

10 Tips For Successful Public Speaking

Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows you care about doing well. But, too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here's how you can control your nervousness and make effective, memorable presentations:

1. **Know the room.** Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
2. **Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
3. **Know your material.** If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech and revise it if necessary.
4. **Relax.** Ease tension by doing exercises.
5. **Visualize yourself giving your speech.** Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear, and assured. When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.
6. **Realize that people want you to succeed.** Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They don't want you to fail.
7. **Don't apologize.** If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any problems you think you have with your speech, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Keep silent.
8. **Concentrate on the message -- not the medium.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and outwardly toward your message and your audience. Your nervousness will dissipate.
9. **Turn nervousness into positive energy.** Harness your nervous energy and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm.
10. **Gain experience.** Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need.

Giving Impromptu Speeches

Have you ever had work commitments keep you from practicing a speech? Have you ever been asked to speak for someone at the last minute? When I started my consulting practice and became a father of twins in the same year, I often found myself lacking time to prepare and practice my speeches.

One of my evaluators wisely pointed out that it is not how *long* you prepare for a speech, but how *efficiently* you prepare. If you learn how to refine your preparation and delivery skills, you *can* deliver a great impromptu speech from your own foundation of knowledge and personal style.

I would like to share with you some of the tricks I have learned about this important skill from my own recent "trials by fire":

1. **Don't quit your day job.** Your main task is to deliver *manual* speeches. You should attempt impromptu speaking only after you have completed a number of manual speeches and are already comfortable as a speaker. By this time, you should know your natural style and the skills needed for successful impromptu speaking.
2. **Know your natural style.** Impromptu speaking is much easier if you know your own natural speaking style. I discovered my natural style on my fourth or fifth manual speech. What is your natural style?
3. **Use positive self-talk.** My early impromptu speeches were hobbled by negative self-talk. My inner voice kept telling me that I was inadequately prepared and was destined to falter. I turned around this self-talk by realizing through evaluations that I was speaking to *friends* who enjoyed my personal stories. I found myself connecting with my audience, as if I was talking with each one of them personally.
4. **Make a point.** Even when you give an impromptu speech, you need structure. The classic "opening, body, and conclusion" falls in place if everything you say relates to a point that you reveal at the end.
5. **Avoid using notes.** An impromptu speech is like a flash flood - it goes where it wants to. Trying to force your speech back to your notes is at best awkward and at worst will throw you completely off track. Abandon your notes, and let the rest of your speech flow from your heart. If you must use notes, they should contain only the point you wish to make, plus a couple of words to trigger any stories you wish to tell.
6. **Deliver it as if you've practiced it many times.** Don't reveal beforehand that your speech is impromptu. This will undermine your audience's reception of your speech before you even begin. Approach the audience with confidence, as if you've practiced many times before. Deliver it with vigor and confidence, allowing your ideas to flow as if you are talking to friends. Present your conclusion as if you're revealing something very important. Prepare yourself for the praise you receive when your evaluator reveals that this speech was impromptu!
7. **Be willing to cut it short.** Sometimes you'll have covered only half your thoughts, and you'll find a great way to end your story, right there. If you think you're close to the green light, cut to the conclusion!
8. **Tell your evaluator that your speech is impromptu.** Ask him to focus their evaluation on what you did to make your impromptu speech successful, and on suggestions that you can use to improve your impromptu speaking technique.
9. **Practice at table topics.** Be bold, and ask the Table Topics Master to choose you during table topics. If you can master table topics, then you will be able to string together an impromptu speech from a series of anecdotes.
10. **Volunteer to be an evaluator.** This is a great opportunity to learn how to organize thoughts quickly and effectively, and deliver them seamlessly. Force yourself to leave your notes behind when you give your evaluation, so that you learn to think on your feet.

BENEFITS OF PROFESSIONAL SPEAKING

- As your improved communication skills become obvious within the workplace, increased visibility, recognition and promotion will follow.
- Your improved presentation skills will win you the respect and admiration of your colleagues and employees - and make them wonder what you did to change!
- Leadership skills acquired through professional communication will increase your management potential.
- You will acquire an increased ability to motivate and persuade, making you more effective as a supervisor or manager.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Leadership can not be learned in a day! It takes practice.

Company success also depends on communication. Employees face an endless exchange of ideas, messages, and information as they deal with one another and with customers day after day. How well they communicate can determine whether a company quickly grows into an industry leader or joins thousands of other businesses mired in mediocrity.

If you have the opportunity, join Toastmasters. Clubs meet in the morning, at noon, and in the evening in approximately 70 countries worldwide.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Content justifies the act of speaking. The speaker has a responsibility to say something meaningful and original to the audience. The listeners should feel the speaker has made a contribution to their thinking. The ideas should be important ones, although this does not preclude a humorous presentation of them.

Delivery presentation of a speech carries part of the responsibility for effective communication. The speaker's appearance should reinforce the speech, whether profound, sad, humorous, or instructional. Body language should support points through gestures, expressions, and body language.

Overall Effectiveness is measured in part by the audience's reception of the speech, but a large part is your subjective judgment of how the speech came across. You should ask yourself such questions as "Was I able to determine the speaker's purpose?" "Did the speech relate directly to that purpose?" "Was the audience's interest held by the speaker?" "Was this subject appropriate for this particular audience?"