

PUBLIC SPEAKING

“The most valuable of all talents is never using two words when one will do.”

– Thomas Jefferson

Public speaking: one of the most feared activities by a large portion of the population. We fear it more than heights, snakes, financial stress – even death. We talk to people all the time, yet the thought of talking in front of a group of people can be terrifying.

As frightening as it may be, think about it: if no one wants to speak in front of others, imagine what a marketable skill it must be! Employers may look very highly upon those potential employees who have experience in—and are not afraid of—presenting products or explaining strategies to groups. This skill can be the key to getting your foot in the door of the business world.

If that is not a motivating enough reason, there are others. Chances are, you will not complete your education without making a presentation at some point. Wouldn't it be nice to do this without tossing and turning in bed for weeks, feeling nauseous, getting clammy hands and tripling your heart rate in a matter of seconds? It can be done. . .it just takes a bit of work (and a positive attitude).

- Practice, practice, practice. Just what you wanted to hear, right? But honestly, what better way to get used to it? Practice speaking in front of others any time you can. Even if it is just a matter of voicing an opinion in a meeting or asking a question in class, it is a step in helping you project your voice and get used to that “all eyes are on me” feeling.
- Be prepared. When you are first learning to speak publicly, it is usually best to be prepared rather than “winging it.” Do not write your speech out word for word; this can be terribly boring for the audience and make it easy for you to lose your place. Instead, make an outline with key points and phrases.
- Start low-risk. Your first speech should not be on a controversial topic to a group of 5,000 angry people if at all possible. Instead, practice in your “comfort zone”—with friends, coworkers, housemates – and ease your way into the larger engagements.
- Chill out. Learn different relaxation methods to use before and during your presentation.
- It's not a war zone. Remember that most of the people in your audience are probably scared to death of giving speeches themselves. Most audiences are kind to a speaker who is well-prepared.
- No one can tell. Though you may feel like an absolute mess, your cold hands, dry mouth and racing heart are invisible to your audience. Chances are you look cool and confident to them!
- Know the room. Visit the place in which you will be speaking prior to your presentation to become familiar with the seating, lighting, position of the microphone and so forth.

Now that you have an idea how to get yourself on stage or to the podium, how do you speak?

- Wear your audience's shoes. Use your time effectively. Be as interesting as you can. Use clear, understandable statements. Be brief!
- Skip the ums, ers, and ahs. It's natural to want to fill silent spaces with some type of utterance. Make a conscious effort to avoid this (being well-prepared helps). You want people to note your facts, not keep track of how many times you say "um."
- Be yourself. You will be most believable and comfortable if you act naturally.
- Enthusiasm!!! Speak with as much enthusiasm as you can muster. If you appear bored, there is virtually no way your audience will be excited.
- Narrow your focus. It is difficult to cover the topic of "success" when you are allotted fifteen minutes. Speaking about "seven tips for running a successful organizational meeting" would be more manageable.
- Maintain eye contact. Let them know you are talking to them and not the floor.

What exactly do you say?

- Consider your listeners. Your speech to a group of college graduates would probably be quite different from your speech to first graders. Know your audience and consider what would be appropriate for them.
- Why are you here? When you know why you have been chosen to speak, it is easier to tailor your speech.
- Know your opener. Know the beginning of your speech inside and out.
- Anything can be interesting. Even if you think it is the most boring topic in the world. Use humor, stories, dramatic statistics, quotations and visual aides to keep everyone's attention.

References:

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