

## 10 Tips for Public Speaking

### How to find your confidence.

Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and even beneficial, but too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here are some proven tips on how to control your butterflies and 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 humor, personal stories and conversational language – that way you won't easily forget what to say.
2. **Practice. Practice. Practice!** Rehearse out loud with all equipment you plan on using. Revise as necessary. Work to control filler words; Practice, pause and breathe. Practice with a timer and allow time for the unexpected.
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.** Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything. ("One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand. Pause. Begin.) 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're rooting for you.
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.** Mainly, your speech should represent *you* — as an authority and as a person. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need in a safe and friendly environment.

### Gestures: Get Moving!

#### Let go of your stiff death grip on the lectern and learn how to make your speeches interesting through body language.

The human body contains more than 700 muscles, but few of those are used by speakers – except when using their arms and fingers in a life-preserving clutch of lecterns and laser pointers or frenetically clicking on PowerPoint slides. Speakers tend to focus most of their efforts in search of the perfect word to illustrate their precious points, despite overwhelming evidence proving that, in fact, our bodies speak louder than words.

Your effectiveness as a speaker is directly related to your ability to invoke emotion and interest through the use of non-verbal communication. Your listeners judge you and your message based on what they see as well as what they hear. In public speaking, your body can be an effective tool for adding emphasis and clarity to your words. It's also your most powerful instrument for convincing an audience of your sincerity, earnestness and enthusiasm. Whether your purpose is to inform, persuade, entertain, motivate or inspire, your body language and the personality you project must be appropriate to what you say. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, *"What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."* So be sure your appearance, posture and attire is appropriate as well.

Here's how you can incorporate appropriate body language into your speeches:

- **Start with eye contact.** Being prepared – having control of your message – is a prerequisite for being able to project and establish a bond with the audience. Don't just pass your gaze throughout the room; try to focus on individual listeners and create a bond with them by looking them directly in the eyes for five to 10 seconds.
- **Smile!**
- **Express emotion with your facial muscles.** For inspiration, take a look at the *The Human Face*, a BBC documentary narrated by John Cleese of Monty Python fame, now available on DVD.
- **Avoid distracting mannerisms** – have a friend watch as you practice and look for nervous expressions such as fidgeting, twitching, lip biting, key jingling, hands in pockets or behind the back.
- **Telling a story?** Highlight the action verbs and look for ways to act out one or more parts. Speaking about marathon running? Run a few steps.
- **Stay true to your personality.** Don't copy gestures from a book or other speaker, but respond naturally to what you feel and say.
- **Make gestures convincing.** Every hand gesture should be total body movement that starts from the shoulder – never from the elbow. Half-hearted gestures look artificial.
- **Vary your speaking position by moving from one spot on the stage to another.** For example, walk to the other side of the stage as you move to a new topic or move toward the audience as you ask a question.

## 10 Biggest Public Speaking Mistakes

### Top executives often fall flat on their faces as speakers.

How come intelligent, business-savvy people end up boring their audiences? They fail to recognize that public speaking is an acquired skill that improves with practice and honest feedback. Speaking for 20 minutes before the right group of people can do more for your career than spending a year behind a desk!

Rob Sherman, an attorney and public speaker in Columbus, Ohio, says in an article in the *Toastmaster* magazine to avoid these mistakes:

- **Starting with a whimper.** Don't start with "Thank you for that kind introduction." Start with a bang! Give the audience a startling statistic, an interesting quote, a news headline – something powerful that will get their attention immediately.
- **Attempting to imitate other speakers.** Authenticity is lost when you aren't yourself.
- **Failing to "work" the room.** Your audience wants to meet you. If you don't take time to mingle before the presentation, you lose an opportunity to enhance your credibility with your listeners.
- **Failing to use relaxation techniques.** Do whatever it takes – listening to music, breathing deeply, shrugging your shoulders – to relieve nervous tension.
- **Reading a speech word for word.** This will put the audience to sleep. Instead use a "keyword" outline: Look at the keyword to prompt your thoughts. Look into the eyes of the audience, then speak.
- **Using someone else's stories.** It's okay to use brief quotes from other sources, but to connect with the audience, you must illustrate your most profound thoughts from your own life experiences. If you think you don't have any interesting stories to tell, you are not looking hard enough.
- **Speaking without passion.** The more passionate you are about your topic, the more likely your audience will act on your suggestions.

- **Ending a speech with questions and answers.** Instead, tell the audience that you will take questions and then say, “We will move to our closing point.” After the Q and A, tell a story that ties in with your main theme, or summarize your key points. Conclude with a quote or call to action.
- **Failing to prepare.** Your reputation is at stake every time you face an audience – so rehearse well enough to ensure you’ll leave a good impression!
- **Failing to recognize that speaking is an acquired skill.** Effective executives learn how to present in the same way they learn to use other tools to operate their businesses.