

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Many people are worried whenever they are asked to make a public speech. A lot of nervousness overwhelms us. This topic on public speaking is aimed at helping you to be an enthusiastic public speaker and the abilities you develop from this topic can also help you in life outside the workplace. Seeing yourself as a public speaker may be difficult just as it is for many people. Therefore, this topic aims at removing the mystery and makes public speaking a natural and enjoyable activity in your life.

Preparation of the speech

1. Audience Analysis

The first thing you need to do in preparation of your speech is to understand the audience dynamics and audience demographics

1.1 Audience dynamics are comprised of:

- Motivation
- Attitudes
- Beliefs
- Values

All these factors influence the listeners from within. The more you understand these dynamics the better you can adapt your message so that it serves their interests and needs. Being aware of audience attitudes can suggest strategies that you can use to get a fair hearing.

You might question the person who invited you to speak about those aspects that are related to your topic, if you are not familiar with the group.

1.2 Adjusting to audience demographic

Audience demographics include:

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Group affiliations
- Social-cultural background

If you are not familiar with the group ask the person who invited you to speak about these factors. Demographic analysis can help you estimate interest in your topic and how much your listeners may already know about it.

2.0 Adjusting to the communication situation

You must consider the following:

- Time
- Place
- Occasion
- Size of audience
- Overall context of your speech

2.1 Time

The time of the day, day of the week and time of the year and amount of time allotment for speaking must be taken into account. For example, if you are speaking in the evening people will have completed a day's work and will have left the comforts of home to hear you. You must justify their attendance with good ideas that are well presented. Remember also that the amount of time allocated for presentation is also critical. A short speech does not necessarily mean shorter preparation. You must prepare to handle the topic in the time allocated.

2.2 Place

The place where you will be speaking should also be considered in your planning. When speaking outside you have to cope with unpredictable distractions. A forceful presentation can help speakers cope with problems of traffic noise and bad weather.

2.3 Occasion

You need to take into account why people have gathered to listen. You may have to work hard to arouse interest and sustain attention if the presentation is at a mandatory employee meeting.

2.4 Size of Audience

The size of the audience can affect how you speak. A small audience provides feedback and an opportunity for interaction. On the other hand, large audiences offer less feedback. With a large audience you need to speak more loudly and gestures should be more emphatic so that everyone can see them.

2.5 Context

Anything that happens near the time of your presentation becomes part of the context of your speech. When listeners enter the room the day of your speech, they bring with them information about recent events. They will use this information to evaluate what you say. You must be up to date on the latest news on your topic otherwise you can easily embarrass yourself because of ignorance.

Focus your topic by asking yourself:

- ✓ Have I selected a topic that has value for my listeners?
- ✓ Do I really care about this topic?
- ✓ Does the topic satisfy the purpose?
- ✓ Have I narrowed the topic sufficiently?
- ✓ Can I develop enough information on this topic?
- ✓ Could I give a speech on this topic in the time available?

4.0 Determining your purpose

The aim is to answer the question "Why would I want to speak on this topic?"

To answer this question you must know the general function of your speech. Having a specific purpose clearly defined in your mind:

- helps you to focus your topic
- spells out what you want your listeners to understand, believe, feel or do
- Helps you direct your research towards relevant information.

Example:

Consider the following specific purpose statements:

Topic: Global warming

General function: To persuade

Specific purpose: To persuade the audience that global warming poses a serious threat to our environment

5.0 Gathering information

Once you have established a specific purpose for your speech, you can begin acquiring the relevant information.

This information should include:

- The main issues concerning your topic
- What respected authorities say about it
- The latest developments relevant to it
- Related local applications of interest to your audience.

Each of these sources can offer facts, testimony and examples to use as supporting materials for your speech.

The articles you find provide you with ideas, information, opinions and examples for use in your speech. If you simply summarize an article and present it as though it were your own you are committing *plagiarism*.

To avoid this you;

- ✓ Identify your sources of information like this: "According to Martin Luther King, Junior" This gives credit to the originator of the idea.
- ✓ Test information by asking yourself whether the sources are reliable and trustworthy.

6.0 Structuring your speech

Your speech must be well structured and well organized. A well organized presentation makes it easier for listeners to understand and remember your message. A well-organized presentation affects your credibility. It is hard for the listeners to think of you as competent when your speech is poorly organized.

Principles of a good form

Keep your presentation:

- Simple
- Balanced
- Logical

Simplicity

A simple design helps the listeners to follow, understand and remember your message. To achieve simplicity you should limit the number of your main ideas and keep your design direct and to the point.

Balance

This means that each of the major parts of your speech i.e. the introduction of your speech and conclusion receives appropriate development.

The body should take the longest time. The introduction and conclusion should be about equal in length. The amount of time spent on the introduction and the conclusion should be less than the time spent on the body of your speech.

Order or Logic

A speech that meets the requirement of order follows a consistent pattern of development from beginning to end. It should start with an introduction, present the main ideas in the body, and finally end with a conclusion.

Order also applies to the way you arrange your main points. If you propose a solution you must first pose a problem. Because this is how our minds work.

Introducing your speech

When you first start to speak, the audience will have two basic concerns in mind.

- (i) Why should I listen to this speech?
- (ii) Why should I listen to this speaker?

This is why your introduction must serve three basic functions:

- a) Capture attention and arouse interest
- b) Help establish your credibility
- c) Preview your message

Capturing attention

The introduction of your speech must immediately engage your audience. There are several ways to attract, build and hold the audience.

Involve the audience

Offer well deserved compliments; people like to hear good things about themselves.

- ***Ask questions:*** You could ask questions or short series of questions- Not all the questions will require an answer. Some may be rhetorical questions where the audience's curiosity is aroused as they start to think about your topic.
- ***Relate a personal experience:*** Relating your subject to personal experience can be very important. We are more willing to listen to others and take their advice if we know that they have travelled the road themselves.
- ***Tell a story:*** A story helps capture audience attention and involves listeners in creating the meaning of the message. Narratives are also good at establishing a mood for your message.

- **Use of Humour:** Humour can enliven an introduction and when used appropriately, it can put your audience in a receptive mood for your message. Humour however may also be the most misused technique for introducing speeches. Unless it is carefully adapted and relevant to the message or topic it can backfire. It might be the only thing remembered at the end of the speech.
- **Begin with a quotation:** A quotation from a well-known person or respected authority can arouse interest. The person quoted should be a person known by your audience, respected and one that the audience identifies with a historical figure for example know a person, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela etc. The quotation should be short and to the point. They should be used to lead into the topic.
- **Establish credibility:** The second major function of the introduction is to establish yourself as a competent, trustworthy and a likeable person. Perceived competence will be strengthened if you seem organized, pleasant and tactful. Your introduction must show enthusiasm for your topic; a smile and direct eye contact signals to listeners that you want to communicate.
When you seem likeable, sincere, competent and forceful your listeners want to identify with you and your effectiveness as a communicator is magnified.
- **Preview the topic**
The final function of an introduction is to preview the body of your speech. The preview indicates the main points you will cover and offers your listeners an overview of the speech;

Example:

"This college will be a much safer place if we adopt my plan to improve college security. First, I want to show you how dangerous our situation has become. Second, I'll explore the reasons why current security measures in our college are ineffective. Thirdly, I'll present my plan for a safer college environment."

By informing the listeners of your intentions and speech design you help them listen intelligently.

9.0 Developing an outline for your speech

Developing an outline gives you a picture of what you want to say. An effective outline helps you to:

- Identify your most important points.
- Determine the most effective order.
- Select your supporting materials.
- Takes ideas out of your head where they can get tangled up and allows you put them on paper.

A good starting point in developing the outline is to:

- (i) Write out your specific purpose.
- (ii) Sketch the body of your speech and write out your speech.
- (iii) develop sub-points - to identify sub-points imagine a critical listener who will ask following;

- ✓ What do you mean?
- ✓ How do I know this is true?
- (iv) Plan transitions to use between the different points.
- (v) Number and letter your outline.

Types of presentation aids

Using presentation aids helps the presenter to:

- Enhance understanding;
- Establish authenticity- proofs what you are talking about really exists;
- Improve delivery and enhance credibility.

There exist a wide range of presentation aids, which include:

- Your body grooming, gestures, facial-expression all provide an additional dimension to your speech
- Other people could also be used.
- Objects could also be used to show exactly what you are talking about
- Graphics- such as sketches, maps charts etc
- Videotapes and audiotapes.
- Over-head projectors and slides.
- PowerPoint presentation

Guide to Effective Delivery

Once you have planned and practiced your speech you are ready to deliver it to your audience. Study the following tips carefully since they will help you to present the thoughts and ideas that you have carefully prepared.

1. **Don't start by apologizing even if you feel insufficient**
Give the audience confidence.
2. **Hide your nervousness**
Face the fact that you will be nervous as you wait to give the speech.
Remain confident knowing that you have carefully prepared your talk. If you find that you have stage fright, take a deep breath before opening your mouth.
3. **Check your volume**
It is very annoying and boring when the listeners can't hear the speaker. They even become uninterested. Before the meeting, check your volume in the room where you will speak. If there is need for a microphone, use it and do it appropriately.
4. **Keep your head up**
This position gives an appearance of authority and helps the speaker project the voice better.
5. **Use a conversational tone**
Remember that you are talking to an audience. Your voice should reflect the warm and easy conversational tone that you would use if you were talking to a group of very good friends. Also remember that you will destroy any warmth created if you allow a critical scolding or sarcastic note to creep in.
6. **Look at the audience**

An audience responds favourably to a speaker who seems to be talking directly to each person in the audience. One way of doing this is to look directly at the assembled people. Let your eyes look right, left and centre; they will feel attended to.

7. Stand at ease

How you stand and what you do with your hands will help or hinder your presentation. If possible stand behind the speakers stand if you feel nervous. Avoid holding the notes for nervousness may cause the papers to rattle like leaves in a storm.

8. Avoid mannerisms

Mannerisms such as playing with objects, clearing the throat, or wetting the lips, repeating 'uh' or 'and' frequently are not taken well by the audience.

Mannerisms distract the audience and obstruct the thoughts the speaker is trying to convey.

9. Use only the time allotted

If you are asked to talk for 5 minutes, don't talk for 6 minutes.

10. Observe audience reaction

Watch the audience as you speak and be sensitive to the changing moods. If as you talk you notice blankness or boredom on the faces, you might need to awaken the audience with a joke or an amusing story.

11. Mind your voice quality all through the speech

Voice quality includes:

Volume: intensity, force that enables people to hear you.

Pitch: degree of highness or lowness of the sound.

Tone: aspect that reveals attitude.

Tempo: the rate of speed at which you speak.

12. Use notes

Even the most confident and experienced speaker uses notes because they:

- a) provide an outline
- b) guard against omission
- c) help develop your talk
- d) prevent loss of sequence

However, even if you have written notes, do not read directly, but consult your notes and then talk, looking at the audience so that you do not lose eye contact.

13. Make a favourable first impression

This is achieved through:

- a) Appropriate dress and grooming
- b) Determining what is acceptable and dress accordingly (careless dressing will be a disadvantage in creating favourable first impression)

14. Look interested

A pleasant interested expression is a winning expression. It creates a feeling of warmth. Your look may create a feeling of boredom or indifference.

15. End on a high note

Avoid ending the presentation as if you are in such a great hurry.

