Web site and provides additional information. Also, the library displays books near the front desk about major speakers.

2. Listen—just hear

Lee Bush, an assistant professor in communications, said there is a difference between hearing and listening to a speaker. Hearing is the physical act of sound waves hitting the random and sending a message to the brain. Listening is the intellectual understanding of the message sent to the ear. She said many students miss the point of the speech because they try to write down every word that the speaker says to put it in a paper.

“Your intent shouldn’t be to get information for your paper,” Bush said. “If you really listen to a person’s speech, you can then be able to write the paper.”

She suggested that students listen for a beginning, middle and end of a speech. In the beginning the speaker will usually state these or four main points that they will make and then back up those points in the middle in a way of testimony, personal anecdotes and statistics or facts. “People don’t listen often because people don’t know what to listen for,” Bush said.

3. Respect the speaker

This suggestion is all encompassing. Here is a dos and don’t list.

Do
- Maintain eye contact
- Write notes
- Sit up straight
- Provide good visual material
- Do not wear baseball caps
- Whisper to neighbors
- Eat, drink or chew gum loudly
- Make unnecessary noises

Don’t
- Sleep
- Slouch in your chair

4. Ask intelligent questions

Elen offers a great opportunity to ask questions to speakers during the Q&A. Not many people in general, can say they asked Colin Powell a question. Answer these three questions before you are passed the microphone: Did the speaker already answer this question in his speech? Make sure you have paid attention throughout the speech. Don’t waste other people’s time. How can I ask this question in a concise manner? Paragraph-long questions are annoying for other listeners and confusing to speakers. Try to ask a question in 10 words or less. This way, more people will get to ask questions. Will this question spark controversy or anger the speaker? While it is okay for questions to cause some controversy, listeners must understand that the speaker has opened up their views to an audience and should not be attacked. A little debate is okay; a massacre is not.

5. Never leave early

Leaving early is rude. If you really must leave early, sit in the far back section on the end of an aisle where it is easy for you to slip out unnoticed. Also, do not leave just before the Q&A. The mass exodus that sometimes occurs is unacceptable. You can wait the extra 10 minutes, which can also be the most memorable.

“They’re going to miss the really interesting part of the speech,” said George Trovler, dean of cultural and special programs.

Trovler also recommended that students who cannot stay for the whole speech watch the video in the library. Most speeches are taped and are available the next day.

“Whether you attend a speech voluntarily or not because you are assigned, keep common courtesy in mind,” he said. “It is the responsibility of the academic community to bring in different views.”

6. What speaker is memorable to you?

In high school John Lewis, one of Martin Luther King Jr.’s friends came. He led us through one of the songs they would sing just before demonstrations.

Kelci Flowers, junior

Colin Powell was pretty cool because he was down to earth and personable with the student body.

Claire Campbell, sophomore

Sunny Pembus, the Governor of Georgia, came to our high school and talked about education issues. Our class improved SAT scores in the county, and it was cool that he took the time to see us.

Alex Watson, freshman

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THE PENDULUM

Chris Gless, Ben Bradlee, Colin Powell, Billy Collins, Edmond Morris. And that is just a past from the past two years; the list of powerhouse speakers at Elon could go on and on. Students are required to attend, and some go voluntarily to many speeches on campus. While the majority of the community is polite during these events, there are always a few who could use a reminder about proper speech listening etiquette.

Mark Fox, an adjunct instructor for communications and public speaking, said that he believes the increase in disrespectful behavior is an “entitlement attitude” that the speaker is then to entertain the listeners. While not every speaker will be funny, dramatic or gripping, each speech does have something to add to the community.

“We go in with the mindset that we are going to be bored,” Fox said. “If we go in thinking this person is going to teach us something that I didn’t know before, we will enjoy the speech more.”

Listeners can take steps to ensure he or she will benefit from the speech.

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