

Tips on Public Speaking

By Derek Davis, American Tongue



Research consistently shows that one of the greatest fears people have is the fear of public speaking - called "stage fright" or "glossophobia." Fear of public speaking is ranked even above that of death by most surveys. As the comedian Jerry Seinfeld once said, *"The average person at a funeral would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy."* The fact is most careers require some ability in public speaking, for example presenting information to clients, colleagues, or to the public. Public speaking is considered one of the most important business skills that an individual can possess. This skill can be used for almost anything. Having experience in public speaking is essential and can help you achieve your career goals as well as your personal goals. Becoming an effective speaker takes practice, and with a few tips and tricks, anyone can become an effective speaker. Here are a few:

- 1) Before giving a speech or presentation (or writing a paper) you should always identify your audience. Approach the topic from your audience's perspective. If your audience is familiar with the topic, you can use much of the jargon commonly used on the subject matter. Otherwise, approach it from a layman's perspective - explaining terminology or difficult concepts. The audience should learn something by the end of the presentation. If you use terms or theories they are not familiar with, they will lose interest and not learn anything.
- 2) Practice the speech or presentation aloud many times prior to presenting it. It is not uncommon to practice it 20, 30 or even 50 times depending on the complexity of the topic.
- 3) Remember, YOU are in control when you are speaking. You are the expert on the topic. Be authoritative. Be confident.
- 4) Always begin with a quotation, statistics, anecdote, or humor in good taste. These are "ice-breakers". Do not try to be a comedian, unless you are. Be yourself and keep it brief.
- 5) Confidence is shown through a) knowledge b) ability to persuade c) oral skills (clear, concise, organized thoughts and speaking) and, d) simple body language or hand gestures.
 - a) If you know the topic well, then you have the knowledge. If not, you should learn all you can about the topic, so you will be perceived as knowledgeable.
 - b) The ability to persuade comes from how you make the audience believe what you want them to - connect with the audience by being a real person, relevant, and using real life situations or examples.
 - c) Orals skills take PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. Practice ALOUD MANY TIMES and try using voice inflection to emphasize important information.

- d) The use of simple body language and hand gestures will help with emphasis. You certainly do not want to look like a talking mannequin - a mannequin is not human and therefore is not believable. Conversely, being over animated can be perceived as being fake.
- 6) Always speak in 1st person (i.e. I), unless it is a very formal speech - use 3rd person.
 - 7) When speaking to the audience, pretend to be speaking to one person (i.e. You, 2nd person).
 - 8) Organize your notes, thoughts, PowerPoint or other props and ensure that it all makes sense; it is concise and flows smoothly. Then, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE ALOUD MANY TIMES!
 - 9) Stay on topic. Do not get off topic with extraneous information.
 - 10) Make eye contact with audience - practice in front of a mirror.
 - 11) DO NOT READ TO THE AUDIENCE - unless it is a direct quote, statistics, etc. - always adlib, especially personal stories or discussions. Remember, you are trying to paint a picture in the audience's mind. This is the art of public speaking. If you can paint a picture in someone's mind instead of reading verbatim, you have accomplished a great task! Reintroduce yourself to adjectives - they will be your best "paintbrush."
 - 12) Be cognizant of your bad habits (i.e. no holding a pen, scratching your face, swaying back and forth while standing, etc.). This can be distracting to the audience and can be perceived as nervousness. Also, avoid wearing gaudy jewelry and clothing that may be distracting to the audience. Conversely, what would you do if you were distracted by someone in the audience or loud noises? Be prepared! Learn the art of "distraction management."
 - 13) Do not be afraid to give examples (i.e. "I once experienced...") but keep it brief.
 - 14) Posing questions to the audience is a means to get them involved. It allows them to participate and feel included (i.e. "If you have ever experienced ____, raise your hand" See #6 & 7 above).
 - 15) If you have no podium to rest your notes on, hold your notes in one hand, while using the other hand for mild hand gestures.
 - 16) Segues - Make a smooth transition from one topic or idea to the next.
 - 17) The "professional pause" - If you feel like the audience is distracted or is losing interest, or you just want to get their attention, you can stop speaking, look at the audience, and silently count to 5. This usually makes the audience look at you to see what you are doing or why you became silent. It gets the attention back to you. IT WORKS!
 - 18) Briefly summarize the speech and conclude by looking towards the future. (i.e. "To end, the cost of oil continues to rise, but based on my recommendations we can reduce the dependence on oil and in the future there will be no concern about oil prices.")

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Tips for overcoming your fear of public speaking / stage fright / glossophobia.

- 1) Take a deep breath and clear your throat before getting in front of the audience. Even professional singers and actors do voice warm-up routines. It gets the blood flowing to where it needs to go!
- 2) If you have the opportunity to present your speech / presentation first, volunteer to do so. This will avoid the anxiety of waiting - the longer you wait, the more stress that is put on you while you sit and ponder your fear of speaking to an audience.
- 3) Practice the speech or presentation many times prior to presenting it. If you have practiced, it will show. This will also make you more comfortable in front of the audience.
- 4) Props or visual aids are the best remedy for overcoming stage fright or shyness. These take the audience's eyes off of you so you can get your message across. PowerPoint presentations are preferred, but even a simple handout such as an outline or a photograph is helpful.
- 5) **BE ORGANIZED IN EVERY ASPECT.** If you are organized, you have less chance to make errors that can be embarrassing. Most errors are caused by **NOT BEING PREPARED and ORGANIZED!** Organize your notes, thoughts, PowerPoint or other props and ensure that it all makes sense; it is concise and flows smoothly. **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE ALOUD MANY TIMES!**

NOTE: a speech or presentation follows the same rules as writing an essay.

- 1) **OPENING:** begin with a quotation, statistics, anecdote, background information on the topic, etc. The thesis statement (what the paper / speech is about) should be in the **OPENING**, typically, but not always in the last sentence.
- 2) **BODY:** facts, analysis, discussion, compare/contrast, evidence, argument for/against, ideas, statements, opinions, descriptions, details, words from people interviewed, quotations used to argue your points, etc. This is the bulk of the topic where the information is clearly explained to the audience. Each subtopic should be a separate paragraph and should flow smoothly into the next.
- 3) **CONCLUSION:** summarize the entire paper/speech (briefly review major points) and end with a final thought, idea or look towards the future.