Introduction

While many exciting opportunities for learning and growth await the adult learner, some students feel a mild twinge of trepidation upon returning to formal education, upon "going back to college." Others would call this more than a twinge. This guide for successful communication in adult learning contexts, specifically, the higher education context, is intended to help the reader to ease the trepidation, however it is felt, and to achieve successful and enjoyable learning, be this in a classroom setting or online.

In this guide you will find information and practical tips that come from the author's many years and countless experiences with helping adults to thrive as learners. It will help to remember that you, as a college student, have embarked on a path of learning that holds high standards and raises them whenever possible.

Yet the expectation of your "fellow communicators" along this path is not that you prove your worth and ability against these standards, but that you, with help from instructors, advisors, administrators, and peers, raise your abilities, step by step, class by class, to come to meet these standards – perhaps, even, to exceed them, thusly raising the bar for those who follow in your footsteps.

To meet such a goal will require a number of attributes, such as commitment, reliability, stamina, and the willingness to accept and learn from feedback. And, every step of the way, it will require that you strive to communicate successfully. Enjoy what follows, and strive to find in it the understandings, strategies and even motivations needed to help assure your success.

-- Mike Zizzi
The roots of modern communication theory run deep into the history of Western civilization, beginning, many would say, with Aristotle's work three and a half centuries BC. The democratic system of government pioneered in ancient Greece (public representatives discussing, debating and deliberating policy decisions on behalf of the citizenry) shifted the basis of political power in Athens from coercion ("I have a bigger sword") to persuasion ("I have a better speech"). This power shift necessitated the formulation of coherent speech theories, principles, and practices – a set of techniques for winning influence through words, not weapons – and Aristotle and his many student-helpers obliged, compiling a comprehensive text known as the *Rhetoric*.

The Roman Empire served as the next breeding ground for speech/communication instruction and texts (e.g. Cicero's "five canons of speech"), as the Romans also used democratic processes, with senators and citizens making speeches to win support for leaders and laws ("Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. . ."). The orator Cato and the teacher Quintilian advanced that speech not only serves as a tool of power and influence, but also as an inherent basis for virtue and honor.

Especially in his context as a teacher and a teacher of teachers, Quintilian linked "the good speaker" with "the good man" in ways that still resonate for students and teachers of both genders. With honor, and of duty, teacher and student contribute, preparedly, to the discussion and discourse of those assembled to learn and to explore. Whether the learners assemble face to face or are mediated by technology (as in an online class), the "civic" obligation to contribute meaningfully far predates the "personal" obligation to earn this grade or that, though many honor students have found that the one usually leads to the other.

Such are the ancient roots of "communication" as a course of study and application. The modern era of communication study arose in the past century or so, as modes and technologies of telecommunication and mass communication sprouted into the mainstream of our day-to-day life. First, wired telegraph, then "wireless" radio transmission, then telephone, then television, and, nowadays, local and global computer networking – all these technologies have required of modern-day scientists and theorists what democracy in Athens required of Aristotle: new understandings of what it means to successfully "communicate." From the early 1900s into mid-century, a "linear" model of communication evolved (considered such, because in this model, the information, or "message," moves in a line, from sender to receiver), as follows:
This simplistic understanding of communication worked well for telecommunication pioneers, like Bell, Western Electric, and RCA, and for anyone else needing to depict the simplistic "connection" of sender and receiver and the transmission of information from one to the other. Moving forward, we can add a "feedback loop" (upgrading our model from a one-way mode, like AM radio, to a two-way mode, like a telephone network), we would then rename our communication model from "linear" to "interactive." The interactive model depicts the same basic process, but the information flows goes back and forth, as sender and receiver swap roles.

As another example for the contrast of linear and interactive models, consider a Web site, which may allow a person to simply "receive" information (linear) or allow the receiver to also post or reply (interactive). Again, the implication to the adult learner is to resist the temptation to view "classroom" communication as linear (teacher provides information to the student), when at minimum, this exchange should be interactive – a give and take among interested parties.

In a sense, the "interactive" mode is inescapable within the academic setting, since the student must prepare and submit work as assigned by the instructor, who will review the work and provide feedback. But let's move our model from mid-century to present understandings, to more fully appreciate the essence of dialogue and dialectic in the classroom.

In doing so, we move from the interactive model to one markedly different – the "transactional" model. Unlike the simple upgrade afforded by the interactive model (simply the linear model, bouncing back and forth like a ping pong ball), the transactional model radically redefines communication, moving it from a process (A sends to B, and maybe back again) to an entity that is co-created by A and B (and by many others past, present, and future), as follows:
"Transactional" Model of Communication

As the model indicates, "communication" is not the process of "A" sending a message to "B" (or vice versa); rather, it is the product *co-created* when "A" and "B" join together in communication. Think about it. "A" has something to offer, to "put on the table," and so does "B." When they merge their offerings, a product (let's call it "new understanding" or even "new meaning" – that is, "co-created meaning") forms as the result.

Thus, we have moved from *monologue* (teacher speaks, student listens) through *dialogue* (teacher and student speak back and forth) to *dialectic* (teacher and students sharing, examining, and co-mingling ideas into something new and, in the *transaction*, giving rise to new understandings and meaning). And not only is such *action, interaction, and even transaction* a necessity for optimal learning, such engagement is, according to Quintilian and many afterward, a matter of both honor and duty among teachers and students – the citizenry of the learning society.

Indeed, we might be quite proud of our progress in understanding communication as idea-birthing dialectic, were we not mindful that Socrates, teacher of Plato, himself teacher of Aristotle, knew it all along, calling the educational function of the teacher "midwifery" – a novel paradigm in those days and a risky one. Socrates paid a dear price for his establishment-threatening innovation, despite having brilliantly defended himself in a speech (his *Apology*) that graces textbooks even today. Alas, a slim majority of his 500-member judging panel maintained closed minds on the subject of open-minded educational discourse, and Socrates was sentenced to death for leading his learners to actively question the *status quo*.

In any event, the above review, a very brief history of the study of communication and the modern evolution of communication models and modes, offers much as a basis for moving forward into some tips and techniques for the learner, especially for the adult learner, who, presumably, has much to offer in the co-creation of classroom meaning, be this classroom physical or electronic.
Part 2

Tips for Improving Classroom Listening

At the heart of adult learning, especially that offered in accelerated formats, is the stretching out of the usual sense of time. In the traditional context of higher education, the time, or duration, of a course taken is, say, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from 11:00 to 11:50, September through December, and then life moves on.

In contrast, for adult learner, the course "begins," retrospectively, at the time of the student's earliest relevant experiences and memories – those applicable, somehow, maybe quite creatively, to the course at hand. One hopes, and sometimes finds, that during the course session, the student stays engaged in the course material, in one way or another, around the clock, all week long, all term long. And the class "ends". . . well, at best, it never ends. Top students, in great classes, are known to comment, as the course formally concludes and the final work is turned in, "In reality, this class is now just beginning for me."

Yet, there is a special time and place, within the "ever-expanding" term, when everyone gets together to share and learn, person to person. This is the classroom -- or, for the online learner, the forum. How the student takes in information and perspective at this special time and place plays a huge role in the success of the student and of everyone else involved. Here are some tips and some self-assessment mechanisms for successful classroom (and forum) listening:

1) **Come to the class meeting, or forum, physically able to "attend" for the duration of the meeting or session.**

First of all, this means, "be there." Come late, if you must, but show up.

The author has known many adult students who never missed a class in years of attending – strive to be one of these. When a student does not attend class – especially in small classes that meet, say five, times – things get harder for everybody. Too often, the whole group suffers after that, when the student returns but is now behind the others. Missing a class is forgivable, but let it be someone else who needs the forgiveness. (However, if you must miss class, give the instructor as much notice as possible – do not simply "not show." At the very least, contact the "front desk," if available, and leave word of your impending absence.)

If you know, before the term, that you'll have to miss a class, strongly consider taking a class on a different day – or skip a class that term, working instead, if you prefer, on other, more independent credit earning activities, such as those offered by the school's testing and prior learning assessment offices.
As for once you've made it to class, alertness and participation become primary goals. Most adult learners have jobs, and all have external (to school) responsibilities. Sometimes the classes run late into the night (until 10 p.m. is not unusual). If a student has been functioning full-bore since before dawn, this can present a problem. Even morning classes can test one's stamina, especially on a Saturday morning following a rugged week of work, family, and other duties. While caffeine may be helpful to some, this is not the only, nor necessarily the preferred, alternative. The intents, demands, and even costs of one's education are not to be taken lightly, and they require an active approach to ensuring readiness to learn when in class or online.

Sometimes the best approach to ensuring such timely attentiveness is to schedule some rest time prior to class. Some students use a vacation day here or there to catch up on schoolwork and to get some rest. Some stave off major burnout by taking active steps to convince their employers (especially those who help pay for the schooling) to allow some classwork time during the work day; asking for this cannot hurt, not asking imparts a sense that the employee's education is of low priority, so play it the other way around.

Also, a nap at lunchtime can do wonders, as can leaving work a little early on class night, perhaps to take a pre-class nap. This whole "project" you've embarked upon requires both commitment and flexibility – and your continued education is, indeed, worth it. Conversely, snoring during class, or sleepy/sloppy work online, will not play well and wastes time and money.

Make time for rest, rather than remorsefully "wishing" you had time to rest. You, your employer, and your family will all benefit from your education and growth, so use all available resources to help you ensure that you're making the most of your important time during class.

You will know that you're preparing yourself well for the rigors of school-time attentiveness when you feel alive and alert during class meetings and online sessions, sometimes even gaining alertness and excitement as the evening progresses and your learning is piqued.

2) Come to the class meeting/forum devotedly intent on understanding a new way of looking at the subject at hand – that is, "courting a new perspective."

To suggest that you "leave your biases at the door" is both to ask the impossible and to devalue the worth, to others, of these "biases" – these preferred lenses through which to observe the world. Keep your core biases as you wish, but do come in with the goal of understanding new ways of seeing things.

Whether and how you will adopt these new ways of seeing is another matter – ideally you will revise, and so will others, as you all share and co-create, but if you come in seeking affirmation of what you already think – or mainly seeking a "forum" to get others to see things your way, you will make learning next to impossible.

Come in with the goal of understanding in a new way. Listen as if your grade (your growth, really) depends on your ability to grasp and characterize new perspectives. It does. You are free
to believe, feel, and act as you wish, but you cannot use what you do not grasp, and you will not grasp what you do not actively court as worthwhile of your understanding.

You will know that you're doing this well when you find you can securely make a strong case for a perspective new to you (whether or not you "believe" it) and when you find classmates approaching you for clarification of comments you (or even somebody else) made to the group. Being seen as knowledgeable and being asked, perhaps at break time, to explain something is a wonderful compliment and often an acknowledgement of your open listening posture; seek this.

3) Ask questions when you do not understand.

Some students, a few, have an exaggerated sense of their "right to understand" regardless of classroom timing issues. They will hog "airtime" to the detriment of many and to the chagrin of all. Most students, however, lean the other way. They underestimate their right to understand. They allow discussion to proceed, even when they know they are "getting lost." Fight this feeling.

You have the right, maybe even the obligation (see "communication duty," previous section) to raise your hand and ask, "Would you explain what you mean by..." or, perhaps, "Can you give an example of..." or, even, "I'm getting lost – please go back and explain...".

Few teachers (or students, for that matter) would presume that the choice of words, examples, and/or visual aids (hasty writing on the board, perhaps) they have used in any give moment is "just right" for everybody listening. Indeed, the insecurities of instructors ("Was I clear? Did I leave out something important?") can match those of the reticent student ("Will I sound dumb if I ask my question?").

Therefore, when a student asks a question – in a sense, "insisting on understanding" (within reason, time-wise – yes, some follow-up discussion may work best out-of-class) – the instructor is generally grateful for the chance to improve on clarity and/or completeness. In fact, some students are so "tuned in" to the communication occurring that they may grasp a concept but know that others do not – hence they ask the needed question on behalf of other students (and on behalf of the instructor, who is concerned about the group as a whole). This is the "star student." This student's listening serves not only self, but also the group. Strive to be this student.

You will know that you are asking questions effectively when you find that you are able to maintain your "thread of understanding" during the session and when your questions draw appreciation from classmates and instructor, that the answers given to your questions provide enlightenment to you and also to others.

Note that should you find that certain "subjective" elements of your submitted work seem, thereafter, to be somehow "better appreciated," you might take this, as well, as a sign that your outward desire to "understand, in class" is making a difference that is appreciated, whether consciously or not, by your instructor.
4) Continually refine your note-taking technique.

Strive to find a balance between taking notes and attending to the discussion at hand. Don’t write out so much that you miss what is going on, nor write so little that you cannot review your notes for an effective reminder of what transpired during class time.

Some students use color-coding (perhaps one color during class and another for enhancement and clarification added soon after class). Some adult students type away on laptops and seem to stay well engaged. Some will, with permission, record the class on tape or other device. This affords complete and accurate record of the session — though working later from such devices consumes a lot of time, be warned.

Other students scribble furiously, seeming, perhaps, the most devoted in the room . . . and end up asking questions that are immediately answered by classmates who were listening better (“She already covered that . . .”). Avoid this embarrassment (though it’s better to ask than worry that something has already been covered), by working to develop a system that works for you without causing you to miss much. Use “key words,” and add to them shortly thereafter, if you like, striving, in class, to stay engaged with the discussion as it occurs. Yes you can even take notes from online discussions — copy and paste, or paraphrase, key contributions into a separate file, or jot things in a notebook, longhand. It beats hunting fruitlessly through endless posts, searching for something you’re sure you saw before — and now need.

Other students, especially in situations wherein quizzes and tests are not likely, will sit back and take no notes at all. This may seem reasonable, but it can also come off as arrogant, and it adds little to the group sense of importance of the material and commentary. Strive to add to, not detract from, this sense of import. At least track what is being discussed — do not sit there "too cool" (or more likely, "too tired"!) to work at your note-taking.

You will know that you are taking notes productively when you find that you’re not falling behind in the class discussion and that you find yourself inclined to look over what you wrote in class — you understand your notations and enjoy the reminders of fuller discussions indicated.
Part 3

Tips for Improving Classroom Discussion and Participation

More than anywhere, the transactional model of communication applies to adult education in the context of classroom (or forum) discussion and participation. Instructors who teach two sections of a course during a given term often marvel at how one class differs from the other. Ironically, the students in both sections attribute the classroom feel and dynamics to the instructor. The Tuesday night students feel they have a dull (or, maybe, harsh) teacher, while the Thursday night class nominates theirs for Teacher of the Year. What is the difference? Look to the transactional model of communication, and the difference becomes clear. And it is not the instructor.

Well, partly it is. The instructor's job is to facilitate the best learning experience possible, regardless of "the luck of the draw" found on the roster. The size of the group is one variable (smaller groups are often the trickiest to lead, since the "human resources" therein are reduced), but an even more significant variable is the "learning attitude" of the students present. Great instructors can inspire and shepherd eager learning attitudes in the classroom, or online “forum,” most of the time, regardless of the individual variances involved, but none can do this all the time. Quite often, the dominant variable affecting the dynamics in the room or the forum, is the variable of attitude and demeanor among a select few in the class. It is true.

The author has observed that most (though not all) students in the class begin "neutral" in this regard, and, indeed, it is the instructor who makes the difference – at first. But soon thereafter, one or two influential students emerge, and these can make or break the bunch. Here are some tips (and, again, some self-assessment mechanisms) regarding how, for your sake and for everyone else's, you can make the difference with beneficial, not detrimental, impact.

1) **Come to the class meeting/ forum with the express intention of making the class better for everybody.**

As stated, most students come in "neutral" in this regard. They do not see their roles as "influencers"; they just want to learn (and/or secure their credits). Paradoxically, the best way in which you can assure a valuable learning experience for yourself is to work toward one for everybody else. This is true for at least two reasons.

First, by asserting, from the outset, an openly supportive stance toward instructor, classmates, and course material, you "stack the deck" in terms of providing positive, learning-focused influences among the group. You not only add your positive energy, you serve as a positive role model for those who begin naturally "neutral." Second, you counteract the influence of any negative, counter-productive energy imparted by those who come in with, or quickly find, a "problem with the program." In the experience of the author, recommending psychotherapy to these "problem finder/bearers" does not work well, but peer influence usually does.
Yes, peer influence outweighs instructor influence in many, if not all, cases. As does your instructor, you want a positive and fruitful course – well, make it your business to exert positive energy into the room or the online forum. A few good doses of this, from students, can swing the whole group into a productive mode. Without it, the group risks that the influence of one or two "people with a problem" will become a dominant influence that engenders the same among others and alienates the "neutrals" into withdrawal from class activity, while evoking defensiveness, anger, and/or ineffectiveness from the instructor – and none of this leads anywhere desirable.

You can make all the difference – try it early; try it often. It works. You want the "Teacher of the Year"? Act, right off the bat, like that's just what the luck of the draw has dealt you – and you will generally find a great deal of satisfaction and learning.

You will know that your personal effect on the "middle zone" of the transactional model is a positive one when your comments seem to lighten the looks on faces around the room and maybe even bring some appreciative laughs, though never at the expense of those in the class, except, maybe yourself. Also, if you find that others are following your lead and participating with good cheer and enthusiasm, you will have plenty in which to take pride – and the class will be more productive for you and for everyone.

2) Speak out at least twice each class, but do not overdo it.

Assuming a class size of fewer than 25 students, and a class session of two hours or longer, "Once is not enough." Less than that is even worse. If you go home after class and realize that you never made a peep during the session, commit yourself to not letting that happen again. The sum of the classroom, or forum, "communication" (this, the "middle zone" in the transactional model) requires your input, though not your domination.

It has been said that instructors should adjust expectations to accommodate all learning styles, including that of the "quiet learner." Two comments a class hardly makes one a loudmouth. Fewer than that, and one is getting by on a free ride – not acceptable, especially in the adult learning context, wherein learners are likely have had experience relevant to nearly any discussion. It has also been said that one cannot not communicate. Saying nothing is saying something, something quite likely, whether rightly or wrongly, to have a perceptible negative impact on the attitude and "culture" of the group, be it face to face or online.

For practical purposes, consider the "neutral point" to be two well placed, perhaps brief, comments per session. Contribute that, and you're about "even." More than that, if not overdone, adds to the two-way creation of meaning for everyone; less than that harms the group experience as it unfolds. True, "overdoing it" is hard to define, out of context: a lot can be good – or not. As a general rule, if you notice that you're providing more than your share of the student commenting, apply your enthusiasm toward getting others involved in the discussion.

Online students have even greater personal impact as they contribute, or don't, to the forum. "Ghost members" of an online class do far greater harm than do those who post frequently. Time
works differently in online discussion – the risk of harming a discussion by "dominating" is vastly minimized. Likewise, the risk that a student's nonparticipation becomes contagious is much greater among folks not meeting face to face and in real time. If you sign up for the class, participate more than the "required" amount; you will thusly serve everybody, especially yourself, as you honor your duty as a "learning citizen."

You will know that your participation is of beneficial quantity when you see and hear signs of affirmation of the value of your comments and, perhaps, when classmates start referring to you by name. That is, your classroom citizenship gains recognition and appreciation: you're a player on the court, though not a "ball hog."

3) Provide comments and questions that enhance the discussion for everybody, not just for yourself.

Having looked at comment quantity, we now consider comment quality. Pretend, in class, that you are being paid to enhance everyone else's learning. Though, indeed, you are the paying customer, the best way to get your money's worth is to strive to speak up in ways that serve the needs of the group, the best you can. Per the transactional model, all that you add, you receive.

One way to aid the quality of the group discourse is by avoiding comments that come off as defensive. Defend your point of view with spirit, but do not portray that you are taking things personally, do not "get stuck" on one issue for more than a few minutes, and, especially, do not "defend" your work or performance, when critiqued, with more than one quick reply, if any at all. If you feel the need, save further discussion along those lines for private consultation with your instructor.

However, you can aid the group discussion and experience by defending someone else's idea or performance, particularly if you do so without hostility or undue confrontation. Instructors and classmates appreciate students who point out the unnoticed or unmentioned merit of another's contribution. A productive and classy classroom demeanor shows a learning attitude that is quick to acknowledge the merit, and improvement, of others and even quicker to acknowledge room for improvement in one's own "act."

Another especially welcomed type of comment from the adult learner is the personally experienced or observed case in point. Often an instructor's, or a student's, explanation is aided by a clear and relevant example; to see this opportunity and take advantage of it by offering the fruits of your own experience is usually of benefit to everyone. When tactfully and open-mindedly presented, even examples of "when it did not work that way" are also welcomed and can bring out deeper understandings of the matter at hand.

You will know that your participation is of beneficial quality when your input adds insight and relevance, affirms the relevance and success of others, and in general, moves the discussion, whether in person or online, not backward, but forward. That is, you will spark into being ideas beyond those you proposed.
4) Provide, and encourage, participation in small group activities.

Often the instructor will break up the class into smaller groups for activities or discussion, so that students can develop more familiarity with one another and will enjoy more time to talk. Do not dominate this discussion, nor sit back and let others do all the work.

Instead, strive to contribute, while monitoring the participation of others, so that you might encourage those who are, themselves, "coasting." If everyone in the group were to strive to maintain balance among the contributors, all would learn and benefit, and none, for that matter, would have to work hard at the task. Short of that, if at least one member of the group (namely, you) is thusly attuned to the group process, a reasonably productive experience remains quite likely. Asking directly for a student's input can be risky when done in the full-class setting, but it is rarely off-putting in the small group. Who knows, you might be helping someone to make a comment that will be of immense benefit to everyone in your group, including you.

Lastly, you may be assigned to a smaller group for the completion of some kind of classwork project. Some students enjoy this opportunity, others go in "less than enthused," but the author's experience reveals that if at least one person commits (personally, if not outwardly) to ensuring that all members are in regular contact and that their roles are distinct and these roles engender personal accountability, the experience is refreshingly positive for all involved. Providing leadership in this way is greatly preferable to "doing everything yourself" to compensate for what others in your group, lacking role specificity and accountability, do not do. Use this opportunity to refine your leadership skills, remembering that, generally, the more subtle your efforts, the better the results they will produce.

You will know that your communication in small groups is a boon, not a bane, to yourself and others when you notice that everybody is contributing and enjoying the experience -- and getting to know each other on more personal levels. Even job leads are not unheard of, when things go well in small groups (so play nice!).
Part 4

Tips for Improving Written Work

One idea that the author has shared at numerous new student orientations and related events, in regard to the preparation of written works, is this: "Remember, you write one; we read many."

The point of this reminder is that our perspective in reviewing your work is not simply as a reader of something written but as a "comparer" of a lot of things submitted – in response to assignment criteria of our own making, at that. You have read only yours. Maybe you like it; maybe you don't. We will read everybody's in the class and have, perhaps, read hundreds of similarly assigned papers before the present class started. We assess accordingly.

What a student believes to be top-shelf stock may, indeed, find its place nearer the middle of the rack, maybe lower. Conversely, what one doubts is at all worthwhile, the instructor might rate as the best of the bunch. If students could, as instructors must, read the whole batch of work submitted by a group, they would soon see the basis, and the benefits, among the following tips.

1) Understand, completely, the assignment criteria

Experts in the quality assurance business define quality as "meeting requirements." In the subjective realm of academic writing, these "requirements" can change somewhat from assignment to assignment – and they can change radically from course to course and from instructor to instructor. That's why the successful student places a premium value on understanding just what the instructor has given as the assignment specifics. Rare is the critic who places low emphasis on criteria of his or her own design.

Remember the point made earlier about how the course "time" extends past the class meeting, or the online session, pervading the student's entire week? Much more time, typically, will be spent drafting, polishing, and producing the week's written assignments than will be spent in the class or on the forum. Yet, often, students will rush away from the class meeting without a complete understanding of the expectations for the week's written assignment. The end of class has struck, and books and papers get packed away with a flourish. Whether or not the assignments have been discussed in adequate detail, the sound of nylon zippers fills the room, and, shortly, cars zoom out of the parking lot.

Here's a better plan: before you pack up and leave, regardless of the time on the clock, look over what you have for assignment instructions and ask for any needed clarifications, then and there. When the author studied in a traditional setting, professors often rushed away from class with, "Sorry, I have another class to get to." This seldom happens in adult education. Typically, if you inquire, we stick around until the matter is clear. We would rather have you do it right than tell you, after the fact, that you did it wrong. But you may have to ask for clarification.
If your need for clarification arises after class, perhaps once you get started on the work itself, contact the instructor immediately. If you've waited to begin your work until mere hours before it is due, this will strain the situation. Therefore, you should pull out your course notes and information (or review online instructions) as soon as possible (by the very next day after class?) and look it all over, considering whether you have any needs for assignment clarification. If so, you can phone or send an e-mail, and you'll have allowed for plenty of time for response. Do not move forward with your work on an assignment if you have significant questions about these requirements! Trust that to hand in your work with the comment, "I hope this is what you were looking for," does not win you any points.

Timing is another key variable. Know your instructor's policy regarding late submissions. Some, like the author, will extend leniency in relation to the nature of the reason for the delay and the timing of the notice given (the earlier the better) regarding possible lateness. Such instructors would rather you be there, without work in hand, than sitting home regretting things. Others find that extending such "latitude" leads to things coming in late, and they feel that it is unfair, to those who got it done on time, to accept work from those who didn't. Know this variable and act accordingly.

Lastly, in this vein, ensure that your work is of the appropriate length. If the assignment calls for a "paper of 3-5 pages," do not expect a decent grade on a submission that includes a cover sheet and one full page of text, spilling a few additional words onto sheet three. Though you have, indeed, turned in three sheets of paper, this effort is not going to stack up well against one that features four-and-a-half pages of solid text. When given such a "range" for the required length of a written work, it is usually safest and best to shoot for something close the higher limit (but do not exceed this limit without permission). When told to include a certain number of research "sources," include even more than required. For that, you will seldom need to ask permission.

Remember, you write one; we read many. Know and meet your requirements. If you desire a grade equating to "outstanding," you must make your work stand out – but not by being "the one that missed the mark"!

2) Gather the necessary resources before beginning the writing process

Another of the author's well-worn maxims for new students is this: "If you want to make something out of gold, first you have to get the gold." This implies the need to gather resources before moving into the writing phase.

"Resources," in this sense, come in two classes, starting with an inventory of prospective material that you can "brainstorm" from out of your own experience; that is, "mining" what's already in your head. There are a number of published techniques for brainstorming. One is called "mind-mapping," wherein you write one or more assignment-relevant words on paper and draw lines radiating from these words, linking them to new words that they help you to think of, and those new words might link to other new words. This makes for a visual technique of helping you think of lots of words and associated events and ideas – before you begin to write.
You can use this method or some other "brainstorming" technique to help you find ideas that might (or might not) be useful in developing the essay or report you will write. That is one mode of "gathering resources" prior to actually writing, and it beats the heck out of simply sitting down and starting to type whatever comes to mind, with a resulting paper deserving of the title, "A Bunch of Stuff I Thought of, Presented in the Order it all Occurred to Me, Until I Finally Made it to Four-and-a-half Pages." This is neither a good organizational system (this will be covered next) nor an effective screening mechanism for what should or shouldn't make it into your paper.

The second type of "resource gathering" you should perform, prior to writing, is to look for related material that is not "already in your head" – that is, to conduct some research. Whether you prefer to visit a library, to go find experts and interview them (in person, on the phone, or online), or to use online research methods (the fastest and easiest mode these days), you should, as an adult learner, bring to the matter at hand the knowledge and experience of those who have devoted themselves, personally or professionally, to the issue you are addressing as "this week's assignment."

Maybe you protested gun control at the Capitol. That is laudable, but it doesn't make you an expert on the Second Amendment. For credibility's sake, before writing your treatise on the meaning of "a well-regulated militia," consult a variety of authors and agencies that have published articles or books on the subject. Note that if your sources are not "published" per se, but are simply put up on the Web by "who knows who?", don't expect these sources to carry much weight with your reviewer. "As noted on Blitzkrieg Barry's Blazing Bullets and Bombs Tribute Site. . ." does not have an appropriately academic ring to it. You write one; we read many; some papers are eminently well supported; strive to place yours in that group.

So, before progressing to the planning stage for your report or essay, gather both types of resources described above. Take a few minutes to "inventory" the available material from your own experience and memory, and also take a few hours to research what has been experienced and/or published by some of the other six billion people on the planet.

3) Considering your acquired resources, develop a "thesis-and-main-point" structure.

Some student writers prefer to plan out detailed outlines before starting the actual line-by-line "drafting" of their work. At the other end of the spectrum are those who prefer to "free write," letting the words and phrases fly from their fingertips without direction or judgment, to "see where they lead." If the student loves nothing more than spending time at the keyboard, joyously splashing around at the shore of semantic delight, the second approach works well. For after a sprightly and spirited adventure into "wherever the words lead," the student can then indulge in the next wave of seaside activity, arranging the salty spray and foam into something resembling a purposeful stream of well ordered prose. It will take hours, and much will have to be cut, but small is the price for such fun earlier on the beach of free writing.

Let's say, instead, that you wish to expediently compose a worthwhile and clear paper and get on with your day – or get to bed before midnight. Then you might adopt the style of the first type of student mentioned above. Though you needn't spend hours outlining your paper, drafting, per
our metaphor, a detailed blueprint for a sandcastle (this, perhaps, as much an indulgence as is frolicking in the waves and seeing where the tide takes you), you will need to formulate a clear and focused plan before you begin to wrote. At minimum, and a very workable one at that, you will need to settle on a "thesis-and-main-point" structure.

For help in visualizing all this, structurally, refer to the diagram on "Essay Structure" that is presented at the conclusion of these writing tips.

Admittedly, to concoct this basic framework, working from the various brainstormed ideas and research nuggets first gathered, is not always a simple task, as it requires one to think, at the same time, both narrowly (in determining a focused thesis statement, or "central idea") and broadly (in determining the two to four best "main points," which will serve to "develop and support" one's thesis, which can be also thought of as "my paper boiled down to one clear and focused sentence – a.k.a. "my bottom line").

Sometimes the writer decides on the "thesis" first, then determines the main points to best develop (explain) and support (back up) the thesis. Other times, one first decides upon "main points" (very important and interesting material), and these lead to the development of a solid thesis, one that unifies the broader material found as "main point" worthy. Yes, the writer must think both narrowly and broadly, while regarding the gathered "possible material," to come up with both a focus and a structure.

Note that many student reports and essays lack such a clear-cut and unifying thesis (and also a clear-cut structure). You will immediately establish that your work belongs toward, or at, the top of the stack when your paper's "introduction," indeed, leads to, and ends with, such an intent-clarifying sentence. Your reader will find pleasure in noting, right away, that you have narrowed your response to the "given assignment criteria" in such a focused way. Your thesis clarity will plainly show that you are not simply offering three to five pages of "sea-splash" related to the week's readings and discussions, you are presenting a point relevant therein.

For example, the thesis of the section you are reading, Writing Tip #3, is that "You will save time and get a better grade if you determine a "thesis-and-main-point structure" prior to writing the first word." Note how this thesis was first presented (in so many words) as the last sentence of the two-paragraph "intro" that begins this write-up. That's where the thesis belongs, at the end, not at the opening, of the "intro."

As for determining your "main points," the common term used for what might more accurately be called the "main structural components that work together – functioning as the "body" of the paper – to develop and support the thesis" (now you know why we simply refer to them as the "main points"!), these should number two to four (rarely five) and be arranged, before you begin to write, in the most logical and clear order. These main points can come in a number of pre-set patterns, such as the following "chronological" approach: 1) Definition and background of the "technique" at hand; 2) Illustration of current applications of this technique; 3) Prediction of future applications of this technique.
Here is another "pre-fab" system of main points, this time, with not a chronological, but a "topical" approach: 1) A look at the development and history of a new process; 2) A look at the comparative benefits of this process; 3) A look at the expected compatibility issues with existing processes; 4) A look at the long-and-short-term costs of implementation and maintenance of this process.

And here is yet another ready-made main-point structure for possible use, this one designed to support a "personal experience" with the given topic: 1) A review of the facts of my chosen anecdote (the relevant story I'm using); 2) The legal risks that were incurred, per my research; 3) the ethical breaches, as processed through a chosen model or models in the textbook; 4) how this could have been better handled, according to our class discussion.

As you can see, the main-point system can take many shapes, but in all cases above the system serves to clearly and logically develop and support a well-founded report, centered (we would hope) on a well-focused thesis.

In fact, note that by having determined these main points (the essence of each main point shown above is shown in italics to help show their simplicity and differentiation from one another) before writing, when it comes time to actually write up the text of the paper's main points, the writer knows what to go into, and what to hold off on, for each main point as it is written up. To clarify, think of the last example of main-point structures provided above. It would be tempting, while writing up the facts of the anecdote, to mention some of the legal risks involved, but this writer knows "not to go there" yet.

So now you've created your "thesis-and-main-point" structure. Whether you dig in and start drafting the main points or add an additional planning step of creating a more detailed outline (including carefully chosen and arranged sub-points for each main point -- see the "Essay Structure" diagram that follows), just think of how much clearer and more coherent this paper will turn out, as compared to the not-unusual approach we referred to earlier as, "A Bunch of Stuff I Thought of, Presented in the Order it all Occurred to Me, Until I Finally Made it to Four-and-a-half Pages."

4) Encase your paper's now-drafted "body" with an effective introduction and conclusion, then revise and proofread the whole thing – and you're done.

After you have "drafted" the body of the paper, writing up the explanation and support for the planned main points, possibly allowing for a little game-plan changing here and there as you composed your text (see? you are allowed to play around a little in the waves, as you compose the material, it's just that you do so with a coherent plan in mind), it's time to create the "head and tail" for the body you invented – that is, it's time to write the introduction and conclusion.

Yes, you were tempted to "begin at the beginning" (first writing your "intro"), but you wanted to save time and get a better grade, so you held off on that, knowing that it would be faster, easier, and clearer to draft this "set-up" after you had composed, in detail, even allowing for changes, the body it must now "set up." Beginning by writing an "introduction" to something not yet
conceived is a recipe for a lot of time-consuming revision – or, without that, an incoherent paper. Also, since it’s best when intro and conclusion match, or, at least "go well together," you will find it easy to ensure that they do, since you’re now creating them at the same time.

Some needs, strategies, and structural considerations for the intro and conclusion can be found in the next, and final, section (the one concerning oral reports) of this specialized guide for adult communicators in college. Go there now, if you like, to read more about intros and conclusions.

The following section will also address one additional concern for the writer, and that is the need for, and methods of, unifying the main points of the body through the use of smooth, clear, and effective transitions.

Intro and conclusion composed, and smooth transitions assured, you are close to finished. But do not feel your work is done on this written report until you have combed through it at least two or three times, as your "reviewing" function progresses from revising (moving and rewording things where needed for clarity and smooth flow) to proofreading (ensuring that your text is as clean and error-free as possible). For the last time, you write one; we read many.

If you followed the procedure outlined above, your paper will most likely find a place near the top of the stack, even if your grammar and punctuation are still "a work in progress." Those issues are beyond the scope of this guide, and, while important, they can be moved from the forefront of your paper's evaluation, as you ensure that your reader admires your conformance to requirements, your solid material, and your coherent and effective organization.

Now, haven't you been taking care of business, you effective "adult learning communicator," you? No wonder you are becoming the teacher's pet!

As with your classroom listening and participation, or the equivalent on the forum, your reports and essays are prepared with awareness of purpose, with discipline, with clarity, and with a confident touch of your personal style. Take a look at the diagram that follows – it will serve as a useful transition to our final section, on preparing oral presentations that win great grades while minimizing stress.
Part 5

Tips for Improving Oral Presentations

Note that most of what was covered in the previous section, on planning for written work, will also apply directly to planning a report intended for oral presentation – except that the speaker need not (and should not) write out the text of the body's main points. Instead, the speaker merely arranges them with "bullet-style subpoints," the way those writers who prefer to use a detailed outline might have done, before drafting the paper.

So, leaving out the "apprehension factor" (i.e. "speech nerves"), it makes sense to say that preparing an oral presentation, that is, a speech, is easier than is a paper to prepare and present. Whereas most of the same planning steps apply, the oral presentation omits the significant task of drafting and composing the text. Just line up your "bullet-style" main points and their subpoints, and you're ready to go. Not that easy, you say? Okay, let's back up and take a look at overcoming speech nerves.

The author, having taught speech communication (along with "advanced speech") dozens and dozens of times to well varied groups of adult learners, has come to realize a prevailing truth about "speech nerves," a phenomenon more precisely known in the field as "communication apprehension."

There are relaxation and other strategies out there, but the "prevailing truth" mentioned above is that speech nerves affect adult learners in inverse proportion to the learner's understanding of how to prepare for a speech.

In other words, students who have learned the simple and effective methods of preparation to be discussed below, and have practiced this learning for a month or two, find that speech nerves are no longer a primary concern – getting a good speech together takes that role! Getting up and delivering the speech is actually quite exciting. And for most students, it's a lot quicker, easier and more comfortable than, say, doing all those same preparatory steps, then having to write it all up, then edit, groom, and polish a written version of the report, in which every flaw and imperfection sits there forever to be noticed and noted.

In a speech, the rules of grammar are relaxed a notch or two, since the communicator has such an array of nonverbal aids to assist the verbal (i.e. "in words") message. Why do we find it so much easier to pick up the phone and call someone than we do to pick up a pen and write a letter? E-mail is a little different, since we feel that the grammatical standards are, as with speech, more relaxed – and often they are. But more and more e-mail readers are becoming fussy about the slop that appears in their in-boxes, and, remember, that slop is there to stay. Unlike the permanence of the written word, the spoken word is gone the moment the next word takes its place, though, if well chosen, its effects can be everlasting.
There is good reason to feel that it is easier, more natural, and less risky to put one's message out there orally – but this is true mainly for those who know how to prepare. With that noted, let's embark upon what the author teaches as "The Three 'Gets' of Preparing a Speech."

1) Get focused.

Whether preparing a classroom speech or one to be delivered in "the real world," the first step for the speaker is to get focused, and this begins with considering the speaking situation, especially the occasion and the audience. What is going on? Why are you speaking there? Who are these people, and how can you best serve their needs? As with preparation for a written report, you must ensure, for classroom purposes, that you understand the assignment specifics (such as the topics permissible, the time allotted for the presentation, the types of visual aids that are, or are not, expected, and the research requirements, if any).

Having considered your occasion and requirements, the next step, generally speaking, is to identify your speaking goal, that is, "your purpose." Usually this is to get a good grade, but to do that you will have to identify some sub-purposes, such as "to clarify for my audience the nature of my research project, how I conducted the research, what I found out, and what I learned in the process." If this sounds like the makings for your speech body's "main points," you've been paying attention. (For more on that subject, refer to Tip #2 below and to the previous section, "Written Work," Tip #3.)

Clear, now, on your purpose, you should gather resources in the two ways (brainstorming and researching) as detailed in this guide's "Written Work," section, under Tip #2.

2) Get Organized.

Now that you are clear on your situation, audience, and purpose, and have even gathered resources from which to develop your speech, it's time to get organized. Again, this process has been treated in depth in the previous section, but there is one major difference this time, and that is that you may well be developing the essence of your "thesis-and-main-point structure" with the use of a page-design or presentation-design software application, such as PowerPoint.

That is, since you won't be writing it all out, all the more attention must be paid to the clear, well balanced (in depth and detail) framework of main and subpoints. Their wordings are important to a written report, but they are critical to an oral report.

Perfect the wording of your thesis statement, but this time we will consider it a purpose statement (since you will present it in "purpose" terms at the end of your intro: "Tonight I will review with you. . ."). Then play with the wordings of your two-to-four "main points," using a separate "slide" for each main point, with the brief wording of the main point written like a headline in large type (maybe 36 – 48 points!) at the top of the slide. The next tip, below, will go into more detail regarding visual aid (V/A) preparation; the point now is to refine the names of your main points with great care. We are concerned with wordings more than look, including
using large type for these wordings to ensure that they stay brief, preferable no more than one line across the top of the slide.

Now you have created one "starter slide" per main point, and each has a clear heading worded briefly (e.g. Project Goals) and shown in very large type. It's time to arrange the subpoints that each main point will use, by carefully wording and typing these subpoints, perhaps using "bullets" at the beginning of each one. This type will be a bit smaller (perhaps 30 points), allowing for a few more words per line than was possible for the slide heading (e.g. * To determine viability of new procedure).

Remember the example in the "writing" section, wherein the student knew, having predetermined the main points, not to go into "legal risks" while giving the "facts of the story"? To predetermine subpoints, under each main point, is optional for the writer, but it is necessary for the speaker, and that is what you're doing now. You are refining the wordings of all your subpoints and moving them around, and maybe among, your slides, renaming slide headings if need be, as the subpoints take shape, until you have organized the material most central and necessary to the purpose of your presentation – and even this purpose might change or shift as the points under it take form.

You could do all this with pencil and paper, of course, but most speakers prefer to do it on the computer, for ease and mobility and because then the visual aids are almost done, as a by-product of having organized the body of the speech.

With the body of the speech now well laid out, the next step in "getting organized" is to create a clear, effective and complementary (somewhat "matching") introduction and conclusion. If writing a paper, you should hold off on this step until the body is not only organized, but written, but since you will not be writing up the body of your speech (repeat that rule until you come to believe it is law!), having organized your main points and their subpoints, bullet-style, means that you're ready to craft your intro and conclusion.

Be it for a paper or a speech, your intro has an important, if brief, job to do, namely to prepare your audience to value and understand the coming material (the body of your paper or speech). Begin not with your purpose or thesis (many novices make this mistake, "spilling the beans" too early!), but with an appropriate and catchy "opening line." It should amuse or startle your audience, with a "device" (quote, image, statistic, dramatic anecdote, V/A, etc.) that is appropriate to your topic and immediately engaging (e.g. for an oral version of our essay against gun control, we might begin, "As the clock was striking midnight, Mrs. Glock was sure she heard a noise outside her bedroom door – and she was right!").

With "catchy opening" crafted, we move on to other less dramatic, but equally important functions of the intro. It might give a quick thanks to the audience for being there, and it should also establish relevance of the topic to this audience – that is, it should answer in the listener's (or reader's) mind, "What's in it for me?" to pay attention to this stuff. The intro should also include an overt, or subtle, indication of the speaker's credibility (mentioning one's experience or research is "overt"; deftly using a technical term or higher-level reference is more subtle).
And the intro should include both a purpose statement (in a paper, we'll call it a thesis) and a preview of the coming main points – do not go into them at all, yet, but do mention them, by name. There are more subtle ways to present your purpose/thesis statement and main-point preview, but, unless very skillfully used, subtlety here risks that the audience does not catch these important previews; best to play it safe and just plainly "tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em," as the saying goes.

If you get all those needs taken care of and fit together in a smoothly flowing little set-up that takes about a tenth to an eighth of your allotted time (or word count), then you have done well and are ready to craft a matching conclusion.

The job of the conclusion of the speech (or written report), which, like the intro, should cover a tenth to an eighth of the time/pace allotment, is "to make a good thing even better." Some people think the job is simply to recap what the speech or paper covered, but there is more to it than that. Along with reviewing the thesis/purpose and main points, by name (the intro pre-views these key structural elements, and the conclusion re-views them), the conclusion has two additional jobs.

For one, it should give a sense of long-term relevance to what was covered in the report's body – some call this a sense of "futurity." Without really opening up anything new and compelling (this is a definite no-no for the conclusion, as it might give a sense that "we covered the wrong stuff but are now out of time or space – oops") the conclusion does give a sense that the topic is worthwhile and relevant and deserves further consideration. In a "persuasive" speech or paper, this might come in the form of a carefully withheld, but now unleashed, "call to action" (as in, "Now, if you will all pull out your wallets and remove your credit cards, I'd like you to join me in snipping them in all half").

The other necessary goal of your conclusion, complementary to futurity, is finality. You must have a closing line that is as effective in telling the audience that "it's over" as your catchy opening line was in alerting your audience that something great was forthcoming. The opposite of effective finality is an apologetic throwaway, such as, "Well, that's it" or, even worse, "That's all I have." End with something super, and follow it with a gracious "Thank you," and stop talking.

If you want to take questions, make sure that you are not out of time. Usually, you are. And this point serves as a reminder that, in contrast to the length guideline for the writer (remember, the writer should push toward the allowed maximum), the rule for the speaker is to get it done, and well, as close as possible to the allowed minimum. A five-to-eight-minute presentation that comes in at 5:15 is seen by most as superior to one that comes in at 7:55, and is ten times preferable to one that stretches to ten or twelve minutes. You make one speech; we all hear many!

One last point of organization, now that intro, body, and conclusion are now developed, is that both the writer and the speaker must ensure that the main components of the material are linked together with smooth, effective transitional statements.
For the writer, these are main point lead-ins that can have some subtlety (e.g. "From this project, I learned quite a bit"). They might even come in the form of headings, perhaps centered and in bold (avoid "all capitals," though). For the speaker, whose audience cannot simply flip back a page and review what was just covered, these transitions should be about as subtle as a shot of seltzer in the face – in the sense of "Wake up, we're done with that part, now, and we're moving forward." More realistically, the exaggerated, oral transition, perhaps accompanied by the switch to a new V/A slide, might sound like this: "So now we've looked at what the founding fathers said, let's race to the present and take a look at current legislation in Washington." Note that this transition named both the main point just covered and one that's coming.

Whether or not your audience was actually slumbering, it's always possible that something you had said sent their minds in another direction – to clarify, in your transitions "where we've just been" as well as to indicate "where we're now going" is extremely helpful, and it is quite easy, really, if one remembers to do it!

And this leads to the last tip of the last section of this guide for successful communication for adult learners, namely, getting prepared to deliver your carefully arranged oral presentation with clarity, confidence, and impact.

3) Get Prepared.

Your oral presentation, or speech, if you prefer, is not complete from top to bottom, transitions, included. Now it's time to make you final preparations for a successful delivery of this material, starting with finalizing the preparation of your materials to be used: your visual aids (V/As), your speaking notes, if needed, and any handouts you might give out.

The text of your V/As was quite likely created when you organized the body of your presentation. One thing you might add, now, is a separate slide or two to use in introducing your presentation (possibly one that simply bears the title of the presentation and another that indicates the coming main points). This can all be done on one slide, if preferred. The "Contents" page of this guide you are reading makes a reasonable example of such a thesis/main point preview, though it is just a touch wordy were it to be used for an oral presentation.

You will need to decide on a background for your slides – the author prefers these simple (just one or two colors, possibly using "fill effects" such as gradients; some like them somewhat busier. You can "format"/"background" as well as choose fonts and colors (preferably just one or two of each!) and your type sizes (main point headings versus subpoint headings”) all while working in the "slide master" environment of PowerPoint.

Further details on using that, or any other design application, are beyond the scope of this guide. One principle worth remembering, though, is that you should ensure a very strong contrast between background and text darkness. One should be quite dark and the other very light. To save on ink and expense, if printing out the slides, use a light background and dark text; vice versa if only projecting the slides. And one last broad-stroke principle is that "a picture is worth a thousand words." This does not mean rely on clip art, it means give strong consideration to
imbedding charts (with large labels and other type) and even photos or movie clips in your presentation – they are quite easy to insert and they can add a lot.

Beside the PP-type slides, many other options exist for your use as visual aids. Books you hold up, posters you put up, white boards and flip charts you might use right in front of your audience, objects you send around the audience, and even printed materials that you hand out (or little "freebies" you give out as gifts) can mean a lot more to your audience than yet another set of PP slides. Consider all options.

Your V/As might serve as your speaking notes or guides, but if they don't (e.g. your V/As are, say, books and posters), you will have to make up a set of speaking notes. For more details and options on preparing speaking notes, refer to the following chart on "Speaking Notes," which is shown at the end of this section.

Note that the author actually uses this diagram as a "handout" in speech classes. It serves as both a guideline for preparing such speaking notes and as an example of a nicely designed "handout" that can takes the place of, or augment, a speaker's PP slides.

The author's preference, incidentally, is to eschew, when possible, the sometimes-problematic projection equipment used with PP and, instead, design speaking notes that also serve as spiffy take-home reminders of the content of the presentation. Note that such handouts, whether used as speaking notes, V/As or both, can also serve to reinforce a call to action for the persuasive speech. For example, instead of ending a speech with, "So call the Governor and say that...." (which nobody is going to do, without more help) you might end by distributing your handout, which includes, along with your main point cues (hence, they also serve as your own speaking notes) both the Governor's contact information, and a reminder of what to tell him or her (and so, with this take-home information, some audience members might actually do the thing you pitched in your speech!).

On the following page, then, you will find the "sample handout" referred to above. It presents, for your review, some purposes and alternatives for the design and creation of your "speaking notes." Give it a close look.

And notice that it exemplifies some reasonably effective "handout design" touches, including a border and decorative lines, strategic type sizing and indenting, some graphics to help show what the text discusses, and the speaker's name and related event information.

Also note that, as used in the author's classes, this handout is usually printed in color (the border, lines and some other minor touches). Remember, your speech handouts should be attractive and classy – use color when you can, and print on nice paper, maybe even stationery.
Along with the preparation of materials, discussed before the sample handout on speaking notes, comes one last area of preparation, rehearsing the speech. The goal of this effort is not to get the speech memorized, it is to make sure that all planned points make sense to you, as you deliver your message from your "key-word" V/As or notes. Also, you rehearse to ensure that the time needed to cover these points meets the time allowances given.

The speech should be rehearsed – without stopping! – at least once and no more than three or four times. That is the thinking of many students who, at the point toward the end of the course where they report that their preparations are truly working for them, have been asked the question of "how many rehearsals?" No rehearsal at all seriously risks timing mishaps, and more than four rehearsals risks that the speech sound memorized, which is surely not the goal.

The goal is to come off as prepared with a creative, effective and tight game plan (everything covered above) and to execute this plan in a way quite natural to the very moment of the delivery and to the audience who is listening. These "situational" variables can't be approximated in rehearsal, but the flow of the main points and subpoints and the time required to cover them can be.

That is why this last step in preparation, rehearsal, including the use of all V/As and other materials, possibly even in the very room where the speech will be given live, might involve one last loop: revision if the material is too short or too long, and at least one more rehearsal of the revised material.

With all of the above preparations complete – and, realistically, with a handful of experiences in practicing the above under the belt, perhaps from a speech class, perhaps class by class in an adult program that emphasizes, program-wide, oral communication (and written communication, since organizing tight essays and reports is great practice for organizing speech material!) – the speaker will find the aforementioned "speech nerves" are of minimal concern.

It may not seem likely to the newer student, but that's what the author has seen time and time again. It could happen to you. Follow the steps outlined in the previous two sections of this guide, and you may soon find that your main concern is no longer your speech, but instead your audience members and the impacts you want have upon them.
Conclusion

In the context of helping to understand the big picture of successful communication for adult learners, we have now traversed much ground. We began at the roots of rhetoric, proposed centuries before Christ's and the Romans' time, and we ventured into modern communication theory, into classroom performance and dynamics that blend to co-create the meaning and the experience for student and instructor alike.

We explored strategies of preparation and structure that lead to producing and delivering gratifying and successful written and oral reports of learning – all the while, having a little "fun on the beach," though not getting carried away by the waves of scattered intent. We explored purpose; we explored focus; and we found, one hopes, a treasure map for growth and development. And we have found, en route, that adult learners must enlist, and should repay, the support of everyone involved with their learning, since real and meaningful growth is, indeed, a "group project."

Successful communication for the adult learner, then, is both the vehicle and the destination. Indulge, enjoy, and remember that all you contribute to the "middle zone," to the communication among those participating, you receive back in a form that is improved, maybe even enlightened.