

The Art of Public Speaking

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking is an art. It requires one to cover several important aspects. A good speaker must know the right words to use in order to keep the audience captivated. The selection of the right words is not only an important aspect in understanding the subject matter, but it also helps the audience remember the speech for days to come.

Keywords: Public speaking; giving a speech.

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is an art that covers several important aspects. A good speaker must help the audience understand the subject matter and keep them interested until the end. The speaker can use words that can make a dry subject more appealing to the audience. A good speaker must make even an uninteresting subject appeal to the audience. In their book 'Put Your Audience in Your Speech', the authors Brydon & Scott (2006) explain that public speaking is a living and dynamic transaction in which the meaning of a message emerges between the speaker and the audience.

speaker → *speech (subject)* → listener/
audience/readers

When speaking, the following aspects should be kept in mind.

- What is the subject matter?

- Who are the audience?
- What are the keywords to be used?
- How should you visualise the subject matter?
- What is the appropriate body language?
- What is the expected response from the audience?
- What new aspects are you trying to bring to an audience that is familiar with the topic?

It is essential that the speaker knows and understands the subject in depth before speaking. The speaker must be confident in his delivery. The speaker must be aware at all times that he/she is the focus of the audience. "There are always three speeches, for every one you actually give. The one you practiced, the one you gave, and the one you wish you gave." (Dale Carnegie).

Developing your speech

The challenge faced by most speakers is the fear of speaking in public. Each individual has his/her own way of overcoming this fear. There is no particular technique or method for this. It comes only with practice. Even experienced speakers get nervous sometimes. The fear can sometimes be used to improve your delivery.

Preparation is key to improving your confidence. Planning what you are going to say, your choice of words and the reason for choosing those particular words helps. Be critical of your own speech. Think outside the box and gather information and examples that are appropriate to the topic under discussion. Facts and real-life examples help to keep the audience interested.

Practice also improves confidence. Actively engage the audience and put them at ease. Carson (2005) gives some ideas and techniques for getting and keeping the attention and respect of the audience.

Gaps to be filled

While speaking you have to prepare for certain pauses where the curiosity of the audience is raised. The pauses should not be too long. Before you begin speaking, breathe out and relax for a few seconds. Be aware of the vibrations produced by your vocal cords, and the pitch and intonation of your voice.

Rehearsal

Walk around and practise out loud. Do not

memorise your speech or practise it word for word. Talk it through, point by point. Imagine you are explaining your main ideas to a friend. In his book 'The Elements of Public Speaking', Devito (1981) states that in the beginning a public speaker needs to research in order to deliver an effective speech. This is an essential element of public speaking.

Focus on your audience

Stop focusing on yourself. Focus, instead, on your audience. Ask questions like 'How are you?', 'Can you hear me?', 'Are you comfortable?', and so on to draw their attention. Keep the audience engaged. You have only one chance to make a good first impression, so utilise it. You may consider narrating a short story, or describing a real-life incident. You may even start with a joke or a powerful quote that relates to the subject under discussion.

Simplify

Most speakers try to deliver a lengthy speech. They often get confused midway, worrying about having left out something important from their speech. Aim, instead, to communicate one basic idea. Keep it short and simple. Know the level of knowledge of the audience.

Level of confidence

Do not show fear or nervousness. Look confident, even if you do not feel it. Be as bold as a soldier in war. Build up your confidence level. Limit your negative thoughts, paving the way for positive

thoughts. It is essential to be confident.

Engage the audience

Engage the audience with the power of your speech. Talk to some individuals during your delivery to make it interactive. Look at them as you speak. When your audience sides with you, your job becomes easier. Do not end the speech abruptly. If the audience seems to be losing patience, try to present some visuals as a conclusion. Both verbal and non-verbal communication are important. The way you present the subject is a verbal form of communication, whereas eye contact, facial expressions and body language are non-verbal forms of communication. While delivering your speech, keep these in mind.

Visualize success

Be at ease and imagine yourself delivering the speech with confidence. The place is filled with rapt silence. Time has no meaning. The audience hangs on your every word and understands you. Everyone forgets himself and sits comfortably, listening to your speech. Beabe & Beebe (1991) explain that speech is an audience-centred approach by emphasising the importance

of analysing and considering the audience at every point during the delivery. Finally, success is yours and you become a great orator.

To quote Swami Vivekananda, "Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, and live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success."

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