

TOP 10 TIPS FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

By Carrie Grant

1. Write your speech for the spoken word, not the written word – it's not an essay! It may read slightly oddly on the page, but once you speak it out loud you will find it works better. Think about how you would say it – if it feels uncomfortable or awkward, shape the speech until it begins to feel natural. If something is written 'off the cuff', or as an aside, it must remain sounding off the cuff! If you are storytelling, especially if it's your own, personal story, just tell it as it is. You may not even need to write this part but just give yourself some prompts to help you remember the facts you want to get across.
2. Be yourself – your speech has to work for your character and style. If you are working in teams it is particularly important to understand the person who is delivering the speech; it must be written with them in mind. Try not to act your speech, but stick to your own identity and character. If you are shy, make use of this in the delivery – it can be very powerful and mesmerising. If you are a loud extrovert, be your big self!
3. Learn your speech. When I am teaching performance for songs, I always tell students to learn every breath, placement, lyric, tone, emotion etc. Once it's locked in, let go and just deliver. This means your learning takes time and there should be plenty of hours spent rehearsing. Once you become an accomplished speaker, much of this becomes natural to you, but to begin with you have to know where you are going and practice really does make perfect.
4. **BOLD CAPS** speech. Once you have your speech written and learned you may want to just have highlights in front of you to keep, or the whole speech but with bold capitals to remind you to keep on track. These visual prompts will help you to feel secure and mean you can stay engaged with the audience. Use cue cards, not a sheet of paper.
5. Light and shade, pace and rhythm. When we speak we use a natural pace and rhythm and if we are telling a story or want to put a point across we speak loudly or softly to make a point. A speech should have all of these elements. Where is the big 'money moment' when your speech reaches its high point? Where is the moment where you want to challenge your listener? Where is the angry moment or the funny moment or the thought-provoking moment? All of these mood changes need to be reflected in your vocal tone and volume. Record yourself and you'll start to hear the difference.
6. Slow down. I have never met a new speaker who I haven't told to slow down! Also, when you are nervous you speed up, so be aware of this. Take time to breathe, take time to pause – it may feel like an age has passed, but it is probably only a nano-second! Remember, this is the first time your audience has heard this information, so they need time to absorb what you are saying.
7. Tailing off the ends of lines is something we want to avoid. Sometimes speakers go quieter at the end of a sentence or swallow their words. Live in the moment and in your head only go to the next sentence when you are ready, not before you've finished the former. Keep the volume consistent. Speak out a few tongue-twisters to get the mouth warmed up, this will help you to avoid swallowing words and your mouth will obey you even if you feel nervous.

8. Welcome – make eye-contact with your audience as much as you can. You are inviting them into your world and thoughts; you are the host so make them feel welcome in your space. You own the space, not the audience, don't give up your control, and maintain the authority you have been given for those few minutes.
9. The lectern is not a cloak of invisibility to hide behind! Use it as a prop, lean on it, step away from it, move completely out from behind it if you want! You are allowed to move. A note to those who like to move: try not to meander. If you like to walk, that's good, but make sure you actually arrive somewhere, plant your feet and deliver!
10. Focus – when someone is asked to speak for the first time it will normally only be about two minutes long. Just think, that's a 120-second burst of sheer genius! It shouldn't be a big task! People often lose focus in the middle of their speech and if you lose focus, we lose the meaning. Stay on it from beginning, through the middle, to the end!