

Upgrade Your Public Speaking Skills



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Strengthening your public speaking skills can help you advance your career and increase your confidence in social situations. Follow these tips on how to prepare and deliver memorable presentations that will make you a hit with your audience.

Preparing for an Effective Presentation

1. **Know your topic.** Pick a topic that you already know and love. If you need to present a new subject, perform thorough research. Gather facts, statistics, interesting anecdotes and quotes from experts.
2. **Know your audience.** If possible, identify the background and size of the group you'll be addressing. Find out how well informed they are about the material you'll be presenting. You don't want to talk over their heads, but you don't want to talk down to them either. It's also helpful to know their average age and other characteristics.
3. **Keep your purpose in mind. *Most presentations seek to persuade, educate or entertain so focus on what you want to achieve.*** For example, you may want to motivate clients to sign up for a new service your company is offering or you may want to help your employees understand changes to your company health insurance plan.
4. **Organize your presentation.** Construct a powerful opening and closing. Have a checklist for all the main points you want to cover. Tailor your content to your time limit so you can address everything without feeling rushed.
5. **Prepare visual aids.** Liven up your speech with visual aids. Use them to reinforce your main message. Simple designs created in large type with bullet points work well for most audiences.
6. **Practice.** Your public speaking skills will improve with practice. Rehearse your speeches aloud. Take advantage of opportunities at work to get more experience or join an organization like your local chapter of Toastmasters. They're a nonprofit entity specifically designed for members to give each other friendly advice and support on public speaking.

Delivering a Compelling Presentation

1. **Engage your audience.** Make a connection by greeting people you know or introducing yourself to early arrivals. ***Establish eye contact*** and ask for volunteers. If the size of the group and time permits, encourage questions and dialogue.
2. **Vary your tone of voice.** Adjust your tone of voice to the emotional content of your words. Repeat key points or emphasize them by speaking louder or more softly. Vary your pace as you speak and use pauses strategically.
3. **Tell stories.** Interesting stories make any topic more entertaining and memorable. Cite your personal experience or anecdotes about others. ***Vivid examples work wonders in bringing your message to life.***
4. **Move around.** Get from behind the podium. Use a hand-held microphone and a remote control with your PowerPoint slides so you can circle the room freely. Well-timed hand gestures can also help you appear more dynamic.

5. **Use appropriate humor.** Work on your timing to deliver funny lines effectively. Play it safe and avoid anything that could be considered offensive.
6. **Relax.** Impress your audience with your competence and confidence. Conquer any nervousness with relaxation techniques like deep breathing or visualization. ***Focus on serving your audience rather than being distracted by your fears.*** Remind yourself that every presentation is an opportunity to learn and grow.
7. **Solicit feedback and network.** Get the full value out of your speaking engagement by asking for feedback. Have evaluation forms ready for audience members and review them for constructive criticism that you can use to sharpen your performance. Use a visual aid to display your contact information and website, and include that information on any handouts.

Public speaking is a valuable tool for many business and social gatherings. Improve your presentation skills so you can effectively share the benefits of your experience and knowledge with your audience.