



A Beginners Guide to

# Public Speaking

*Public speaking is considered by many to be a difficult and frightening experience. Overcoming the fear of speaking to an audience and learning techniques for effectively communicating material to a large group of people are valuable skills that are transferable to almost any type of employment or social situation. Learning these skills while still in elementary school gives students the advantage of being confident speakers. Young people who master public speaking skills are preparing themselves for leadership roles in the future.*

*Assembled in this introductory guide are some pointers young speakers can use to polish their presentations. However, this booklet is meant to be used as a guide only. It is hoped that by using some of these guidelines, students will bring together their own ideas and personal style as they become accomplished public speakers.*

# Development of Your Speech

## Introduction

Before you begin your speech, it is appropriate to acknowledge your audience. This may include parents, judges, dignitaries, fellow speakers, and teachers. Or, you may just say, "Ladies and gentlemen; boys and girls." You may also want to introduce yourself by stating your name.

It is important that the first line of your speech captures the attention of your audience. Start with something that will make the listeners sit up and say, "I want to hear more about this" or "Is that so?". Here are some suggestions to help you in developing an exciting introduction:

### *Ask a question*

"Did you know that...?"

"Are men really stronger than women?"

### *Begin with a quotation*

"Honesty is the best policy." (A quotation from a well-known person.)

### *Use a story*

"In the late 1980s, I went into a time warp. I discovered..."

### *State remarkable information*

"Seven out of 10 people will make career changes more than once in the 1990s."

### *Make a statement*

"Most people are *unhappy!* Why?"

Make the introduction reflect your personality. Work to inform and entertain your listeners. Keep in mind that the beginning of your talk should be very carefully planned. You can convince, persuade or win over your audience in the first few lines of your speech.

As you progress from the introduction to the body of the speech, you must think about the order in which your information is presented. Build on your opening. Be sure the information flows in a logical sequence. This may mean rewriting your speech several times to produce a polished copy.

## **Body**

The body of the speech also needs some variation. Some ways to ensure this variation are:

- Tell a story (personal or otherwise).
- Read a short statement that supports your argument.
- Use statistics. Be sure that your examples are correct and easily understood by the audience. Note: Numbers alone do not create a reaction. Don't over-use this form.

Do not try to cram too much information into the allotted time for your speech. Repetition, while sometimes effective, can be boring. Get to the point and don't talk in circles.

As a speaker, you should work to develop vivid images for your audience by choosing words that most descriptively portray your thoughts. Use words with feelings or emotions to effectively communicate with your audience. While it is important to have interesting vocabulary, don't use words that you really don't understand. Feel comfortable with what you are saying.

## **Closing**

The ending of your speech is as important as the beginning. Your conclusion is the last impression the audience will have of you. Aim for a strong conclusion. Memorize the ending so that you can look at your audience and share the strength in your last thoughts.

Do not say "Thank you" at the end of your speech. Simply pause for a moment and smile.

## **Delivery of Your Speech**

The audience begins to form an opinion of the speaker from the moment the speaker enters the room. Enter with confidence, shoulders back (not stiff), and with a smile. Slow your pace of walking and get rid of the frown that might come from a bad case of nerves. Breathe in slowly (from the lower part of the lungs) and control your exhalation. This will help to calm those “butterflies” in your stomach.

### **Posture, Appearance & Dress**

Stand straight, with feet slightly apart. A common error when speaking is to have the appearance of leaning slightly forward. Keep heels and toes on the ground, and don't shift weight from one foot to the other. These mannerisms suggest nervousness. Also, keep hands, arms and fingers still unless you are using them for appropriate gestures, such as to show a strong feeling or place emphasis on an argument.

Keep your head and neck in line. Do not let your head sag forward, bob up and down or sway from side to side.

Dress in a style that does not draw undue attention to your clothes. Choose something that is comfortable and suitable. Hair should be worn in a style that allows good eye contact with the audience. Also, avoid using repeated movements to brush the hair away from your face.

### **Eyes**

As you speak to your audience, you are developing rapport with your listeners. Be sure not to stare straight ahead. Speak to the entire audience. Establish eye contact by slowly shifting your gaze from one member of the audience to another. Speak loud enough to be heard by the back row of the group. You want to make your audience listen to, understand and appreciate your message.

### **Gestures**

While gestures can serve to intensify what you are saying, they can also detract if used incorrectly. Some speakers tend to move their arms around at random, almost in a pattern, to alleviate nervousness. This can be distracting. Gestures must be used with care and should look natural and spontaneous.

### **Pitch**

Pitch is the key of the voice. Speakers usually have three different pitches: high, medium and low. For speech delivery you should concentrate on the medium pitch. If you speak all on one pitch level with no variation, the voice will sound monotonous – include some variety. For instance, lift your pitch just a little as you begin to talk about a new idea.

### **Emphasis**

Stressing certain words or phrases is another way to avoid monotony in your speech. For instance, a pause can be an effective way of emphasizing a word or words that you wish to make stand out. Pause before or after the important word or phrase. Other ways to emphasize are by increasing or, in some cases, decreasing word volume.

## **Inflection**

Inflection is the upward and downward glide of the voice. Inflection gives the correct meaning to what you are saying. For instance, if you say the word “yes”, think of the different meaning it can take on just by the way you inflect your voice. Use the upward inflection at the end of a sentence only if you want to pose a question. Otherwise, it may reflect a lack of confidence. Speak with conviction and enthusiasm. If you are truly interested in what you are saying, your audience will be as well.

## **Conclusion**

Don't rush away from the podium with your head down, feeling nervous or embarrassed. Leave with the same poise with which you entered. Keep your head up, shoulders back, and smile with self-confidence, knowing you have done your best.

## **A Final Word**

It is important to remember that these suggestions are just *guidelines*. More importantly, your speech should come from your heart, reflecting your own thoughts, feelings and personality. Remember: relax, and you'll enjoy the experience.

## **Movement**

This technique, thought by some to add variety to a presentation, can actually detract from it. The audience's attention can be diverted from your message to watching you move. Keep your body movements natural and to a minimum.

## **Voice**

Your voice also works to create the images that really communicate meaning to the audience. Of special importance to the voice are: breath control, pace, articulation, pitch, emphasis and inflection.

## **Breath Control:**

Take in a deep breath (from the lower part of the lungs) as you begin to speak. Your voice is carried on the breath so you need a good strong breath to project your voice to be heard at the back of the room. Be sure to keep replenishing this breath as the need arises. One common error is to begin speaking in a nice loud voice and then have it die out at the end of the sentence. This forms a pattern (usually unknown to the speaker) which results in an up-down rhythm to the speech. Project your voice so that you can be heard at all times. Do not shout.

## **Pace**

A natural consequence when speaking in public is the speaking pace tends to increase. Practice speaking slowly so your listeners can hear and savour all you have to say. Remind yourself to slow down. Take time to speak slowly and think. There is no error in stopping for a moment to gather your thoughts and give the audience a time to digest what you have already said. Just be sure not to add any “ums” and “ahs” during this pause.

## **Articulation**

If your audience is to understand your message, they must understand your words. Speak clearly and distinctly. If your articulation is not exact or you tend to run words together, the listener may miss a part of your message. Strive for clear consonant sounds like “t” and “d”, as in “start” and “round”. In practice, over-exaggerate these final consonant sounds and they will come through with clarity when you speak.

**Please note:**

Speeches should be 3 to 5 minutes in duration.

No audio-visual aids whatsoever are permitted.

Participants at the school level may include gr 6 students (i.e. if they are in split 6/7 classes). The gr 6 students can use the school competition as a practice for the following year when they are in gr 7.

However, the Zonal and District Finals are only for gr 7 students.

Students must also be physically present at venue for the Zonal and/or the District Finals to have their speech considered for judging.