

Public Speaking Basics

- 1. Know your audience.** Who are you talking to? What do they need and want to know? What do they already know?
- 2. Accept that you're nervous.** It's normal. Use pauses to calm and center yourself. Speak a little slower, and have notes in case you forget.
- 3. Use your voice to keep listeners engaged.** You have a range from soft to strong, quiet to loud(er), serious to lighthearted—use it.
 - ▷ Speak clearly, and loud enough so everyone can hear you.
 - ▷ **Be positive**—talk about what *to* do rather than what *not* to do.
 - ▷ Use **common words** and **short, active sentences**. Speak like you do in conversation.
 - ▷ Use slang, jargon and acronyms only when you're sure *everyone* understands.
 - ▷ Talk **to the audience**, not your slides.
 - ▷ Glance at your notes if necessary, but avoid reading. Make text large enough to read at a glance.
- 4. Relax, slow down, and pause.** Speak slowly and allow time for people to digest what you're saying. When you make an important point, pause to let it sink in. If you forget what to say just pause and gather your thoughts; most people won't even notice.
- 5. Move with purpose.** Use body language and gestures for emphasis. Walk around if appropriate, but don't pace. When standing, balance your weight and bend your knees just a little.
 - ▷ Watch your audience's body language for interest, comprehension and engagement. Adjust your presentation if they look bored or confused.
- 6. Practice, practice, practice.** Practice silently or out loud. Use a mirror or record yourself. If you have time, go through the whole speech 10 times. If you don't have enough time to do that, list the main points, in order.
- 7. Give.** We get nervous when our ego says it's all about us, so focus on giving rather than receiving. What are you giving your audience?
- 8. Understand that your audience wants you to succeed.** Research shows that audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating and entertaining—they're rooting for you! (Except in Australia, where they're cheering for you.)

How to Create Great Speeches & Presentations

1. Define your purpose. Why are you making this presentation? (To educate, inspire, advertise...)

- ▷ What do you want to happen as a result of this presentation—what do you want the audience to know, do or experience?
- ▷ How will you know you've succeeded?

2. Understand the context. Is this a lecture, workshop, speech, or...? Formal or informal?

- ▷ How much time do you have? At what time of day? (Will your audience be alert and motivated or tired and hungry?)
- ▷ Is this part of a larger event? What's happening before and after your session?
- ▷ Why were you asked to present? What are the organizers' expectations?

3. Know your audience. Who are they?

- ▷ What's their age, gender, experience, education, work, motivation?
- ▷ How fluent are they? What technical language or jargon do they understand?
- ▷ Do they like to participate or just listen?
- ▷ Do they prefer lots of visuals and fast-moving content, or reflection and discussion?
- ▷ How important is this to them? Do they want to be here or is this mandatory?

4. Brainstorm. Make a list or mindmap of *what you could* include in your presentation. Decide how far back to start, and identify your major points or ideas. After you have identified all the ideas that *could* work, prune and edit them until you have the vital content, connections and context that meet your audience's needs. This is your framework.

5. Gather your content. Now flesh out the framework. Decide what to say about each point. Add sub-points to each major point. Consider any other content you might need, for example:

- ▷ Resources—audio, video, graphics, props, photos, contact info, etc.
- ▷ Handouts—Digital or print? Who will design and print them? How many copies?
- ▷ Audience evaluations—What format: spoken comments, written evaluations, survey app..?
- ▷ Marketing materials—Do you need to promote this event? If so what's the plan?

6. Put your content in order. Next, organise your content in ways that make sense to your audience. For example:

- ▷ Chronological order
- ▷ Order of importance
- ▷ From general to specific
- ▷ From what they already know to new information

7. Add an introduction and conclusion. Make the introduction engaging and simple to grab the audience's interest. A good conclusion neatly summarizes the content and leads to a clear, memorable ending.

8. Now think about time. How long do you have? How long will the introduction, body and conclusion take? Will you include activities or questions, and if so, how long will that take?

- ▷ If it's a longer session, take a 15-minute break every 60-90 minutes or your audience will drift.
- ▷ Ensure that anecdotes are brief, professional, and focused on the content.
- ▷ Be careful not to overload your audience. Is the amount of information appropriate to the time allowed? Can anything be cut or shortened without sacrificing clarity?

9. Prepare & practice. Your reputation is affected every time you present so make yourself look good. You should be able to speak naturally, with minimal reference to your notes.

- ▷ Practice in a mirror or record yourself. How many times did you say "um," "like," or "you know"? How many times did you touch your face, play with your hair, or stand on one leg?
- ▷ Make a list of what to bring, and bring back-ups or alternates for anything that depends on power or connectivity. Download files to the device you'll be using; if possible bring a second device too, or a USB drive full of files.
- ▷ Do you have/need comfortable, appropriate clothes? What about drinks, snacks, pads, glasses, sweat shields, safety pins, or a sweater?
- ▷ Pre-visualize. See yourself speaking clearly and confidently. Visualize the audience clapping and thanking you. Plan your celebration.

10. Find out about the venue. If you arrive with time to spare and the cables you need, you'll be calmer and able to focus on your presentation.

- ▷ Do you have the exact location & address of the venue, and clear driving or transit directions?
- ▷ How long will it take to get there? How much ahead of time do you plan to arrive?
- ▷ How much will it cost to get there? (Transit fares, tolls, etc)
- ▷ What is the parking situation? (Availability, fees, time restrictions)
- ▷ What door do you go in? Will it be unlocked? Will the presentation room be unlocked? If not, where is the person who will open it? Will they be expecting you?
- ▷ Room size & layout: Will you need a mike? What are the sightlines & acoustics?
- ▷ Physical atmosphere: Will you need to arrange the furniture, whiteboards etc? Do you control the air conditioning or windows? Are there light-blocking curtains to improve the visibility of screens & monitors? Are there sufficient chairs?
- ▷ Are electrical & internet connections available? Who can give you the wifi password? Are there firewalls or other restrictions—will you be able to access all the sites you expect?
- ▷ Do they have the hardware and software you need? Can you bring your own device?
- ▷ Cables: Do you have/need connector and power cables for your device, mouse, projector, etc?
- ▷ Other hardware (projector, screen, mike, etc): Do you know where they are & how to work them? Where are their remote controls? Will you have technical support available?

- ▷ What's your backup plan if technology fails? (Print, speech, interpretive dance...)
- ▷ Analog tools: will you need a blackboard or whiteboard, markers & eraser, flip charts, tape?
- ▷ Are other events happening at the same time & location? (Will there be noise, distractions, interruptions, attendees migrating to/from other events?)
- ▷ Is your audience familiar with the venue? (If not, they might be late, or need to know about parking restrictions and the locations of bathrooms, coffee, etc. If it's a hard-to-find location they may be grumpy or distracted when they arrive.)

11. Survive the Actual Presentation

- ▷ Can everybody hear/see you? You don't have to ask; just observe the audience.
- ▷ Speak a little slower than normal. Enunciate. (Is any of your audience reading lips?) Allow space between words and sentences (But. You don't. Have to speak. Like. Captain Kirk.)
- ▷ It's ok and normal to be nervous, but try to trust yourself and your knowledge. If you're not sure how to start, introduce yourself, thank whoever invited you, and give information about yourself or your company, if appropriate. Keep this part short—tell just enough to justify your expertise, then move on to the presentation.
- ▷ In some situations you will want participants to introduce themselves and mention what they hope to get out of the session. You'll have to manage this diplomatically. Try something like this: "Please tell us your name and, in 2 to 3 sentences, what you hope to get out of this session." After each person speaks, offer a simple "thanks" and move on. If a response is too long, interrupt and say something like, "Unfortunately we have to keep moving, but maybe we can continue this after."
- ▷ Keep an eye on the time and don't go over. Your job is to deliver the content in the allotted time. Holding your audience hostage will cause them to hate you, so if things run long, pause to let people leave if they need to.
- ▷ After the presentation and questions, make any announcements about evaluation forms, handouts or reference materials, then thank your audience for their time and attention. Once you do so, they will begin to leave, so make this the last item.
- ▷ Expect to stick around for a while for those who wish to speak with you.

12. Reflect, learn and iterate. Even if you won't give the same presentation again, you learned something from this experience. Apply it to your next one.

Be yourself, be brief, and be clear.