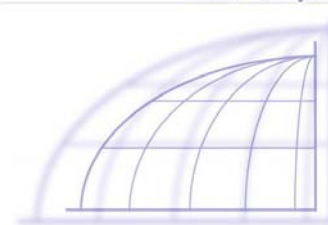


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Section B-5•



C-4: Overcoming Blocking

Dahlia had carefully prepared her speech. When she stood up to deliver it she realized she had suddenly gone blank. This knowledge construction function helps students recover after going blank. Going blank, or blocking, is a sudden stoppage of the flow of thinking and processing from the transformation to the communication phase of the mental act. As this includes the mental pointers that are needed “to pick up the thread” it can be difficult to recover unless students know how.

The fear of going blank in front of an audience is commonly at the top among the causes of speaker's anxiety. Being in front of an audience may cause an individual to see the self through the eyes of others. The individual becomes self-conscious. The sudden loss of the normal flow of subjective experience may elicit blocking. Blocking is often accompanied by confusion, a racing heart, a flushed face, sweating and tension. If not overcome it may cause the flustered individual to exit the stage. Theaters use hidden prompts to assist actors that experience blocking or otherwise have difficulty remembering their lines.

To mediate the development of this communication function describe and discuss the phenomenon of blocking to your students. While many people will never experience blocking it is not uncommon. You and your students may have experiences you can relate about yourselves or other people who have encountered it.

The key to overcoming blocking is ‘to pick up the thread’. Once the thread has been recovered the individual is usually able to retrieve all of the blocked information. Share with your students that there are two ways to recover the thread: “Either you get assistance from someone else or you regroup and recover the thread on your own.” The development of this knowledge construction function gives

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students the knowledge they need to deal with blocking should it occur.

A. Outside assistance: Blocking can be overcome with the help of another person who provides:

- (a) A cue that is relevant to the interrupted stream of thought (“I believe you were going to tell us about the book you have read”).
- (b) A starting point (“Why don’t you begin with a description of Winnie the Pooh”).
- (c) A supportive statement that reduces anxiety (“Take a moment to gather your thoughts”), or
- (d) A supportive communication that lowers the cost of failure (“Don’t worry about it; we can come back and do this another time.”)

B. Internal regrouping: Students can rely on their own resources to overcome blocking if they know what to do:

- (a) Rehearse your presentation in advance. Imagine you are in front of the group you will be speaking to. Be prepared to rehearse a number of times but unless you plan to read your presentation verbatim don’t lock yourself into a tightly written manuscript.
- (b) Prepare a note with the title, starting and main points of your presentation and use it if you need it.
- (c) Tell yourself to take a moment to gather your thoughts. Pausing quietly, regrouping, and, if necessary, simply selecting a new stream of thought usually enables you to move on. Once you move on you may find that you have recovered your original starting point so you can use it as you wish.
- (d) In some situations you can be upfront with your audience and let them know you lost your train of thought. Most people can relate to that. Just say: “Where were we? I seem to have lost my train of thought.”
- (e) Trust your knowledge and skill in handling this kind of situation.

Your students may wish to use role play to practice and rehearse how to overcome blocking. - By developing this knowledge construction function your students are better prepared to deliver presentations and be comfortable with sharing their knowledge in smaller or larger groups. You can provide additional support by arranging the classroom environment to encourage the free flow of information and ideas. The classroom environment should always be free of ridicule and threat.