



A Guide to Public Speaking



Would you rather die than stand up in front of a group to give a speech? If so, you're not alone. Most people feel nervous about speaking in public. In fact, studies show that for most people speaking before a group is one of their greatest fears. Nervousness is normal. Even experienced public speakers report feelings of anxiety before giving a speech. Despite nervousness, you can make it through your talk. Contrary to what you might think, it's unlikely that you will "die" from giving a speech.

Reducing Anxiety

Unless you give a dramatic sigh at the end, or tell them, the audience probably won't notice your nervousness. Believe it or not, speaking gets easier as you gain confidence. The more experienced you become, the easier it is to cope with pre-speech anxiety. A little nervousness actually can be a good thing, and can give you an extra edge. To reduce anxiety to a level you can live with, consider the following tips.

- If possible, look at the setting before you speak. Becoming comfortable with the environment in which you will give your speech helps reduce anxiety.
- Use positive visualization. Many people become anxious about speaking because they imagine

themselves doing a bad job and embarrassing themselves in front of everyone. Some people even imagine being in front of the audience and making such fools of themselves that everyone throws tomatoes! Instead of increasing anxiety with this negative thinking, repeatedly visualize yourself giving a strong, confident speech. If you see yourself being confident and performing well, you probably will.

- Don't think about your speech right before you give it. Contrary to popular belief, this doesn't help prepare you—it just makes you more nervous. Concentrate on something else, something pleasant. Or concentrate on listening to the speaker who talks before you.
- Be well prepared. If you thoroughly understand the topic, the audience will appreciate you more, and this will boost your self-confidence.
- Concentrate on taking deep, regular breaths. Stand tall, but stay loose and relaxed.
- Project your voice. When you sound confident, it will help you be more confident. Don't be afraid of sounding too loud. Remember, you hear yourself as being loud because your mouth is close to your ears. Talk to those in the back of the room. Ask a friend to sit near the back and signal if you are not speaking loudly enough.

- Concentrate on communicating your message. This sometimes is the best advice of all. If you are working hard to help your audience understand your message, you won't have time to feel nervous. You'll be thinking of them and of your message, not yourself.

Tailoring Your Speech to Your Audience

The first step in preparing a speech is to think about the occasion and to whom you will be speaking. You wouldn't tell jokes at a funeral, but you might at a party. In what context will you give the speech? Is it a formal dinner, an awards banquet, an informal meeting? Even more important than where you are giving your speech is to whom you will speak. Tailor the speech to your audience. Such factors as age, religion, or racial, ethnic, or cultural background affect the audience's response to your remarks. You wouldn't give the same speech on nuclear power to children as you would to adults. For children, you would use simpler terms and more definitions; otherwise they wouldn't understand or listen. On the same note, an audience who doesn't eat meat is unlikely to listen to a speech on how to grill steaks.

In addition to their general attitude, also try to determine how much your audience knows about your topic. You wouldn't want to give a speech about the basics of fingerprinting to an audience of accomplished artists. Knowing your audience should affect every aspect of speech preparation and delivery. Try to imagine at each step how your audience will respond and what they will be able to understand. Keep them in mind when selecting the type of language you will use. Target your introduction, examples, support, statistics, and conclusion.

Outlining and Organizing Your Speech

Once you establish the audience, location, occasion, and purpose for your speech, outline what you plan to say. First, write the purpose of your speech on a piece of paper. Use an infinitive phrase, such as “to inform,” “to explain,” or “to persuade,” to state what you plan to do. Next, state whom you are going to be speaking to, such as “the Valley High P.T.A.” or “the board of directors.” If yours is an informative speech, narrow the purpose to the number of items you will discuss, like “the five steps in decision making” or “the five steps in writing a newspaper article.” Your completed purpose statement might be “to inform the Stanford Extension Homemakers Club of the five steps in making decisions.” Limit the purpose statement to the primary goal you plan to accomplish in your speech. After you write your purpose statement, ask yourself:

- Is my purpose statement too vague?
- Can I accomplish my goal in the time allotted?
- Is my purpose relevant to the audience?
- Is my purpose too technical or too simple for the audience?

Next, write down the thesis statement. A thesis explains the details of your specific purpose. If your purpose is “to inform the Stanford Extension Homemakers Club of the five steps in making decisions,” then your thesis should be: *The five steps in making a decision are: 1) Identify the problem. 2) Seek alternatives or solutions. 3) Analyze each alternative. 4) Choose an alternative. 5) Accept and evaluate the choice made.*

These five steps are your main points. Using Roman numerals, write down these five steps allowing space in between for supporting statements. Develop the support or subpoints for each main point. You

may place your main points in different orders. The topic will indicate which order to use.

Chronological Order. When the main points follow a time order, indicating a sequence of events or a step-by-step process, use a chronological order.

Example

Purpose: To explain the four simple steps involved in antiquing a table.

- I. Clean the table thoroughly; sand as needed.
- II. Paint the base coat over the old surface.
- III. Apply the antique finish with a stiff brush, sponge, or piece of textured material.
- IV. Apply two coats of varnish to harden the finish.

Problem/Solution Order. Use this order in a persuasive speech. First, convince the audience there is a problem. Then suggest solutions.

Example

Purpose: To persuade the audience that our state should enact tougher laws against drunk driving.

- I. Drunk driving is a major problem in our state.
- II. Tougher laws penalizing drunk drivers will do much to solve this problem.

Spatial Order. If you present a topic which logically proceeds from top to bottom, left to right, or inside to outside, organize your main points in the same manner.

Example

Purpose: To explain to Central High School students the three levels of a sea laboratory.

- I. Level one contains the decompression chamber.

- II. Level two contains the laboratory facilities.
- III. Level three contains the researchers’ living quarters.

Topical Order. When your main points are subtopics of your main topic, and they don’t fit into any particular order, use a topical order.

Example

Purpose: To inform the audience of the three types of extrasensory perception.

- I. Telepathy refers to the communication of an idea from one person to another without benefit of the named senses.
- II. Clairvoyance refers to seeing events and objects that take place elsewhere.
- III. Precognition refers to the ability of knowing what is going to happen before it happens.

Speaking from Your Outline

Once you gather the information you need for your speech and organize your main points and subpoints, it’s time to prepare for the actual presentation. Because the introduction is so important, it usually is a good idea to memorize it. However, don’t memorize the remainder of your speech word for word. Use your outline. Outlines, on either regular paper or note cards, help you keep track of where you are in the speech and help ensure that you leave nothing out. Keep your notes as brief as possible by using key words and phrases rather than formal sentences. The idea is to be able to recall your ideas with a glance at your notes. No matter how interesting the subject, it is difficult to listen to someone reading a speech. It’s not easy to read from a script while maintaining good eye contact and rapport with your audience.

The Introduction

Prepare your introduction after you complete the research for your speech. Sometimes, it's not readily apparent when you start writing which direction you'll end up taking. If you write your introduction first, it may not relate well to your topic. An introduction should capture the audience's attention, reveal your topic, establish your credibility and good will, and preview the body of the speech. Keep the introduction fairly short, no more than 10 to 20 percent of your speech.

Look for introduction material as you do your research. Often, you'll stumble across an amusing anecdote, glaring statistic, or startling example to start your speech off with a bang. Be creative with your introduction. If you don't capture the audience's attention immediately, it's unlikely they'll listen carefully to the rest of your speech. Try out several introductions. Pick one which is most likely to arouse interest about your topic. As mentioned earlier, it's quite acceptable to write out a word-for-word introduction and memorize it.

The Conclusion

The conclusion usually begins with a signal that you're ending your speech. Like your introduction, make your conclusion something your audience will remember. Don't just trail off. End with a bang, not a whimper! Many people don't wrap up what they have said. They leave the audience hanging. Often, you can summarize the main points to conclude your speech. Restating the main points in your conclusion reinforces the material you presented and helps the audience remember it. Whatever you do, avoid a long-winded, unrelated conclusion.

Tips for a Persuasive Speech

In a persuasive speech you must be concrete. Use words, phrases, and statistics that help the audience "see" exactly what you mean. When presenting the problem, vividly illustrate all of the consequences including the number, range, and duration of the effects. Show how the problem threatens things taken for granted or held dear. Relate your topic to something you know the audience already understands. Build on this understanding to show how the problem affects the audience. Don't just stop with the audience; show how this problem affects loved ones, both living and future generations. Use examples, not broad, sweeping generalities, to explain how the situation developed.

Encourage audience participation by using rhetorical questions and suspense to make sure that the audience is thinking about the problem. It may be appropriate to refute other commonly held positions. Prepare for an audience who does not believe you. Show that new information is available that indicates circumstances have changed. Give examples of others who have changed their minds about the problem based on this new evidence. Make sure the audience knows it's OK to change its mind, as others have done when confronted with new information.

Illustrate how urgent the problem is and how it affects each member of the audience. Contrast the problem to an ideal situation and point out how, as those most affected, your audience can do something about it.

Tips for an Informative Speech

Emphasize the most important parts of your speech by allotting more time for them. Use repetition, but not necessarily the same words over and over, to reinforce main ideas and concepts. Restate the same

idea in different ways. Be creative! Use novelty and humor to arouse interest. Word your speech so the audience can visualize the information you are presenting. Don't try to impress your audience by demonstrating a big vocabulary; use simple words that everyone easily can understand and visualize.

Remember, people are more likely to listen to information that directly relates to them. They are more likely to remember things they don't already know. Use familiar concepts to help your audience understand new ones. When you can't provide new information, try presenting old news in a new manner. Whatever your topic, bring it home to your audience. If it's not obvious, show the audience how important your topic is for them.

As you gather information for your speech, keep your audience in mind. Balance the time spent on each of your main points. Make sure that the facts, quotes, statistics, examples, and illustrations you use support each point.

Practicing Your Speech

You probably have heard that it's good to practice in front of a mirror. This may not be best for everyone and may be bad for some. If it makes you more self-conscious and increases anxiety about your speech, practice your speech using a different method. Some individuals might prefer practicing in front of family or friends; others might do equally well speaking to an imaginary audience or even while taking a shower. Recording a speech, either audio or video, also can give you a nice opportunity for practice and self-evaluation. The important thing is to realize that no one way to practice is right for everyone. You need to find what works best for you.

Delivering Your Speech

A good message isn't always enough. The way you deliver your message will affect how people listen to you. The following are tips to remember as you deliver your speech.

- Maintain eye contact. Look at individuals, not an anonymous blur. Establish credibility and rapport with your eyes.
- It's OK to hold notes in your hand. However, make sure your notes are well organized and not too bulky.
- Use humor freely. A little humor can go a long way. Anecdotes, humorous exaggerations, and gross understatements about your topic help get and keep your audience's attention.
- Use hand gestures naturally, not jerkily, to accent and to emphasize ideas. Don't just stand stiffly behind the podium with little or no motion. You'll look uncomfortable and less dynamic. Use gestures to accent your speech, but be careful not to use distracting gestures such as nervous foot shifting, hand clasping, or clothes clutching. When speaking to a large audience, make sure your gestures are large enough for everyone to see.
- Consider using visual aids. Visual aids can be a big help. Not only do they help the audience to visualize exactly what you are talking about, they draw attention away from you, which helps to lessen your anxiety. Make sure the visual aids you use are large enough for everyone in the audience to see. If you plan on using audiovisual equipment, be sure to make arrangements to ensure that the equipment you need is available.

- Make your voice work for, not against, your speech. Don't speak so quickly that your audience can't keep up with you or so slowly that they get bored. Articulate each word clearly and distinctly. Remember to be expressive, varying your voice and avoiding a monotone. A boring voice will cause the audience to stop paying attention to your speech. Vary the pitch of your voice for emphasis and variety, and project your voice to all corners of the room.
- Deliver your speech confidently. A timid businessman, after delivering his speech, looked up at the audience as if he expected to find his audience sound asleep. Although his speech was well prepared and interesting, his doubtful expression at the end of the speech, not the content, made the most lasting impression. It showed on his face that he expected the audience to dislike him and his speech. Don't kill your speech in the last 30 seconds like the timid businessman did.

Ethics

As a speaker, you have certain responsibilities. You are responsible to your audience for what you say. When possible, support your main points with solid evidence. If you use a quote or take material directly from an outside source, give appropriate credit to the source you use. Lying and fabrication not only are unethical but also will turn the audience against you. Name-calling and mudslinging will turn an audience against you even faster. Grossly exaggerating or distorting facts, suppressing key information, and condemning people or ideas without revealing the source of your information also are unethical.

For More Information

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