

How to Perfect Public Speaking

Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

Build the skills, confidence, and flexibility to be an effective live speaker. Plan and organize your thinking so you can get to the point, while also being sensitive to your listeners. Here are some physical delivery skills to communicate with impact, as well as visual aids that will support your ideas.

It's not about you.

It's about them, and the "them" is the audience. The more you know about the listener's backgrounds, needs and concerns, the more likely you'll move them to action. What is most important to them? Address the concerns of the audience. Now that you know the concerns of the audience, make sure they know you know. Get that out of the way so that people will trust you as the expert and listen up!

Know your objectives.

What is the main idea that you want your audience to come away with? Make sure to have a short-term and long-term goal in place before you speak.

Create a structure.

Outline your ideas beforehand so you have a cohesive story to tell. This might be numbering your three points or presenting the conventional wisdom and knocking it down. Regardless, make sure your structure is easy to follow and take the time to write it down before-hand.

Practice really does make perfect.

Run through the speech / engagement / meeting with friends, in front of a mirror, or even videotape yourself. The more times you run through, the more comfortable you'll be and other people may be able to pick up things that you do that you aren't even aware of.

Be yourself.

If you're loud and kooky, it's okay to bring some of that to your speech. Being someone you're not never works.

Utilize speaking aids.

Using something awful is way worse than using nothing at all, so if you do decide to use something, it should be almost 100% pictures and visuals (like an easy-to-read graph or chart) with just a few large words. Maybe even audio aids will help if appropriate. Asking your audience to physically do something during the speech is another method.

Own your physical presence.

What you say may not even be as important as how you say it. The three biggest mishaps come with speaking too fast, not making eye contact and not maintaining a firm physical stance.

Don't be afraid of pauses.

If you get lost, there is no shame in taking a moment to regain your composure. A well-placed pause is way better than

“umm”-ing your way through your thought process.

Question time also deserves some practice.

Always pause before you speak and repeat the question in your answer. Be original and sincere. The whole “that’s a great question, I’m glad you asked it” routine gets a little tired.

Tell stories, not jokes.

Too many times speakers looking to get a laugh out of the audience will make a mistake and the audience doesn’t think the joke was funny. The speaker then looks like a fool. Instead, tell stories so that if the audience does not think the joke was funny, they will consider it as a story not a joke.

Use power words.

“Unmatched” or “unparalleled” sound stronger than “great.” “Ummm” or “like” sound weak.

Get personal.

Let the audience know something about you. Perhaps there is a personal experience of yours that relates to the topic. Some of the best humor is self-deprecating.

End with an action step.

There should be a clear idea of what you want each person in the audience to “do” after they leave. It’s always a good idea to reiterate this at the end. At the end of the speech, the audience should not feel like saying, “OK, what do I do now?”

