

How to Give a Successful Speech

Preparation

- **Be prepared.** The most demanding part of giving a speech should be the time you spend preparing. Your audience is giving you their attention, so rehearse enough to make a confident, polished, worthwhile presentation.
- **Practice and rehearse** a speech frequently prior to delivering it. Ask friends to be your audience, or practice in front of a mirror. Be sure to use a timer to help you pace your speech. Another technique is to write out verbatim what you want to say and read it into a recorder. Then listen to it to help you remember the structure of your points and examples.
- **Become familiar with the setting** where the speech will take place. Get a sense of the size of the stage or room, where any steps or obstacles might be, and where to enter and exit.
- **Choose comfortable clothes to wear**, but always maintain a professional appearance. Now is not the time to try out those six-inch heels or too-tight jacket. Wear something that makes you feel confident and together, and that confidence will make your speech stronger.
- **Get Your Facts Together.** You want people to believe that you know what you're talking about! Make sure your quotations are attributed to correct and viable sources. Do some research on facts and statistics to provide a strong *logos* argument.
- **Iron out bad habits.** If you tend to mumble, practice speaking with a pencil between your teeth to force yourself to enunciate. If you tend to go too fast, challenge yourself to speak more slowly than you think is necessary. If you tend to pace, practice your speech standing in a bucket so that you can't move. If you say "um" or "like" too often, have a friend make a noise each time you do so. You might video yourself giving your speech so you will notice habits you never realized you had.
- **Be concise.** Don't try to pack too much into your speech. Make every word count. After you've written a first draft of your speech, go back and look for words you can cut. Cutting words in the speech can make your points more clear. Use shorter sentences and basic language. *Fewer words make a clearer point.*
- **Organization:** Structure your speech in a logical sequence: opening, main points, summary end with a strong call to action or "so what" detail.
 - In a persuasive speech, you might use the "problem-solution" structure in which the first section of the speech poses a problem and the second proposes a solution.
 - Or, use a Rogerian Appeal: 1) I understand the opposing position. . . 2) I agree with . . . 3) However, my point is. . .
- **Write out notes.** You don't want to read your entire speech, so you will need short notes to help you remember your main points. Have them even if you don't think you'll use them. You might start practicing with longer notes and gradually pare down to key words and quotations as you become more comfortable with your material.

Your Speech

- **Start strong.** Begin your speech with a powerful opening that will grab your audience's attention, such as a startling fact or statistic, a rousing question, an interesting story, or a funny joke.
- **Use Concrete Words and Examples.** Strong details keep people interested. Instead of saying, "*Open play spaces for children's sports are in short supply,*" you would use the more concrete phrasing, "*We need more baseball and soccer fields for our kids.*"
- **Be conversational.** You want to sound as though you are talking, not reading. Keep your speech notes short so that you fill in the details in your own words.
- **Speak with passion.** If you're truly invested in what you're saying, you'll be better able to keep your audience's attention and "sell" your ideas.
- **Focus on the message and its benefit for the audience.** If you believe that what you are saying is helpful to your audience, you will more likely make an emotional connection with them and speak more eloquently. Focus your energy on making your speech effective rather than on your nerves.
- **Be patient.** It's easy to get frustrated if you make a mistake, but remember that public speaking is not easy. It takes time to hone your skills. Keep practicing and you will reach your goals.

Gestures and Body Language

Speakers generate emotion and interest through gestures or body language. A speaker's body can be an effective tool for emphasizing and clarifying the words they use, while reinforcing their sincerity and enthusiasm. Here are a few tips on how to use gestures effectively:

- **Make strong eye contact** to establish an immediate bond with an audience. Focus on individual listeners rather than just gazing over the audience as a whole.
- **Control mannerisms.** Mannerisms are the nervous expressions a speaker might not be aware of such as putting their hands in their pockets, nodding their head excessively, or using filler words like *um* and *ah* too often.
- **Put verbs into action** when speaking to an audience by physically acting them out with the hands, face or entire body.
- **Avoid insincere gestures.** Involve the entire body as much as possible in your movements and match your facial expressions to them. Lift your eyebrows to show interest. Watch that you aren't scowling in concentration. Relax, smile, and pretend you are talking to a friend.
- **Move around the stage** as topics change and move toward the audience when asking questions, making critical connections, or offering a revelation.

ESSAY TO SPEECH SUGGESTIONS

1. **Be prepared to defend your thesis.** Think again through the logic of your paper. Consider and anticipate objections. How will you handle them?
2. **You may use a more informal style** in speaking than you do in writing. You may use, for example, rhetorical questions, second person, and a relaxed (but still academic) tone.
3. **Make sure you know the works well.** We assume that you already do, but be prepared for intelligent questions about them.
4. **Practice.** Time yourself. Shoot for a minute less than the maximum. Work out the nerves and the filler words. For this speech, you may use limited notes, and you may either stand at the lectern or use the open space next to it.
5. **Use your voice and body.** Whereas your written work depends primarily on word choice to transmit your ideas, your speech will benefit from your body language and inflection. Stand up straight. Look your audience in the eyes. Be comfortable.
6. **Make eye contact** with your audience. Don't stare at the floor, the ceiling, your notes, or one person the whole time.
7. **Speak more loudly and more slowly** than you think is necessary. People tend to speed up when they get nervous. Remember to breathe!
8. **Enunciate** more than you think is necessary. No matter how brilliant your speech is, its effect will be lost if the audience cannot understand what you are saying. If you tend to mumble, practice giving your speech with a highlighter between your teeth. This will help you enunciate.
9. **Use arm gestures and movement** as appropriate, but avoid nervous pacing or fidgeting. If you have a hard time standing still, practice your speech while standing in a trash can or bucket.
10. **Make every word count.** *Uh . . . like . . . um . . . I mean . . . you know . . . totally . . . like*, avoid filler words and hesitations, *okay?* If you struggle with these, practice with a friend or family member who will ring a bell or yell "ding!" whenever you use one.
11. **Focus on your message and your audience** more than how they will perceive you. If you truly believe in what you are saying and you want your audience to hear it, your delivery will be stronger.
12. **Remember that your audience is not a firing squad.** We are your peers and your teachers. We want you to succeed, and we will be supporting you every step of the way. Good luck!

10 TIPS FOR **SUCCESSFUL** PUBLIC SPEAKING



*Looking to become a better speaker?
Here are proven tips on how to give
better presentations:*

1. **Know your material.** Pick a topic you are interested in. Know more about it than you include in your speech. Use personal stories and conversational language to help you remember what to say.
2. **Practice, Practice, Practice!** Rehearse out loud with all equipment you plan on using. Revise as necessary.
3. **Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
4. **Know the room.** Arrive early, walk around the speaking area, and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
5. **Relax.** Ease tension by doing exercises. Transform nervous energy into enthusiasm.
6. **Visualize yourself giving your speech.** Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and confident. Visualize the audience clapping – it will boost your confidence.
7. **Realize that people want you to succeed.** Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They don't want you to fail.
8. **Don't apologize** for any nervousness or problem – the audience probably never noticed it.
9. **Concentrate on the message, not the medium.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience.
10. **Gain experience.** Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters group can provide the experience you need in a safe and friendly environment.

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