

**Public Speaking**  
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**Lecture: 17**  
**Digression\_ Usage and Concerns**

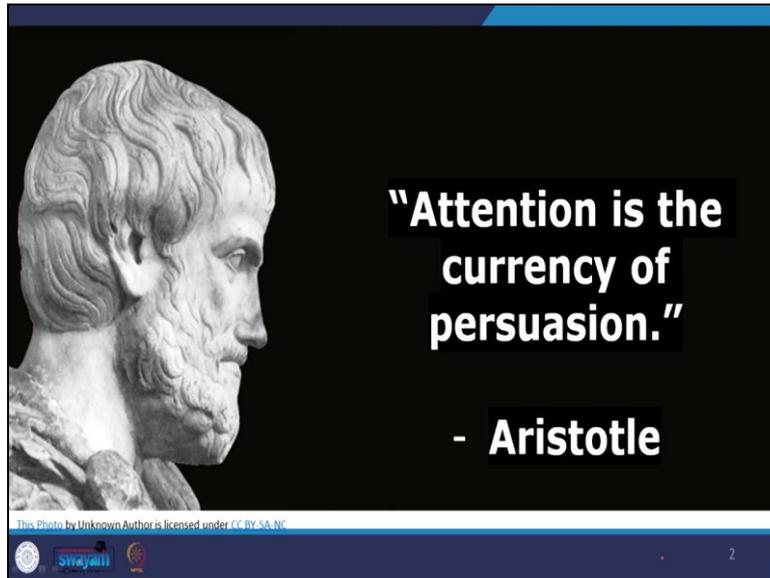
Good morning and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Public Speaking. Friends, all of you must remember that in the previous lecture we talked about the significance or the importance of oral citations in public speaking. Public speaking is an oral affair and the true aims of a public speaker as all of us have been till now trying to understand are to educate to inform and to entertain.

In this regard, there has to be a co-operation between the speaker and the receiver but at times it so happens that while the speaker tries, he tries his utmost to drive home his point. The listeners are often led to a different sort of affair and naturally they are not able to concentrate. It is actually on the part of speaker also, the speaker also gets at times a little bit frustrated when his receivers do not pay attention to.

You might have on certain occasions found that a conscious speaker even while he is concentrating on his topic sometimes or the other, he actually starts referring to something else or talking about something else. You might be at all surprised as to why the speaker had to do this. But then there is actually a reason behind and the reason is to bring the audience members back to the topic, back to the line of the thinking of the speaker.

This can be considered to be a sort of digression. Now you might be thinking that if a public speaker has the aim to concentrate on his talk why the need of digressions. Are digressions not dangerous, are digressions not impediments to public speaking? I think today in this lecture, we are going to talk about digressions--- their uses and their concerns. Now, as I have been saying that in all sorts of public speaking, attention is actually very important.

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And this attention between the speaker and the receiver which actually can result by hint of positivity, by hint of cooperation but at times it seems that such a sort of attention is missing and in order to bring back the attention, digressions are very important. We can take a quote by Aristotle who says---“Attention is the currency of persuasion.” When two people are talking to each other, you will find if they are trying to convince each other they have to be attentive to everything right from the word to the non-word and also at times to the context.

Now if we have to define digression as I have been saying, digression can be defined and in this regard we can take the definition given by Merriam Webster's dictionary,

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**What is Digression?**

- ❑ Merriam Webster defines Digression “as the act or an instance of leaving the main subject in an extended written or verbal expression of thought : the act or an instance of digressing in a discourse or other usually organized literary work”.
- ❑ Digressions are instances when the speaker moves away from the decided topic. This usually happens only for a short period of time.
- ❑ It is different from distraction.

where digression is considered as the act or instance of leaving the main subject imagine that somebody is speaking on a particular topic and he is not able to concentrate the reason being

the audience members are not attentive to. So, what the speaker does? He actually makes use of an instance of leaving the main subject in an extended written or verbal expression of thought the act or an instance of digressing in a discourse or other usually organized literary work.

So, digressing----- this word digression comes from digress and digress actually means to distance a little bit. So, digressions are instances when the speaker moves away from the main topic or the decided topic, moves away. This usually happens for only for a short period of time because if the speaker digresses for a longer time, the digression will actually become a sort of deviation. It may also become a sort of distraction and the real purpose of public speaking on a particular topic will be lost.

So, here the need to understand is that digressions are different from distraction. Distraction is when the speaker or the receiver finally or ultimately completely withdraws himself or herself from the concerned topic then it will become a sort of distraction. But then many of you who might be under the impression that digressions are dangerous they should actually think that digressions are used just for a very novel purpose and the purpose is to bring back the audience to the main topic.

So, even when two people talk to each other you will find they at times digress, there can be many ways to digress. You start on a topic, you start speaking, you speak for some time and then you will find that since they are not providing you the utmost attention you actually digress. You start saying something so, that their interest is aroused so, that they can actually be brought back to the main topic.

Now when we talk about digression, the need is also to talk about attention because digression we can here use as a sort of antonym just for the sake of understanding, as a sort of antonym for attention.

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**Attention Versus Digression**

# ATTENTION

The prime component of any successful act of public speaking is the speaker's **skill to capture and hold the audience throughout the speech delivery.**

However, one can never keep the audience engaged with facts alone. In order to grab their attention, the **speaker must include relevant digressions** during communication.

So, digression is a way of grabbing attention and refreshing the audience and should be incorporated during speech delivery.

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Swayam

So, the prime component of any act of public speaking is the speaker's skill, the motivation the speakers aim purpose to capture the attention or to hold the attention of the audience throughout the speech. But all of us are human beings can we as audience members when we are listening to a person can we also continue or to attend seriously or to pay attention to what has been said thoroughly, no it at times does not happen.

All of us being human beings, we actually start at times to think of something else maybe because of what the speaker is saying our minds are laid astray our minds are driven into a different topic into a different world. However, one can never keep the audience engaged with facts alone. Now as we have been saying that when you are speaking before the public and you have a topic since the topics are varied there are many topics where the speaker is speaking factually providing factual information.

And among the audience members you will find that there are many people who actually develop a sort of distaste for facts. One cannot concentrate on facts for a long time. So, one can never keep on engaging the audience's mind throughout concentrated by facts in order to hold their attention the speaker must include relevant digressions. Now see when the speaker is delivering a talk on any topic maybe on social political educational scientific fine cultural.

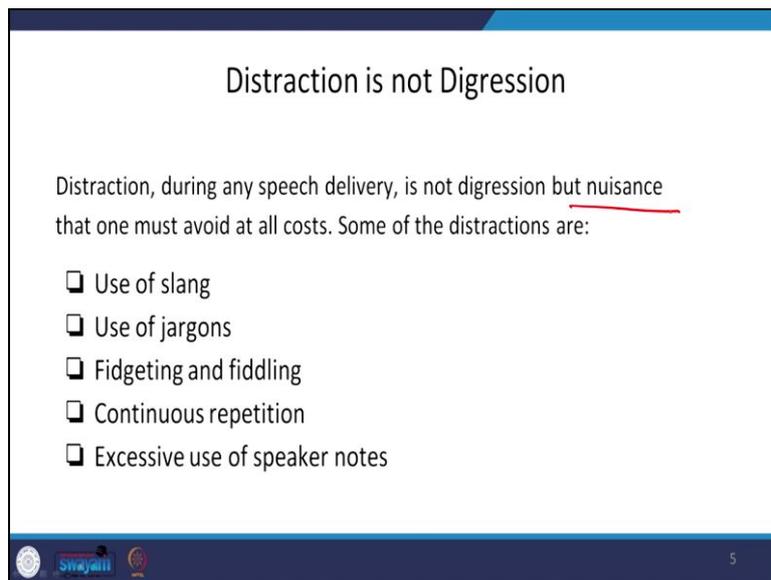
So, what the speaker does in order to bring back the audience members to the track of the topic the speaker provides some relevant digressions. Now even you know it is very difficult to digress and everyone cannot digress because digression also requires a lot of intelligence a

lot of rather emotional intelligence that we have talked about. So, the speaker must include relevant digressions during communication.

So, if the digressions are not relevant what will happen as a speaker you will lose the crowd and as audience members they will lose the speaker. So, digression is a way of grabbing attention and refreshing the audience and that should be incorporated during the speech delivery. So, now you might have been quite clear as to why digressions are important. Now little bit of thought as to why distraction cannot be considered to be digression.

Many people are under the impression that these two can be very synonymous they are very close to each other but then there is a difference between distraction and digression. So, distraction is not at all digression. So, distraction during any speech or any public speech is not digression but distraction actually will prove to become a sort of nuisance my dear friend that should be avoided.

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The slide is titled "Distraction is not Digression". The main text states: "Distraction, during any speech delivery, is not digression but nuisance that one must avoid at all costs. Some of the distractions are:". Below this text is a list of five items, each preceded by a square checkbox:

- Use of slang
- Use of jargons
- Fidgeting and fiddling
- Continuous repetition
- Excessive use of speaker notes

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "Swayam" and "5".

Now it is time that you knew that you understood what are the ways that your digressions will become distractions. When a speaker speaks and he actually tries to refer to something else in literature we call it allusion no you are alluding to you might have heard many seasoned speakers while they are speaking on a particular topic they will refer to examples from various scriptures.

From various great books, various instances from the lives of great people but then how these digressions cannot or should not become distractions are that one has. To avoid the use of

slangs. When a person as a speaker is not able to concentrate or not able to control the audience members naturally he develops some amount of negativity and in negativity one can do anything but it is time that one tried to control oneself and not use slangs just so that their attention can be drawn. Use of jargons, I mean all of you must be familiar with jargons, jargons actually are technical terms and these technical terms cannot be understood by everyone. In any profession you will come across there are several jargons which the people of that profession can understand but people of different professions or different subjects cannot understand for them, it will merely become a jargon, it will become a technical term.

So, jargons also should be avoided. Fidgeting and fiddling you might have found that at times many speakers when they fail to hold their attention, when they fail to have their control over the crowd they start fidgeting they become at times very restless and at times they also start repeating the same thoughts time and again. So, that is also negative. It can have a very negative imprint, negative impact on the crowd and as a speaker you are not going to win.

Now as a speaker because you know speaker is also a human being when he finds that he is not able to concentrate on the crowd or control the crowd he starts finding fault in himself. And if he has brought some notes what he will do he? Will perhaps think that perhaps I am not saying the right thing and that is why the audience members are not able to listen to my words of wisdom and he starts looking after the notes that he has brought.

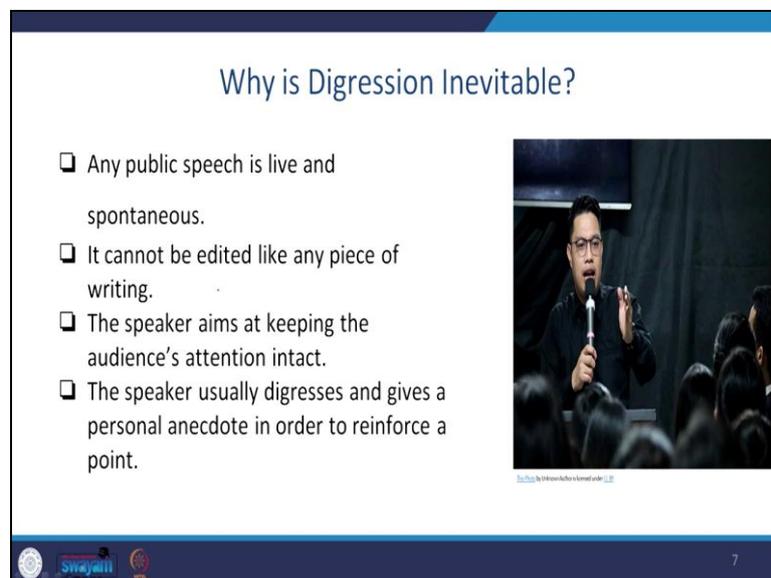
And this will, of course, create a sort of deviation, my dear friend! The audience members will also lose the track and they will also start whispering because in some of my previous lectures I might have already said that audience members have the quality of a crowd. And somebody who becomes a part of the crowd. The crowd does not have its own individual thought the crowd starts behaving like the other members of the crowd.

Like the other members of the audience, because when you find that even something untoward or even something unbecoming happens everyone starts joining the race without knowing the rhyme or the reason. So, the crowd does not stand to think. Now pacing the floor as a speaker when in a sort of frustration, you find that you are failing the crowd members than as a speaker one starts pacing the floor.

The use of language because he thinks that perhaps his language is not that captivating. So, what he does? He starts using very difficult terms, fine? The language becomes very difficult. And then excessive use of visual aids--- if he is making use of visual aids, he will start showing visual aids just to grab the attention. At times, he will also find fault with the sort of clothes or with the sort of dress that he is wearing.

Now all these things are negatives, my dear friends. So, that is why as a speaker one must quite be cognizant of the fact that digression and distraction--- these are two different things. Now there are certain things that we can realize that why this digression is inevitable or why it is necessary.

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The slide is titled "Why is Digression Inevitable?" and contains the following list of points:

- ❑ Any public speech is live and spontaneous.
- ❑ It cannot be edited like any piece of writing.
- ❑ The speaker aims at keeping the audience's attention intact.
- ❑ The speaker usually digresses and gives a personal anecdote in order to reinforce a point.

On the right side of the slide, there is a photograph of a man in a dark suit and glasses speaking into a microphone on a stage. The slide also features a Swayam logo and the number 7 in the bottom right corner.

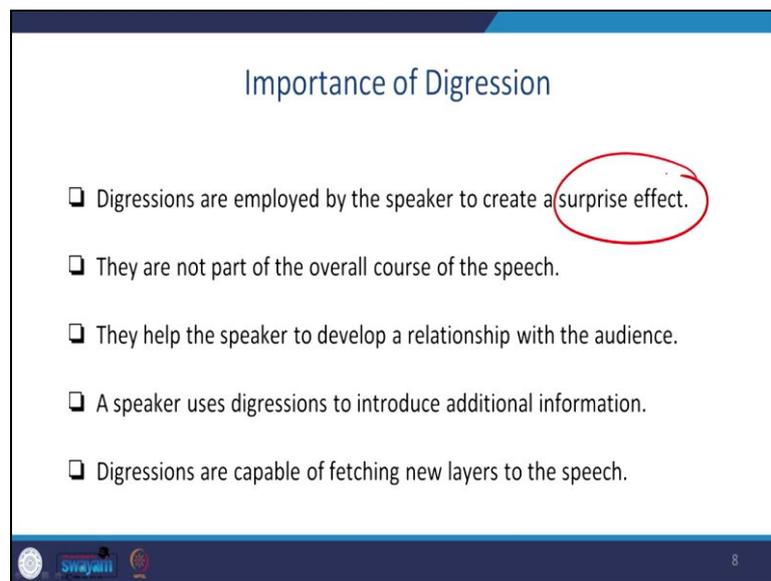
Any public speech for that matter---- a public speech is a spontaneous. It is continuous, it is in a flow and suddenly when you find that the audience members are not co-operating, then the flow comes to a halt. The flow actually receives a sort of breakdown. So, when one is in the midst of a flow, because you know writing and speaking are two different things. In writing, one can edit certain things but when one is speaking it actually becomes difficult and that also when somebody has got a prepared presentation or a speech or whatsoever.

So, it cannot be edited as any piece of writing. You do not have as a speaker, you do not have the time and the speaker always is in search of grabbing the attention. So, naturally he will digress. He will start giving examples sometimes we have found that speaker also starts using humour. But then as I had said earlier even when you are using humour, the humour has to be

relevant, it has to be in line with what you are saying because as a speaker your main purpose is to convince the crowd, to reinforce a point.

Now let us talk about the significance of digression and how we can incorporate it as a public speaker in our speech they are employed by this speaker to create a sort of surprise effect.

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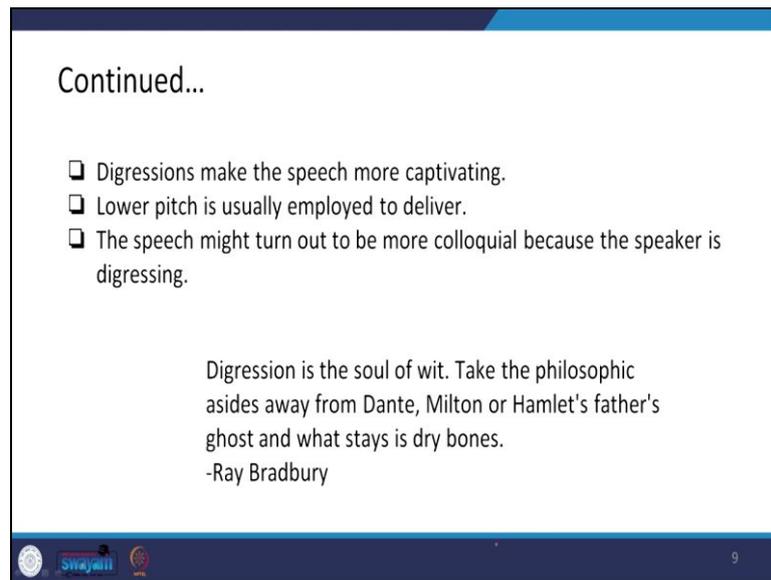


Even when you are in a meeting or whatsoever you will find that if something very new, something that you have not heard of is said, then suddenly all of them become concentrated, then become concerned. So, same is the case with digression. So, digression also is aimed to create a surprise effect. Of course, one cannot have digressions throughout the speech, fine, otherwise this will become a sort of distraction.

So, digressions also help the speaker to develop a relationship with the audience. Now if a speaker uses digression and the digressions appear to be very fruitful. Then the audience actually starts developing a sort of respect at times. They may also feel oh what a sort of person he is---- actually multi-dimensional, multi-talented. He has read scores of books and he has got access to all these things because he is referring from different subjects.

Digressions introduce additional information. They may not be part of the entire speech but they provide some additional information and they are capable of fetching new layers to the speech. That is why when a speaker uses digression you will find that there is a change in tone, there is a change in terms of the usage of words, there is a change in terms of the tempo at times.

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Continued...

- ❑ Digressions make the speech more captivating.
- ❑ Lower pitch is usually employed to deliver.
- ❑ The speech might turn out to be more colloquial because the speaker is digressing.

Digression is the soul of wit. Take the philosophic asides away from Dante, Milton or Hamlet's father's ghost and what stays is dry bones.  
-Ray Bradbury

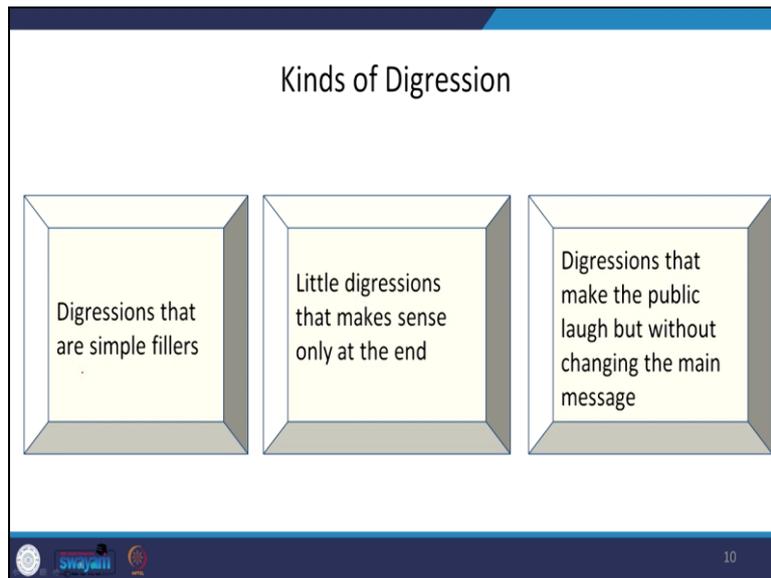
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Now digressions can make your talk more captivating, more attractive and as I said earlier, suddenly there is found a sort of alteration or a change in the voice of the speaker. Lower pitch is usually implied to deliver or to bring digressions. The speech might turn out to become more colloquial. It appears as if it is a sort of conversation when a speaker is providing digressions, my dear friends, you might have all come across.

So, many good speeches or presentations where you could have found the speaker while he or she might have been providing you with his words of wisdom, he actually brings quotations as we have in the previous lecture talked about the use of citations. So, in digressions also he may, at times, refer to some very beautiful lines from some good book, great book inspirational book.

Now, here in this regard let us take one quote by Ray Bradbury, a writer, who says and what he says is actually very significant. "Digression is the soul of wit." It is actually the soul of wit. "Take the philosophic asides from Dante Milton or Hamlet's father's ghost what stays is dry bones what is the meaning?" The meaning is that if a speaker continues, speaker, writer whatsoever if continues to provide only the facts, the facts appear like a sort of dreary desert. And that is why in most of the lectures, talks presentations books, you will find apart from the real thing there is too much of philosophy, my dear friends. Now if they are not they will appear like dry bones, that is why a speaker brings some beautiful quotes in order to make his talk very attractive and that also can be a ploy of bringing digressions.

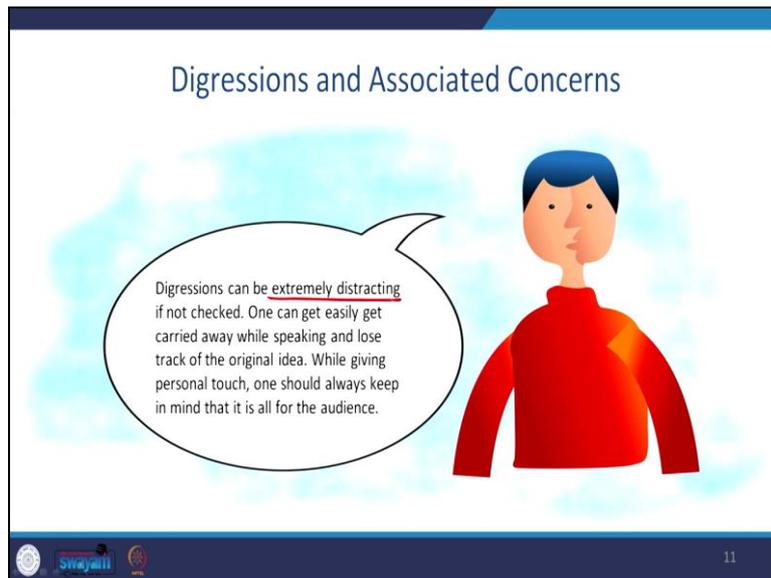
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Now what can be the kinds of digression they; there can be digressions which can simply be called as simple fillers, where you will find the speaker stops just for some time and he actually makes use of certain fillers. Maybe at times this appears to be a little bit humorous also. Little digressions that make sense only at the end. There are some digressions which people as audience members cannot understand instantly.

But then by the end of the talk perhaps the audience members may relate and then the third category of digressions are those that make the public laugh but without changing the main message. So, digressions are just a sort of relief for the speaker and also for the audience digressions have a double duty----- it actually can at times create a sort of comic relief that we study in literature. Now what can be the other concerns of digressions, digressions at times ,may appear to be very distracting extremely distracting if it is not checked properly.

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So, here as a speaker our role is to see whether these digressions fit well into the scheme of our things. One can easily get carried away while speaking and lose track of the original idea while giving personal touch one should always keep in mind that it is all for the audience. Many speakers always devise some personal touch to be included in their talk but this personal touch only should be to an extent, to a limit.

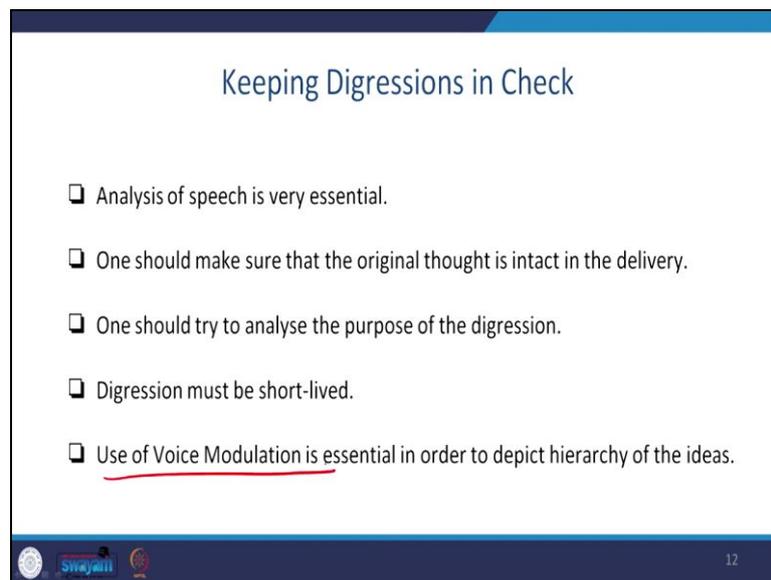
It should not be longer fine. If somebody uses humour, the humour has to be relevant because digressions can be extremely distracting at times and as a speaker because when we are in the flow of speaking we may not have a control over it. So, it is better that as a speaker we become very conscious of using digressions. How can we keep digressions in check? Because we have already said that one needs to use digressions. But digressions have to be controlled. Now when one is preparing this speech or the presentation one also might have come across so many ideas, apart from what the real topic is. So, while you are going to incorporate something new it is always better that your speech or your presentation has been analyzed properly. Analysis of your speech is very essential and then it should actually not somehow the affect your original thought.

The original thoughts should not be distracted it should not create a sort of impediment in the delivery. One should also remember what actually is the purpose of the delivery or purpose of the talk what is the purpose behind giving this sort of speech. So, if one is conscious of, then naturally digressions can be put in check. Digressions should be temporary, no? It is actually to say, that digressions from time to time if a person uses it should only be for a short time.

You might have felt that when you are speaking something or you are writing something, sometimes there is a tick of the clock which continues. But my dear friends, it continues only because you are concentrating on the sound. After sometime you get used to it. So, is the case with digression also in the beginning it will appear very difficult to you to bring digressions in the midst of your talk but you will get used to it.

And moreover, as I said earlier, that when one digresses, the tone or the pitch has to be decreased. So, use of voice modulation is essential.

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**Keeping Digressions in Check**

- Analysis of speech is very essential.
- One should make sure that the original thought is intact in the delivery.
- One should try to analyse the purpose of the digression.
- Digression must be short-lived.
- Use of Voice Modulation is essential in order to depict hierarchy of the ideas.

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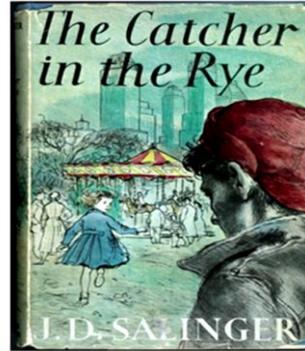
Now what exactly is voice modulation. Voice modulation is the way a person at times raises his voice, the way a person at times lowers his voice or at times brings it into the neutral mode. We shall discuss this voice modulation when we shall be discussing in non-verbal part and we shall pay special attention to the use of voice in public speaking. Now in literature also you can come across several digressions What are those?

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## Literary Example of Digression

J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* is rich with digression.

There are numerous instances when Holden Caulfield's thought patterns seem to derail from the main topic. However, these digressions later fit the missing pieces for gaining insight into the protagonist.



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Say for example we can take an instance from J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* which is actually full of digression here I have simply taken a very small paragraph. “There are numerous instances when Holden Caulfield’s thought patterns seem to derail from the main topic....” As I had already talked about that a speaker as a speaker you derail you actually distance yourself for some time from the main topic.

“However, these digressions later fit the missing pieces for gaining insight into the protagonist.” So, digressions are very important.

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## Do Audiences also digress?

- ❖ Audiences have the qualities of a crowd.
- ❖ Their minds wander constantly.
- ❖ Audiences’ move faster than the speaker’s
- ❖ They have spare capacity and they often day-dream.

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Now, the question is--- as many of you also might be thinking about. Do audiences also digress? Yes, audiences also digress. Because as I have been saying that audience members are just like the members of the crowd and their minds are always not concentrated.

Everyone's mind as a human being, everyone's mind, at times, wanders constantly when the speaker is in a flow and the audience members who are actually paying attention to the audience members actually think faster than the speaker.

Audiences' minds move faster than the speakers mind and psychologists often say that audience members have got a sort of spare capacity and they often day dream. Imagine once you were a part of an audience member, were you able to pay your attention throughout to the speaker? No. On certain points you also distanced, you also started day-dreaming because one such thread of thought came where you started referring it to your own idea, to your own experience.

So, as audience members, all of us have got a sort of spare capacity. Spare capacity ----you have some spare time and in the spare time a man can think in such a way that he can at times start daydreaming, my dear friend. So, in order to bring them back from this daydreaming to the world of reality, we have to practice our digression. Now what are actually other ways to bring back our audience members who have actually distanced themselves from our own topic.

The very first is arouse, arousal technique in psychology they call it, arousal technique. You need to arouse interest in the audience. So, arouse questing interest, that is why when a person digresses as a speaker he says something that may surprise and suddenly the audience members come back to the real topic. Vary the input. I mean there are several ways as a speaker you can try to make use of the variety.

Variety in terms of your voice, variety in terms of the instances. We should also think about the time. Time is also a very important factor in causing distraction. Now you might have all realized that a talk during the morning hour or the first half appears to be more interesting but if the same talk is given in the afternoon despite the hard efforts of this speaker it may fail or to create interest among the audience members.

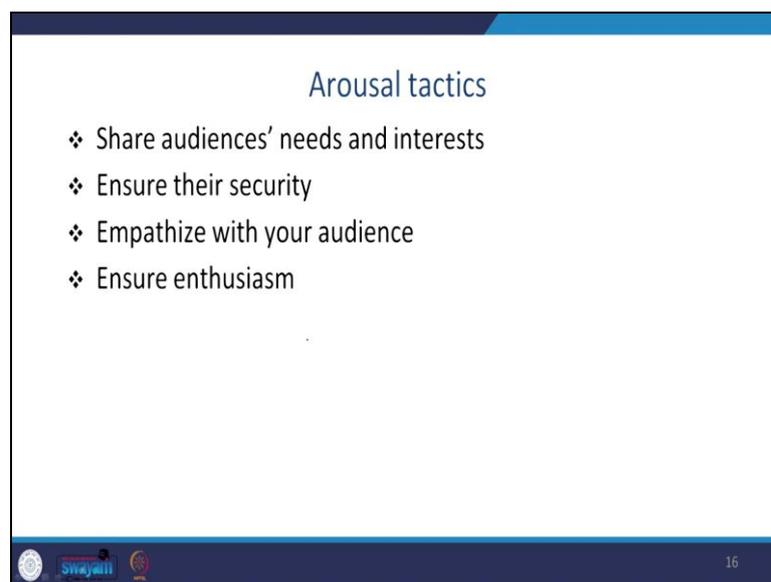
Of course, also the day matters if a talk is on Monday, naturally you will find that audience members are more enthusiastic, more encouraging but if it is on Friday because Friday they start going in a different mode and they start relaxing themselves. Now as a speaker, one has

to utilize the speed and also the volume of the voice, sometimes or the other provide breaks and alterations breaks and alterations.

So, this alteration can be created by the way you speak, I mean the quality of your voice and by the way you suddenly move from one thread of thought to the other and we shall also discuss how linkers are very important. And careful speakers often make use of linkers or transfer stations in their talk. As a speaker also we need to understand that we have to be very sensitive towards the audience's mood.

Sometimes, you will find the audience members are not in a mood to listen to and at that time you have to employ the arousal technique so that your audience members can be brought back.

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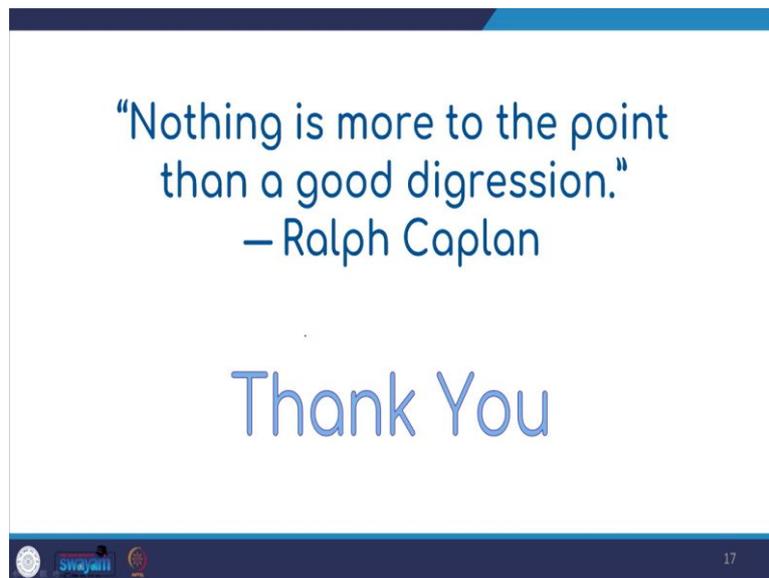
What are these tactics? One needs to understand the needs and interests but all these, of course, can be done beforehand fine. So, you need to anticipate all these things much before you come to deliver the talk and when you come to know about the background of the audience members perhaps you will be very well able to derive some amount of digression that can fit well. You also need to think of their security. Ensure their security.

I mean this lecture that I am going to deliver is going to benefit you more than going to harm you. I mean, if a person makes use of language in such a subtle and beautiful way perhaps the audience members will always be intact. At times empathize with your audience and ensure enthusiasm as a speaker right from the beginning towards the end of your talk. These are

some of the tactics which actually can help arouse questing interest in what the speaker is saying.

My dear friends, speaking is easier but at the same time listening continuously is very difficult. And as a speaker you need to realize this. Because if we continue to speak, fine spontaneously on a particular topic without digressing, there will come a time where you can simply find envy, weariness frustration and dejection on the faces of your audience members. So, digressions are not dangerous, digressions are dependable and digressions are helpful.

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So, before we end this talk let me make a mention of the quote by Ralph Caplan who says ---- "Nothing is more to the point than a good digression." A good digression works a good digression helps, a good digression complements and a good digression supplements the topic of the speaker. So, every speaker should digress from time to time but I hope this digression is simply to bring the audience members to the track.

Now the time has come that I digress but I digress to join you again to bring you back to the next lecture. Thank you very much, I wish you all a good day.