



Improve your podium performance

Tips

Speaking in front of a group is a skill that anyone can learn. And it's easy to collect tips to get you to the next level.

Here's a list of basic tips to get you going. If you crave for more, visit the following site with more than 100 links to sites about public speaking: <http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/public-speaking-blogs/>

1. **Know your material.** Winging it is not a good idea when you've got a speech to make. While going with the flow and being flexible is smart, trusting yourself to be brilliant without any preparation is something even the pros don't attempt. Know more about your topic than you include in your speech. Do your research. Know your topic and what you're going to say about it and how you'd like to say it. The more you know, the more confident you'll be while you are up there.
2. **Organise your ideas logically.** A well-organised presentation can be absorbed with minimal mental effort.
3. **Use facts and figures wisely.** Don't include them just for the sake of it, but do use them appropriately to complement your ideas. Make sure you can explain what the statistic means and why the audience should care.
4. **Practise. Practise. Practise!** Once you're all prepared, run through the speech. Then read it again. And again. And then once more. Practise in front of a mirror. Rehearse out loud with all the equipment you plan on using. Revise as necessary. Work to control filler words; practise, pause and breathe. Practise with a timer and allow time for the unexpected. Every time you go through your presentation, you're adding another layer of 'I know this stuff'.
5. **Know the audience.** To whom are you speaking? What do they expect? Do they want to learn something? Are they looking to be entertained? Do they want to be convinced? Know who your audience is and give them what they want.

6. **Meet your audience.** If you don't know all the participants, make sure you greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
7. **Know the room.** Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practise using the microphone and any visual aids. If at all possible, check the specifications of the room in which you'll be speaking. Is it of football stadium size or conference room size? What about the sound system? If you'll be using a microphone, it's a good idea to test it out beforehand. The more familiar you are with your environment, the more comfortable you'll be at the podium. Remember also: a room's seating arrangement will affect how you connect with your audience.
8. **Visualise yourself being fabulous.** Visualise yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and confident. Negative thinking will get you nowhere. If you believe that you'll be great, you will be. If you think you're going to fail, you probably will. It's all part of human nature.
9. **Don't apologise** for any nervousness or mistakes. The audience probably never noticed. If it really, truly makes you feel better to announce to the room that you're nervous beforehand, go ahead. But your speech will hold a lot more weight if you say nothing. Instead, concentrate on the message. Make sure your audience focuses away from your own anxieties and concentrates on your message alone.
10. **Focus on your audience.** Deliver your speech to the crowd, not to the screen.
11. **Make eye contact.** It makes it easier for people to connect with you. People trust those who look them in the eye, so look at your audience when you're speaking to them. Don't look at the floor – there's nothing there. Don't look solely at your notes – the audience will think you aren't well-prepared. You appear more confident when your head is up, which puts your audience at ease and allows you to take command of the room. If there is a large audience, divide the audience into four and move between them.
12. **No need to break a speed record.** One of the biggest indicators of nervousness is the lightning-fast talker. You might have the best speech ever written, but if no one can understand what you're saying, it won't matter. Pace yourself and remember to speak at a normal or even slightly slower pace when you're speaking publicly.

13. **Reinforce words with gestures.** Gestures should complement your words in harmony, not contradict them. If you want to stress an increase, for example, don't point downwards.

14. **Do not go over the time limit.** Obey time constraints very strictly. You might have three minutes. Or 45. Either way, customise your presentation to fit the time allowed, and respect your audience by not going over time. Even the President's State of the Union Address takes only around an hour. Know what's expected of you and deliver that, and no more. We've all been tortured by a speaker who goes on and on, caring little for the audience's interest or comfort levels. Don't be one of those speakers, always leave them wanting more.

15. **Start strong and close stronger.** The body of your presentation should be strong too, but your audience will remember your first and last words (if, indeed, they remember anything at all).

Some other pointers:

- Recording yourself on video is the best way to pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses.
- Take off your name tag.
- Take care with humour. Only use it when you are sure it is funny.
- Gain experience. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. And you're never too good to practise.
- Include metaphors. They enhance your message in a way that direct language often cannot.
- Tell a story. Everyone loves a story. Points wrapped up in a story are also more memorable.
- Vary vocal pace, tone, and volume.
- Do not read the slides.
- Answer the 'what's in it for me' question.
- Collect feedback. It's the best way to ensure your progress.
- Study the strengths and weakness of other speakers.

This document is part of a set of supporting material available for download upon purchase of Strategy Execution Heroes by Jeroen De Flander (isbn 978-908148731-3).

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