

7 Making that speech or presentation

The time comes for all of us when we are invited to make a speech or presentation. Every time is different, but like everything else in life our presentation style improves the more practice we get. So don't turn any opportunity down, no matter how small, as that opportunity to speak to a group might bring you a couple of potential new members.



Research

Find out about your audience. Who are they? Why have they invited you? (what do they expect?) What do they already know? (nothing is worse than patronising them with information they already know) Find out how long they expect you to speak, it is even worse to over-run or run out of time. If you are preparing handouts, find out the audience size so you can get quantities right. In terms of quantity, the size of audience really doesn't matter, whether you are speaking to 20 or 200, the same basic rules apply.

Using AV

If it is the kind of presentation that demands slides or other audio visual materials, find out exactly what facilities are available and make sure your IT is compatible. If you are using a memory stick make sure the laptop provided will accept it. Allow about 3 -5 minutes per slide, depending on complexity and remember slides, video, DVD etc are tools to assist you, not a prop. Never put up a slide and read the content out to your audience, assume that they can read and if the slide is not going to add anything to what you are going to say, should you be using it at all? Simplify slides to bullet points wherever possible. Don't stand in front of the projector and don't turn your back to the audience to read the slide. The audience won't hear what you are saying and you will have lost eye contact, their attention and your credibility all in one go

Don't forget to switch your mobile off before you stand up to speak.

Prepare

Expect to spend at least three times as long preparing as speaking (so a 30 minute speech should take one and a half hours to prepare).

Structure the speech:

Introduce yourself (if the audience don't know you)

Summarise what you are going to cover

Set any ground rules such: as questions at the end, etc

Make the points you want to make, building up to any calls to action

Use humour (if appropriate) with caution

End by reinforcing the key 'take home' messages

First impressions count

This is an old piece of psychological research which gets repeated from time to time with very similar results

What does an audience take in about a speaker?

How you look 55%

Tone and inflection of voice 38%

What you say 7%

So 93% of what the audience takes in is about how you look and sound. Think about what to wear, how to stand, how you speak and your body language messages to the audience.

It is always good to practice, do it in front of a mirror, a friend or the cat.



Delivery

Speak in front of an audience at a slightly slower pace than you would in an ordinary conversation, but not too slowly that it feels awkward. Try to maintain eye contact with members of your audience, if you find it difficult because the audience is large or if the lighting is on you and not on them try to look at a point just above the heads of the front couple of rows and it will give the impression that you are making eye contact with them. Pauses are powerful, to be used wisely. A pause helps people take in what you have just said and allows you to repeat important information to reinforce it. If you are making a joke, let your audience laugh. If they don't, be ready to move on promptly!

Rule of Three. You will have seen this used effectively by orators, whether you noticed it or not. It is simply: 'It looks good, it tastes good, it does you good!' or as Hillary Clinton said 'No how, no way, no McCain!' The human brain takes in a list of three options, choices or points and opts for the third. If you want to emphasise something, having the choice you want people to make as the third option in a list of three leads your audience to make that choice.

Dealing with questions

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Don't make something up, be honest and say you will find out and get back to the individual/whole group depending on the interest and significance of the question.