

Office of Student Life

Leadership Tip Series

Public Speaking

“The most valuable of all talents is never using two words when one will do.”

Public speaking is one of the most feared activities by a large portion of the population.

We talk to people all the time, yet the thought of talking in front of a group of people can be terrifying.

As frightening as it may be, think about it—if no one wants to speak in front of others, imagine what a marketable skill it must be! Employers may look very highly upon those potential employees who have experience in, and are not afraid of, presenting products or explaining strategies to groups. Wouldn't it be nice to do this without tossing and turning in bed for weeks getting clammy hands and tripling your heart rate in a matter of seconds? It can be done...it just takes a bit of work (and a positive attitude).

Practice, practice, practice. Practice speaking in front of others any time you can. Even if just by voicing an opinion in a meeting or asking a question in class, it is a step in helping you project your voice and get used to that “all eyes are on me” feeling.

Be prepared. When you are first learning to speak publicly, it is usually best to be prepared rather than “winging it.” Make an outline with key points and phrases.

Start low-risk. Your first speech should not be on a controversial topic to a group of 5,000 angry people. Instead, practice in your “comfort zone”—with friends, coworkers, or housemates.

Chill out. Learn different relaxation methods to use before and during your presentation. Remember that most of the people in your audience are probably scared to death of giving speeches themselves. Most audiences are kind to a speaker who is well-prepared.

Tips for how to speak

- Use your time effectively. Be as interesting as you can. Use clear, understandable statements. Be brief!
- Be yourself. You will be most believable and comfortable if you act naturally.
- Enthusiasm!!! Speak with as much enthusiasm as you can muster. If you appear bored, there is no way your audience will be excited.
- Narrow your focus. It is difficult to cover a big topic in just a few minutes. Only discuss what you have time for.
- Maintain eye contact. Talk to your audience.

What exactly do you say?

- Skip the ums, ers, and ahs. Make a conscious effort to avoid this (practice helps). You want people to note your facts, not how many times you say “um.”
- Consider your listeners. Your speech to a group of college graduates would probably be quite different from your speech to first graders. Know your audience and consider what would be appropriate for them.
- Know your opener. Know the beginning of your speech inside and out.
- Use other tools to keep everyone's attention.

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