

A Good Speech is Like a Good Relationship
20 Tips for Presentation Success!

"There are two types of speakers; those that are nervous and those that are liars." Mark Twain

Mostly, you've got to care about your subject and care about the audience

Contrary to what many people think, a speech is not a performance. Rather, it's a relationship -- ideally a meaningful one -- that you create with a group of people.

Like any good relationship, a speech requires caring, trust, openness, accessibility, and two-way communication.

The important thing is to understand the power you have, that we all have, to communicate effectively. Don't hide behind charts, graphs and power point slides. Don't stand off to the far corner and let your materials speak for themselves. Materials can only support your communication, not substitute for it.

Try getting your conclusions down first. What is it you really want your audience to remember from your presentation?

Keep an eye on the bottom line conclusions and never stray too far from those. Support those conclusions as best you can with data, facts, examples and stories, but remember that less said is often more effective when speaking in public. Your mission is to offer the big picture, the context, for your ideas. More details can be supplied in handouts and collaterals later.

Remember that you are the best promoter of your ideas. If you don't sound as though you believe in and are not enthusiastic about those, then you can hardly expect your audience to supply the excitement for you.

If you already know how to be a good friend, that's a great start. Here are 20 tips to help you transfer your people skills to the platform:

1. Clarify the expectations.:

Who asked you to speak?

What does that person expect?

Ask direct questions beforehand, such as:

"What do you hope I'll talk about?"

What problems or concerns might I address?"

2. Speak from the heart -- and the head.

Choose a topic that you:

- a) care about and
- b) know about.

If you can't establish expertise, then they won't believe you.

If you don't care about the topic, then they won't care either.

3. Plan before you speak. Practice the speech, using an outline, to get a sense of timing and phrasing - and to help you feel prepared, which will do wonders for stage fright. Take the outline to the platform with you, if you want (a security blanket, even when you don't need it) but do not memorize or read the speech word for word. People want you to relate to them, not to read or recite from memory.

4. Dress appropriately. Wear an outfit that is slightly nicer than what you expect the audience to be wearing; you're the guest of honour. Keep it simple; don't distract them with sequins or swooping scarves or noisy jewellery. Empty your pockets of key , jangling change, etc. Turn off your mobile.

5. Be prompt. When giving a speech, "arrive early and stay late" is a good motto. By arriving early, you'll have a chance to check out the microphone, seating, lighting, heating, and stage before the audience enters, and deal with any problems (there usually are some). By staying late, you'll make yourself available to audience members who want to talk with you afterward.

6. Be gracious and friendly. Greet at least some of the audience members when they walk in the door, as if you're hosting a party. Shake hands. Make them feel welcome. Not only do audience members appreciate it ("Oh, you're the speaker! Wow!"), it can make you feel more relaxed.

7. Take the time to get to know your audience. Some of this can happen in advance, by asking the meeting planner about the attendees. Interview audience members informally when socializing before the speech, and you can poll them once you take the platform. ("How many of you have been to Alaska?") Don't ask obvious questions ("How many of you would like to be successful?"); use your questions to learn relevant information about them, and listen to the answers. Later, you can refer back to this information: "As all of you zookeepers/swimmers/Madonna fans know..."). They'll feel listened to and understood.

When they ask questions:

A. thank them for the question and repeat it for everyone else – it shows you have listened, it ensues the rest of the audience know what is going on, and it gives you time to think. Use their name – if you don't know it then ask who they are and what they do. If you treat your audience courteously then they will repay the compliment - if you rush to reply then you look like a smart Alec with glib answers.

8. Put them at ease- literally. Straight rows of chairs are deadly. When an audience member has to turn her head to see the speaker, she'll feel neck strain and eventually even

get angry. Request curved seating ahead of time, but move chairs yourself if you must. Or, if that won't work, ask audience members to stand and move their chairs themselves. Tell them that you want them to be comfortable. They'll appreciate it.

The worse mistake is to have an aisle through the middle:

- people\ feel less nervous in a group – they feel self conscious when apart – so if you want them to applaud then sit them close together.
- You don't want to focus on an empty aisle, and if you make contact with one side your voice and eye contact is lost to the other side – a small number of wide rows is better than a high number of narrow rows – the more rows, the further away your audience is and the less impact your slides, voice and eye contact have.
- Check the lighting and sound before you start – close blinds, use a microphone etc.

9. Communicate clearly. a "key overriding message." Many speeches lack this essential structural umbrella -- and leave listeners feeling lost and frustrated? No matter how much time is allotted, there will not be enough time to share all your ideas, insights, wisdom, experience, and humour, so you have to decide: What, exactly, do you want people to remember?

Share your key overriding message at the beginning, middle, and end of the speech.

What is your objective – to inform , to sell, to entertain, to get inquiries, to get applause, to be remembered by x% of the group, ...these all require a different approach. Write down in one sentence why are giving the speech.

10. Be organized.

Choose 3 to 5 minor points that support your key overriding message. Avoid the temptation to make this a list of 12 or 17.

People can't remember everything you say, and will appreciate you for limiting your speech to three to five main points, each one illustrated with stories, facts, humour, and audience involvement.

The point of humour is to not to be funny – it is to make the important points memorable – if they remember the joke and forget your name and message then you are using the wrong joke at the wrong time for the wrong reason.

11. Speak intentionally. Speak a little more slowly than you normally do. Emphasize certain words. Pause when appropriate. A conversational tone is good, but vocal variety -- volume, pacing -- is also good.

12. Gesture naturally. Or, if it's a big room, gesture a little bigger than you naturally would.

13. Be original. Do not tell jokes from joke books or the internet. Do not use other speakers' material. The audience wants to develop a relationship with YOU: based on your unique experience, insight, wisdom.

14. Involve the audience. Refer to a few audience members by name. Or invite someone up on stage to demonstrate a point. Ask them their opinion. Find simple, non-threatening ways to get them to get them involved. Ask them to think, imagine, remember, raise their hands, look at each other, or take notes. The more involved they are, the more likely they are to enjoy your presentation -- and feel connected to you. Questions, even rhetorical ones grab attention. 'How do we double in size this year?I bet we'd all like an answer to that one. But what would you do? ' ...pause... ' lets look at some ideas.....' here the double questions draws in the audience – its a conditioned response from school days – teachers ask a question and we fear being pounced on so we mentally respond just in case.

'The second technique is to get the audience agreeing with you by using tie downs -- e.g. *'..don't you agree' .. 'that would be helpful wouldn't it' 'isn't it so important to...' ... 'I bet you were thinking that, weren't you?'*

15. Make eye contact. Maintain eye contact with one person for a whole sentence at a time, before moving on. Smile and nod. Don't just focus on the pretty girls. Make sure you cover the room over the course of the presentation.

16. Get personal. Tell relevant personal stories that illustrate your message -- and reveal something of your humanity. As in any relationship, self-disclosure will build trust. Be willing to admit your own difficulty with an aspect of the subject.

17. Get close. Walk out from behind the lectern. This one action will make a tremendous impression, since it will bring you physically closer, dispense with the lectern "shield," and differentiate you from most speakers. Retreating to the lectern periodically to look at notes is fine, but you'll notice a remarkable increase in the audience's interest level the moment you leave the lectern behind. Walk all the way into the audience if you want, but don't stay there long, since you don't want to lose eye contact with the people in the first rows.

However, don't change slides, or talk when you are walking – its distracting. When you talk, stand still and don't jig about like a nervous child – inexperienced speakers do a constant three step shuffle and it is clear they are nervous – this makes the audience worried for them and there is nothing worse than a worried audience.

18. Be lighthearted. Even if you're not spontaneously witty, you can add levity to a speech by planning ahead to share stories (relevant, inoffensive ones) that you've practiced on friends. Humour will relax the audience and make you popular; everyone loves to laugh. Deliver the punch line deliberately, to one person who has laughed before or seems ready to laugh. Since laughter is contagious, their laughter will encourage others to do the same. If no one laughs, then don't worry about it; just move on.

Phrase it from their point of view – use the words 'you' and 'we' rather than 'I' . Most sentences can be reworded to avoid use of I. Not *'I think'* but *'..you are probably thinking..'* or *'as you are aware'*

Appeal to all the senses not just their ears. Paint pictures that describe the smell of the leather in your car, the new paint, the bacon you had for breakfast. Instead of telling what you did use the words “Imagine you ..” and invite them to share the experience

19. Send thank-you notes. When you speak, you're not only creating a relationship with your audience, you're creating a relationship with the person who invited you to speak. Sending a thank-you note will be appreciated -- and will increase your chances of being invited back.

20. Learn from the experience. Like any relationship, a relationship with an audience can teach you a lot about yourself: your strengths, weaknesses, hopes, dreams. Did the experience challenge and excite you? That's a good sign; you might want to attend meetings of your local chapter of the National Speakers Association (Nsaspeaker.org) to learn more. Did you make mistakes? Fine. Perfection is impossible. Take a few notes on the process afterward, continue to practice your people/speaking skills, and you'll create increasingly rewarding relationships with your audiences over time.

Finally point 21

Tell them what you are going to tell them – introduce the topic and why

Tell them what you want to tell them – and what, how

Tell them what you told them – summarise and what you want them to do

The audience will lose concentration – if they are always one slide behind they will switch off or starting asking their neighbour, and you can soon lose control. So cue them when you are changing topic, and summarise to make sure the point has sunk in. You know what's coming and you are expert in your material. Your audience needs time to tune in to digest and to reflect.

9 Mistakes Presenters Make with Visuals

Mistake #1: Using Visuals to “Cover” for Problems

Presenters have used visuals to cover for a multitude of problems—to serve as “notes” to jog their memory about the next point, to fill time in case they run out of something meaningful to say, or to give them something to do with their hands such as holding a remote mouse.

Using visuals indiscriminately decreases their effectiveness when you really need those.

Mistake #2: Letting Visuals Dominate

Don’t let your media upstage you. Watch for thoughts like, “As long as I’m preparing slides, I may as well do 25 as 15.” Any technique—even the most creative slides—can get monotonous. As a rule of thumb, your presentation should average no more than one visual per minute.

Average is a deceiving word here, however. For example, during a presentation to a group of proposal writers, I may use three slides in five minutes to present examples of unclear documents. On the other hand, I may use no visual at all for 20 minutes during a keynote address on life balance or communication. Vary number and selection based on topic and purpose. Less is more.

Your purpose is not to guide your audience from visual to visual. If this is your approach, you may as well prepare bound sets of visuals and distribute them to your audience members for self-study. You should dominate; your visuals should support.

Mistake #3: Using “Laundry Lists”

The next worst visual—second only to a full page of text projected on the screen—is a bulleted list of single words or topics. After a while, such charts all begin to look like your grocery list. Consider how you can convey your ideas through a more creative visual than words alone.

Presenters are tempted to use such visuals because they provide an outline to speak from without the audience seeing any notes. But using visuals containing only words defeats your purpose. Even when displayed in a clever way, words are not visual. Photographs, diagrams, art, line graphs, and cartoons are. This is not to say that you should never use a text-only visual. If you do, however, then be sure to supplement it with other visuals that “fill in” what’s missing from the collection of words.

Mistake #4: Selecting Visuals Inappropriate to the Concept

Real objects or simulated models best demonstrate operating procedures or processes.

Enlarged photos or line drawings best illustrate internal workings of equipment.

Line graphs best show trends (as opposed to exact numbers).

Bar charts best illustrate high-low comparisons.

Flowcharts best exhibit interactive processes or the passage of time.

Pictures or cartoons best illustrate concepts.
Know what you want to convey and select your visual accordingly.

Mistake #5: Talking to the Visuals Rather Than the Audience

Visuals are for the audience, not the presenter. Never face your visuals while talking or, worse yet, read them to your audience. Know your material well enough to be able to maintain eye contact while elaborating on the key points using your own words. The visual is the beginning point, not the end.

Mistake #6: Setting the Screen Centre Stage

You yourself should be centre stage in front of your audience. Your group came to hear you—not to see your slideshow. Otherwise, you could have e-mailed them your handouts or your slides. When you stand to the side and place your visuals centre stage, the danger is that you become only a slide narrator. In most rooms, a screen set diagonally across the corner of the room works well.

Mistake #7: Creating Clutter

Avoid text, data, and art that does not clearly relate to the key concept. Avoid bombarding your audience with statistics and numbers that dilute rather than strengthen your main points. Listeners need to grasp the key concepts (such as, “Our costs have risen 40 percent”); they will pick up the specifics from your handout and can mull them over later. Also, make sure that your font style and size are uniform; both should contribute to ease of reading, not create visual clutter. Adequate white space also helps viewers differentiate between main ideas and supporting ideas and makes comparisons easy. Finally, make sure animation aids understanding rather than distracts. Just because you can easily make lines and objects swirl, dance, and flash does not mean they should.

Mistake #8: Packing the Page

Limit each slide to one major concept. One purpose of a visual is to simplify complex data. If listeners have to study the visual to understand it, the visual misses the target.

Mistake #9: Getting Fancy with Transitions and Builds

The types of builds and transitions you decide to use will affect the pace of your presentation dramatically. Transitions that “fade through black” will seem to take forever, whereas those that “appear,” “fly in,” “wipe right,” or “wipe left” will feel faster.

Also consider the fact that when you decide to use a build rather than have all bullet points appear at once, you limit your options of how fast you can cover the material. If all your bullet points appear at once and your time is short, you might say, “You’ll notice the six steps we’ve taken this quarter to market product X. I’d like to take a couple of minutes to elaborate only on item 4 here.” The audience will have an opportunity to skim for themselves all six steps. And then you can talk about the one most important item. Yet, if you had automated the bullets, you would have obligated yourself to talk a little more fully about each as you built the slide.

Consider both the pros and cons before letting the possibility of what you can do dictate what you should do.

Getting Over the Jitters Before You Speak

You're waiting your turn to make a speech, when suddenly you realize that your stomach is doing strange things and your mind is rapidly going blank. How do you handle this critical time period?

You need to anticipate your speech mentally, physically, and logistically.

MENTALLY:

Start by understanding that you'll spend a lot more time preparing than you will speaking. As a general rule, invest three hours of preparation for a half hour speech, a six to one ratio. When you've become a highly experienced speaker, you may be able to cut preparation time considerably in some cases, but until then, don't skimp. Part of your preparation will be to memorize your opening and closing -- three or four sentences each. Even if you cover your key points from notes, knowing your opening and closing by heart lets you start and end fluently, connecting with your audience when you are most nervous.

LOGISTICALLY:

Go to the room where you'll be speaking as early as possible so you can get comfortable in the environment. If you will be speaking from a stage, go early in the morning when no one is there and make friends with the stage. Walk around on the area where you will be speaking, so the first time there is not when you deliver your talk. Then, during your presentation, you can concentrate on your audience, not your environment.

PHYSICALLY:

A wonderful preparation technique for small meetings is to go around shaking hands and making eye contact with everybody beforehand. For larger meetings, meet and shake hands with people in the front row at least, and some of the people as they are coming in the door. Connect with them personally, so they'll be rooting for your success. We as speakers are rarely nervous about individuals, only when faced with the thought of an audience. Once you've met the audience or at least some of them, they become less scary.

It's totally natural to be nervous. Try this acting technique. Find a private spot, and wave your hands in the air. Relax your jaw, and shake your head from side to side. Then shake your legs one at a time. Physically shake the tension out of your body. Also spend a minute or so in private to loosen your vocal cords – make the vowels sounds loud and

deliberately and stretch your face muscles –so by the time your presentation begins you are loosened up to speak. It works for opera singers and it will work for you.

Try not to sit down too much while you're waiting to speak. If you're scheduled to go on an hour into the program, try to sit in the back of the room so that you can stand up occasionally. It is hard to jump up and be dynamic when you've been relaxed in a chair for an hour. (Comedian Robin Williams is well known for doing "jumping jacks" to raise his energy level before going on stage.) Sitting in the back also gives you easy access to the bathroom and drinking fountain. There's nothing worse than being stuck down front and being distracted by urgent bodily sensations