

How to Succeed in Your Public Speaking Class

1. **Strive for Perfect Attendance.** Every class session is designed to help you learn and master the skills of public speaking. Some days will be devoted to lecture, others to class discussion or activities, still others to the presentation of speeches. You will learn something important every day—including the days when you listen to your classmates' speeches. The more faithfully you attend class, the better you will do in the course.
2. **Do the Assigned Readings Before Class.** When you read the assigned material ahead of time, class discussion helps reinforce your understanding of the principles of speechmaking in a way that doing the reading after class (or just before the exam) cannot.
3. **Learn the Language of Public Speaking.** Every area of study has its own specialized language. Terms such as *central idea*, *specific purpose*, *extemporaneous delivery*, *preparation outline*, and the like are part of the language of public speaking. Be sure you know what these terms mean.
4. **Participate in Class.** In addition to helping you learn the material better, class participation gives you additional experience expressing your ideas in front of others. You owe it to yourself to take advantage of this opportunity.
5. **Ask Questions.** If you have no questions about the textbook, your speeches, or the class in general, you probably aren't putting much thought into the course. Asking questions is a good way to increase your understanding of the book, to help get ready for speeches, and to feel comfortable with your instructor and classmates.
6. **Spend Lots of Time Working on Your Speeches.** To get a sense of the time commitment required for this class, think of each major speech assignment as the equivalent of writing a paper in a composition class. The process of preparing a speech includes choosing a topic, narrowing the topic to a specific purpose, researching the topic, determining the main points to develop in the speech, writing a carefully organized outline, preparing visual aids to accompany the speech, and rehearsing the speech so you can deliver it fluently and confidently. Doing all of this well requires a great deal of effort. The more time you spend working on your speeches, the better they will be. Many B speeches could become A speeches with a little more work.
7. **Begin Working on Your Speeches Well in Advance.** Because it takes a lot of time to prepare an effective speech, it is vital that you begin working on your speeches as soon as they are assigned. This way you will be able to spend the night before your presentation fine-tuning your delivery rather than feverishly writing your conclusion. In addition to giving you plenty of time to accomplish all the stages of speech preparation, starting early will help you avoid the dangers of plagiarism that arise when students leave their speech preparation to the last minute.
8. **Get Feedback on Your Speeches.** Most instructors are willing to look at several drafts of a speech and make suggestions for improvement. You can also get feedback from family, friends, roommates, and classmates. They may not be able to give as much advice as your instructor, but they can tell you if you are saying "um" or looking down at your notes too often. Whatever you do, take advantage of feedback that can help you become a better, more confident speaker.