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Successful Public Speaking

Arina Nikitina



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Preface

Does the opportunity of delivering a speech in front of a large audience sound just as appealing as a visit to the dentist?

Or do you feel pretty comfortable when talking in public but you are still looking for ways to improve your skills and get even better at motivating, engaging, persuading, presenting, and educating other people?

In each case, you will benefit from reading “Successful Public Speaking”.

In this book you will find out how to:

- connect with your audience
- dramatically improve your speaking presence
- overcome public speaking anxiety
- respond appropriately to your audience’s needs
- hone your non-verbal communication skills
- add a visual dimension to your presentation
- capture your listeners’ attention and interest
- create a killer business presentation step-by-step
- avoid common, yet costly public speaking mistakes

Arina Nikitina is a self-help expert, psychologist, blogger, speaker and a founder of www.goal-setting-guide.com – one of the largest self-improvement portals that covers a wide range of topics such as: goal setting, motivation, communication, leadership, productivity and success.

In 2010 she started her personal blog www.arinanikitina.com, which has become one of the top three self-help blogs.

She is also an author of the best-selling e-book “*Real Goal Getting*”.

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Please visit www.arinanikitina.com/free-gift to download your self-confidence report and learn more about such topics as communication, intrinsic motivation, goal setting and success.

About the Author

Russian born personal coach and goal setting expert Arina Nikitina has been helping people to achieve thier goals since 2002.

She has used her proven 7-Step Goal Setting System to help entrepreneurs and business professionals all over the country create success on their own terms.

Arina's passion and success as a compelling and passionate professional coach and speaker comes from helping people find the courage and confidence to create their own definition of success and to live it with conviction, joy, and prosperity.



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1 Introduction

1.1 Public Speaking in the Business World

“Nothing in life is more important than the ability to communicate effectively.” – Gerald R. Ford

Communications in its multiple forms pervades today’s business environment. With numerous job interviews, conference calls, meetings, product presentations, workshops, and public events, more and more leaders realize the importance of developing good interpersonal communication skills within their company. Yet the majority of executives and employees continue to neglect and overlook the use of public speaking, leaving the advancements and better career opportunities for those who take proactive steps to master the art of speaking in public.

The truth is that you might have the best products or services, years of experience or an outstanding business idea, but if you do not communicate this to your target audiences, you are limiting your effectiveness. All too often, the very best and inspiring stories in organizations and companies go untold because of people’s reluctance to or fear of taking the stage.

Whether your goal is to enhance your professional growth, take your business to the next level, or inspire, persuade and motivate other people to follow your lead, you will have to learn how to convey your ideas in front of a group of people in a clear, structured and captivating manner.

However, becoming an effective public speaker does not have to turn into one of the necessary, yet unpleasant goals on your professional advancement list.

The art of public speaking holds many practical benefits that go far beyond delivering a project presentation or holding a successful meeting.

Developing your communication skills and learning to speak in public:

- Opens up new opportunities for career advancement
- Positions you as an authority
- Sets you apart from your competition
- Attracts the right customers to your business
- Presents technical or business information effectively
- Produces a faster sales cycle
- Allows you to effectively market your business or promote your products to larger audiences
- Improves internal communication
- Helps you to easily assume leadership and train others
- Increases employees’ productivity
- Prepares you for spontaneous speaking challenges (e.g. delivering a speech at short notice)
- Establishes greater credibility and helps your clients’ loyalty

- Motivates and persuades other people to reach and attain professional goals
- Makes you a desirable guest on local, regional and national conferences, seminars and public speaking events

1.2 Personal and Social Benefits of Public Speaking

A series of psychological studies conducted at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, show that it takes people on average three to five seconds to form an impression about someone they meet for the first time.

How well people perceive you and the conclusions that they make about your professionalism and character will be largely influenced by your confidence, when presenting yourself.

Improving your ability to speak in front of others and learning to talk about who you are and what you do with natural grace and authenticity can go a long way in expanding your social circle, building strong relationships with successful, like-minded people and making new friends.

Other personal benefits of public speaking include:

- Increased self-confidence
- Improved communication skills
- Increased organizational skills
- Greater social influence
- Enhanced ability to listen
- Greater possibility of meeting new people
- Lesser anxiety and fear when speaking in front of others
- Improved memory
- Enhanced persuasion ability
- Greater control over emotions and body language

2 Evolution of Public Speaking

2.1 What is public speaking?

Public speaking is a process, an act and an art of making a speech before an audience. Absolutely everyone from the age of 10 to 90 has found themselves in situations where they have had to speak publically. However, telling an anecdote at a corporate party, introducing yourself in class or delivering a paper at a conference does not necessarily make you a public speaker.

It is not enough to talk in front of a group of people to be a brilliant public speaker. Your goal should not be limited with informing your audience or expressing your thoughts publically, but to changing emotions, actions, and attitudes, and to leaving your listeners moved by the words and touched by their meaning.

“How to do it?” – has been a question many brilliant speakers have asked themselves.

Many tips, techniques and rules have been elaborated on to find the best way to influence, motivate, entertain and persuade people. Some of these rules go back thousands of years, yet they have not lost their actuality and have been widely used by such world-known speakers as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama, Jim Rohn and Anthony Robbins.

But what are the main components and 'golden rules' of a great speech?

How have they changed throughout history?

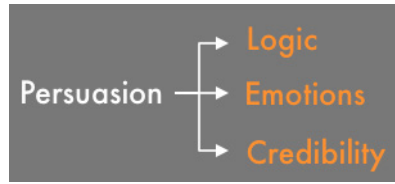
2.2 Three Parts of Persuasion by Aristotle.

The art of speaking in public is not new. Its long tradition can be traced back to Classical Greece (approximately 490-322 BC). Any young men leaving at that time were expected to acquire and develop public speaking skills as part of their duties as citizens.

The first rules of a public speech were elaborated on over 2000 years ago by the Greek philosopher and teacher of Alexander the Great – Aristotle.

We know them as the **Three Basic Parts of Persuasion**:

- Ethos (credibility or the speaker)
- Logos (logic behind any conclusions drawn by a speaker)
- Pathos (emotional appeal or ability to create connection between the speaker and his audience)



These key elements still lie at the base of any successful public speech.

First, in order to be asked to share their thoughts, observations and ideas publically a speaker should possess a certain level of authority and knowledge about the chosen topic (**ethos**).

To make sure that the message is received and understood correctly by the audience, it has to be conveyed in a clear, informative and logical manner (**logos**).

And to capture and hold the audience’s attention the speaker must first establish an emotional connection with the listeners. (**pathos**).

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2.3 Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric

After the ascension of Rome, public speaking techniques developed in Greece were copied and modified by the Romans. Here, oratory lost its dominance in the political arena, but gained wide popularity as a form of entertainment, allowing famous orators to gain political power and wealth by using their public speaking skills. Amongst such people was Marcus Tullius Cicero – a lawyer, politician, philosopher, who gained fame as Rome's greatest orator. Around 50 B.C. Cicero wrote his treatise called "De Oratore" where he explained his "Five Canons of Rhetoric" that are widely used by many public speakers up to this day.

Cicero believed that the process of eloquent speech preparation consists of five main steps:

- **Invention** - development and refinement of the argument (finding ways to persuade)
- **Arrangement** - creation of the structure of a coherent argument
- **Style** - the process of determining how to present an argument, using rhetorical techniques and choosing the words that have the greatest impact on the audience
- **Memory** - the process of learning and memorizing the speech while making it sound natural
- **Delivery** - the process of making effective use of voice and body language

2.4 Modern Elements of Public Speaking

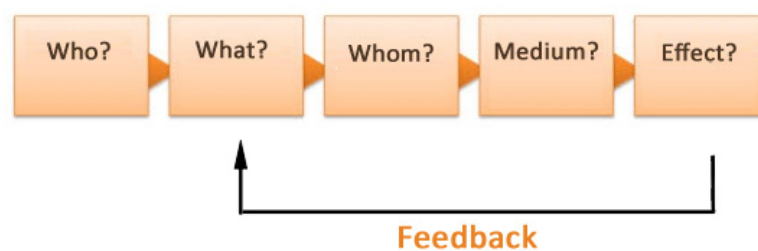
The widespread accessibility of mass media and especially, the Internet, has made it easy for us to reach a vast audience and let our voice be heard.

Public speaking has evolved from a skill reserved by a selected few to one of the most powerful marketing, educational and brand promotion tools in any business.

It is safe to say that in the modern business world just about every well-paid position requires some form of public speaking, be it giving a group sales presentation, presenting your ideas to the board of directors, speaking to a committee or telling a group of potential clients about your company during a corporate event.

Most public speeches can be broken down into five basic elements, usually expressed as

"Who is saying What to Whom using what Medium with what Effects?"



2.5 Three Styles of Speech

The three most common styles of speeches that you encounter in today's business and social world are - impromptu, manuscript and extemporaneous. To become a great public speaker you will have to learn and ace each one of them, as it will allow you to speak confidently and effectively in front of any number of listeners and in any given situation.

Impromptu speech

Impromptu speech is prompted by the occasion rather than being planned in advance. While famous public speakers often joke that best impromptu speeches should be prepared weeks in advance, usually in real life we have very little or no time to prepare before we speak in front of the audience. Some examples of impromptu speech could be your boss asking you to bring the rest of your team up to date, or a group of friends urging you to say a few words at a non-profit event.

Manuscript speech

This type of speech is written like a manuscript and is meant to be delivered word for word. Manuscript speeches are used on many political and social occasions, when every word carries a lot of weight and should not be misquoted. One of the most common examples of a manuscript speech is a political figure delivering a speech that has been written by another person.

Extemporaneous speech

Extemporaneous speech is the most commonly used type of speech that helps to establish emotional connection with the audience. It is built around key points, but the material can be presented freely, allowing the speaker to make changes in their speech based on the listeners' reaction.

Later in this book we will cover the preparation of all three speech styles, but before we do that, let us address one of the major obstacles that most people face when it comes to speaking in front of a group of people – Fear.

3 Overcoming Fear of Public Speaking

3.1 Introduction

An opportunity to speak in front of an audience, whether it is three or three hundred people, is the chance to sell your business or service to potential customers or clients. However, one of the biggest obstacles that many business men and women face is the fear of public speaking.

According to national surveys and research results, fear of public speaking (or 'glossophobia') ranks among the top dreads, surpassing the fear of heights, fear of spiders and even fear of death itself. As Jerry Seinfeld put it – *“at a funeral, the average person would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy.”*

So what is it that makes the fear of public speaking so strong and so debilitating?

Why does 75% of population suffer from speech anxiety every time they are asked to talk in front of other people?

How can we overcome the fear of speaking in public and polish our communication skills?

What can we do to transform the fear of public speaking into enthusiasm and positive energy?

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3.2 The Hidden Psychology behind the Fear of Public Speaking

Psychologists know that the very fact of being in the spotlight often triggers the whole range of physical reactions that we would experience in the face of real life-threatening danger as:

- Pounding heart
- Dry mouth
- Shaky hands
- Quivering voice
- Cold sweaty palms
- Stomach cramps

Recent research conducted at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) might finally shed some light on this issue. MRI scans of the brain showed that the shock and distress of rejection activate the same part of the brain, called the anterior cingulate cortex, that also responds to physical pain.

Another study conducted by Edward E. Smith, director of cognitive neuroscience at Columbia University demonstrated that the feeling of rejection is one of the most painful emotions that can be sustained even longer than fear.

How can these findings explain the fear of public speaking?

If it is painful enough to be rejected by just one person, imagine the pain we could experience when being rejected by a large group of people. Of course, our emotions range from being absolutely terrified to feeling very uncomfortable!

Our anxiety and fright before the speech, however, may be caused not by fear of public speaking per se' but by the audience's reaction to our performance. Or put simply, we are afraid that our nervousness will interfere with our ability to perform and we will end up embarrassing ourselves.

Accepting our fear helps us to take proactive steps in addressing stage fright and letting the adrenaline rush work for you, not against you.

3.3 Two Biggest Myths about the Fear of Public Speaking

When it comes to public speaking there are two common misconceptions that many business owners and leaders fall prey to:

Myth #1:

Great public speaking skills are an inborn talent. Of course, some people find it easier to speak in public than the other, but the majority of successful speakers have trained themselves to perform through persistence, preparation and practice. The bottom line is that if you can speak in front of two friends, you can deliver a presentation before an audience.

Myth #2:

Fear of public speaking is negative and undesirable. This is another common misconception that holds many new speakers back. They believe that stage fright is a sign of their inadequacy and lack of public speaking skills. This could not be further away from truth.

No one escapes the rush of adrenaline that accompanies a presentation in front of an audience. The difference between successful speakers and 'rookies', is that they have learned to transform and use fear to their advantage.

Fear is not only a normal reaction to a public speaking event, but actually boosts our performance. Psychologists agree that some amount of fear heightens your awareness, improves your concentration, sharpens your thinking and gives you an energy boost. It is fear that allows most speakers to perform better during the actual presentation than during practice.

3.4. 5 Ways to Transform the Public Speaking Fear into Excitement

The fear of public speaking should not turn into an obstacle to your professional and personal growth. It is much easier to build a business or to advance in your career when you are able to speak with confidence and authenticity to any size group.

If you are worried that fear may worsen instead of improve your presentation, here are 5 Practical Ways to transform it into unshakable confidence and excitement:

Deep breathing

Such strong emotions as anxiety and fear trigger in your body very specific "fight or flight" response: your muscles tighten, your heart rate increases, your blood pressure goes up and your breathing becomes shallow. While this physical reaction may be helpful in escaping danger it is hardly helpful during the presentation (as you can neither run away from your audience, nor fight with it). However, since your breathing rate is directly connected to your emotional reaction, the fastest and easiest way to take your emotions under control and regain confidence is through deep breathing. Whether you are to talk to potential clients or make a presentation to your team, make sure that you remember to breathe deeply and evenly before and during your speech.

Shifting focus outwards

Paul L. Witt, PhD, assistant professor of communication studies at Texas Christian University, believes that many people perform worse than they could because they focus too much on their physical symptoms (i.e. butterflies, shaky hands, sweaty palms) and on their embarrassment instead of concentrating on their breathing and their speech. This problem could be easily avoided by shifting focus from how we feel or look to the message we want to share with our audience.

Visualizing

Visualization or mental rehearsal has been routinely used by many top athletes as a part of the training for a competition. In addition to athletics, research has shown that visualization helps to improve performance in such areas as communication, public speaking and education.

To ensure that your presentation goes smoothly, aside from actual preparation and the rehearsal of your speech, take 10-15 minutes a day to relax, close your eyes and visualize the room you are speaking in, the people in the auditorium and yourself confidently delivering your speech, smiling, and moving across the stage.

Focusing on facts, not fears

Instead of focusing on irrational fears (e.g. mind going blank, audience getting bored) concentrate your thoughts on positive facts such as: “I have practiced my speech many times”, “I am an expert on this topic”, “I have notes with major bullet points to keep the structure of my talk”. Focusing on positive facts and on what you can offer takes your thoughts away from irrational scenarios about what can go wrong.

Building your speech on clarity, not complexity

While it is often tempting to include as much useful information in your speech as possible, practice shows that this might not be a good idea. Organizing the speech or presentation around two three main points, allows you to relax and not worry so much about running out of time or forgetting to mention something important to the listeners.

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4 Components of a Successful Speech

4.1 Introduction

“The success of your presentation will be judged not by the knowledge you send but by what the listener receives.” - Lilly Walters

Given the choice many of us would prefer to submit a written report rather than get up and convey the same information orally. And it is not only fear of public speaking that holds us back. The written language holds many advantages. Written words can be chosen with greater deliberation and care. Written arguments can be expressed in a sophisticated, complex and lengthy manner and the readers have the option of taking in the text at a pace that is comfortable for them and even re-reading it if they choose to do so.

This degree of precision is hard to achieve when delivering a speech. The presenter does not have the same amount of time to choose the words that would best explain their opinion or idea. While the listeners have to rely only on their cognitive skills to recall and analyze the message.

On the other hand, verbal communication can be significantly more effective in expressing the meaning of the message to the audience. The speaker has an opportunity to use other means of communication that written language does not allow.

Let us take a look at the other means of communication available to speaker besides the power of the spoken word.

These include:

- Storytelling
- Body language
- Tone of voice
- Pauses
- Visual cues

4.2 Storytelling

4.2.1 The Importance of Storytelling in a Public Speech

Everyone loves to listen to stories. A well told story has an almost hypnotic effect on the listeners. People might forget what you wore during a presentation or some of the charts, graphs and statistical data shown to them, but they will never forget the stories that you told them.

Many leaders and managers avoid storytelling in their presentations, believing that they have to keep their speech formal and business-like. This is one of the main reasons they often fail to grab their audience’s attention and establish an atmosphere of trust and respect with their listeners.

In the business world whether you are speaking in front of two hundred people or making a presentation to your client, do not be afraid to include a few personal stories in your speech.

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Professional public speakers use storytelling in their presentations for a variety of purposes which includes to:

Make statistical data, graphics and facts more vivid and interesting

Relieve tension

- Make important points of the presentation memorable
- Establish a connection with the particular audience
- Emphasize the message
- Introduce controversial issues
- Encourage thinking
- Shape people's beliefs
- Raise the energy level of the group
- Motivate people to act

4.2.2 Definition of Storytelling

Storytelling can be defined as a structured narrative account of real or imagined events that is widely used in public speaking as a medium for sharing, interpreting and offering the content of the story to the listeners.

The best stories to use in your public speech may involve true facts from your life; self-effacing humorous facts about your past mistakes, and challenges; success stories from famous people's biographies; and stories that explore the history of your business.

4.2.3 Do's and Don'ts of Storytelling

Not every story will grab your audience's attention and interest. There are a few important points that should be taken into consideration when choosing the right story for your speech:

Do's

- Always make your story relevant to the subject at hand
- Keep your stories simple and short
- Eliminate inconsequential detail
- Space stories at intervals to reemphasize your message
- Make sure the plot of the story involves a lesson or a transformation outcome that your listeners can relate to and benefit from.
- Use appropriate body language and facial expressions to convey emotions to your listeners.
- Use elements of the story that your audience can relate to (e.g. people, places, and familiar facts).
- Emphasize the adjectives and verbs in your stories to make them sound more interesting.
- Learn your stories by heart

Don'ts

- Do not use more than two or three stories on the same topic as each successive one will lose its impact
- Do not use terms that are foreign to the experience of the audience
- Do not fill stories with too many characters, events or details

“What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Body language is the process of non-verbal communication when our physical, mental and emotional states are manifested through conscious and unconscious body movements and gestures.

Numerous psychological findings show that non-verbal communication and especially body language accounts for as much as 55% of the message received by the audience. While words for the most part are perceived and interpreted by our rational mind, our physical gestures and facial expressions reach and are interpreted on a much deeper subconscious level. You have probably noticed it yourself many times – a person can say all the right words to convince you to do something, yet a part of you still resists listening to that person.

The main reason behind this resistance is contradictive body language. While we can choose our words carefully, our body language often portrays our real thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

It means that in many professional and personal situations what you say may have a lesser impact on your listeners than how you say it.

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Still the majority of business speakers spend very little or no time at all thinking about their body language as they prepare a speech. This often proves to be a big mistake, as appropriate use of body language signals your confidence and conviction in your material and ideas, helps you to say more in less time and increases understanding and retention of what has been said.

Therefore, learning to use effective body language during your presentations as well as ‘reading’ the gestures and facial expressions of your listeners goes a long way to improving your communication skills and becoming a better public speaker.

Posture

Slouching shoulders and tensed muscles and abrupt, anxious movements might not be so obvious to the speaker, but this nervousness, tension and lack of conviction are quickly transmitted to the audience.

If you want your listeners to feel comfortable and interested by your speech, make sure that you keep a relaxed and upright posture. Do not lean or grip the lectern as if your life depends on it and avoid shifting your weight from one foot to another as it can become distracting.

Body Placement

Often, new speakers trap themselves behind a podium, using it as a ‘psychological’ barricade between themselves and their audience. Needless to say, doing this does not help to establish a connection with the audience or keep them interested in the message. Even if you usually speak from behind a lectern it is a good idea to step away occasionally. Movement in the direction of your listeners is a sign of trust and openness. Movement is also a great way to make a clear transition from one point to another, allowing a speaker to quickly regain the listeners’ attention.

Arms

While on stage, be careful of using hand gestures that reveal anxiety such as clenching your hands together, clutching notes, fiddling with your clothing, or hiding your hands in your pockets. Even if you feel nervous, practice speaking with your arms relaxed at your sides as it helps to convey your calm attitude, sincerity and openness.

Facial expression

When it comes to establishing a connection with your audience and winning their admiration there is nothing more effective than a genuine smile. As a speaker, you should be the first one to demonstrate your sympathy and interest in your audience and the best way to do it is by smiling and looking at your listeners as you talk.

4.4 Tone of voice

4.4.1. Introduction

“Talk low, talk slow, and don’t talk too much.” -John Wayne

A speaker's confidence, emotional state and attitude is often revealed in the tone of voice.

In the area of public speaking your voice becomes a powerful instrument that allows you to engage, charm and encourage your audience to listen.

In fact, tone of voice accounts for approximately 33% of the transmitted message, while the actual words that you say are responsible for only 7% of communication.

It may mean that people are more influenced by the sound and quality of an individual's voice than by its content.

Of course, these findings do not imply that the weight of the spoken words should be ignored or that it diminishes. They, however, demonstrate that the effect of vocal cues on your listeners have to be taken into consideration when preparing your speech and delivering it in public.

In order to better grasp the impact that your voice has on an audience try to recall a public speaker or an old University professor who talked in a monotone voice.

How difficult was it to keep your focus on what was being said?

Speakers who talk in a tone with no variations, which usually happens when a public speaker is reading the speech or recalling it verbatim, quickly lose their audience's attention and even put some of their listeners to sleep.

To avoid people dozing off or daydreaming during your presentation you have to learn to control your tone of voice and use it to make your speech more expressive and hypnotizing.

4.4.2 Paralanguage

The study dedicated to the vocal part of non-verbal communication is called paralinguistics, while the term "paralanguage" refers to the non-verbal elements of communication as:

- pace (speed)
- pitch (highness or lowness of voice)
- volume (loudness)
- and, in some cases, enunciation of vocal speech.

Let us take a look at how these elements apply and affect public speaking:

4.4.3 Speech Pace

Pace of the speech is the speed at which we say our thoughts out loud.

Often when people feel nervous or excited, they tend to rush through their delivery, hoping to get the presentation over as quickly as possible.

As you can probably guess, talking at a fast pace makes it challenging for the listeners to mentally keep up with the speaker and follow the speaker’s train of thought. While some of the message might get through, most will not, as people will quickly lose interest in the presentation.

On the other hand, speaking at a slow pace leaves your audience too much time to process your message and their thoughts will soon start to wander off to other topics.

Experienced public speakers often vary their pace during a presentation to hold their audience’s attention over a long period of time and add spice to their speech. However, the biggest part of a presentation should be delivered at rate that allows your listeners to grasp your message and let it sink in.

It is worth mentioning that psychological experiments conducted by Smith and Shaffer in 1991 suggest that when messages are counter-attitudinal, faster speakers were more persuasive than slower speakers. This might be the one of the factors that has contributed to Anthony Robbins’ success as a motivational speaker, as his quick speech rate allows him to effectively persuade his listeners to change their dysfunctional habits and act on their goals.

However, Smith and Shaffer also demonstrated that when an audience inherently agrees with the message slower speech rate tends to be more persuasive than a quick one.

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3 Ways to Improve your Speech Pace

If people sometimes tell you “Could you repeat that please?” or “I’m sorry, I did not get that”, the chances are that you are talking too fast. This means that during your presentation or public speaking event you will speak even faster, making it really hard for your listeners to follow your ideas or thoughts.

There are a few ways you can bring your speech to an appropriate pace and win your audience’s attention.

Steady your breathing

As mentioned in a previous chapter, fear and nervousness that many people experience during a presentation is accompanied by physical reactions of the body such as increased heart rate, muscle tension and shallow breathing. Part of the reason why people talk faster during public events is because they run out of air and try to finish the phrase as quickly as possible. Doing this only increases the agitation and makes the voice sound squeezed and strained because they are talking from the top of their lungs with a tight throat, jaw and face.

One of the simplest ways to slow down and regain your balance during a presentation is to get your breathing under control. When you feel overly agitated or are racing through the words during your speech, pause and take a few deep breaths before continuing.

Focus on the enunciation

When we focus on pronouncing words clearly we unwillingly slow down, stop slurring and eliding syllables as we speak, which makes it much easier for our listeners to understand and process our message.

Reflect about punctuation in the speech

Oral speech, just as a written one, should include and make use of punctuation. It has to be clear to the audience where one phrase ends and the other one starts. Yet, often fast-speakers tend to ignore phrasing, not pausing for commas, hyphens, question marks and jamming the phrases together. A good way to slow down is to think of how you would express this idea in a written form and to use your speech rate to emphasize the importance of the message or create anticipation for what you are about to say.

If you feel that you might be a fast speaker, the rule of thumb is to speak at a pace that is slightly slower than what you are comfortable with.

How to pace your speech correctly?

Many people who are just starting to master the art of public speaking have a common doubt – How much information to include in the talk in order to communicate the message and fit it in the time frame allowed for each speaker?

On average the appropriate pace for a speech is around 1,000 words per seven minutes (around 140-150 words per minute). If you are writing your speech down you can quickly multiply the number of minutes that you have at your disposal by the number of words you say per minute.

For example, if you have 20 minutes to deliver a presentation, it means that your speech would involve 2,800 – 3,000 words.

$$20 \text{ minutes} \times 150 \text{ words/minute} = 3,000 \text{ words}$$

Note that more time has to be set apart for the jokes and speeches that require the audience's participation.

4.4.4 Pitch

Pitch is a placement of voice on the musical scale ranging from high to low. Usually men speak in a lower pitch (about 120 Hz) than women (220 Hz).

Research shows that low-pitch speaking voices, both for men and women are preferable to the listeners as they are associated with authority, credibility, strength and self-confidence. A great example of a low-pitch speaking voice is that of American actor James Earl Jones. Many remember him as the voice of Darth Vader in Star Wars and Simba's dad in The Lion King.

High-pitched voices, on the contrary, are less pleasant to the ears of the audience as they are perceived as less persuasive, weaker, less truthful and more nervous. Partly, this unconscious assumption holds true, as the nervousness of a speaker is often reflected in a high-pitched, "thin" or nasal sounding voice or in the habit of raising the pitch at the beginning or end of the phrase.

While there are no "golden" voice standard to fit all, voice coaches usually suggest public speakers talk at the lower end of their speaking voice to make it sound more rich and expressive.

Variation of voice pitch during the presentation

We have already mentioned that speaking in a monotone voice makes the message sound bland, unemotional and even boring.

Varying your voice in pitch during a presentation is the easiest way to:

- Avoid monotony and hold the audience's interest
- Add color and excitement to the speech
- Make certain words and ideas stand out
- Appear relaxed and confident to the listeners

When preparing your speech, it is important to identify and note the exact words or phrases that you would like to empathize and help you listeners to remember. For example, you may use a higher pitch voice for excitement and a lower pitch to add weight and seriousness to the message.

4.4.5 Volume

Volume refers to the power of loudness of your voice. It is one of the simplest areas of modulation to master by public speakers, as it often depends on the size of the audience and the settings the speech is delivered in.

Clearly, the volume of the voice should not be too high so that it looks as if you are shouting or too low, where your listeners have difficulty hearing you. However, varying the loudness of your voice during presentation can be very effective in stressing an important or dramatic point, express strong emotions or to build suspense and make people lean forward to hear what is being said.

4.5 The Power of Pause

“The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause.” - Mark Twain

As strange as it may seem to many executives and business leaders, who are accustomed to persuading and managing other people - public speaking is not just about talking in public.

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It is about listening to your audience and letting the silence talk for you.

In most cases there is no need to fill the silence with meaningless words such as “uhm”, “like”, and “you know”. Doing this only distracts the audience from what is being said and gives the impression of nervousness and lack of clarity.

Accomplished speakers are aware of this and often use the power of pause to:

- raise the impact of a remark
- bridge ideas
- underline the last thing that was said
- create anticipation for the next remark
- instill more humor and passion into the presentation
- give time for the listeners to absorb the information
- leave the room for reflection after questions

Most pauses used during public speaking can be divided in four main categories:

Short pause

Short pauses that last from half-a-second to two seconds are mainly used for separating thoughts, emphasizing the last word that was said or building anticipation for what is coming.

Spontaneity pause

A spontaneity pause is used when the speaker is searching for the right word or pretending to reflect on something. Spontaneity pauses, are not necessarily “unplanned”, but they make the speech look more natural, more polished and less rehearsed.

Long pause

Long pauses can last anywhere from three seconds to a couple of minutes and they are very powerful. They command the audience’s attention by literally creating tension in the auditorium. Long pauses should be used only by experienced public speakers who feel comfortable talking in front of large groups of people. Otherwise, they may become unnerving both for the presenter and for the listeners.

Pseudo pause

The main purpose of a pseudo pause, just like a regular pause, is to bring people's attention back to what is being said and underline the last sentence. However, instead of holding the pause the speaker repeats and stresses their last remark. Mindful repetition gives an additional moment for the listeners to really absorb and memorize the information.

While there are many tips, tricks and techniques that can be used to improve business and interpersonal communication skills, slowing down and using pauses correctly is one of the simplest ways to create an impression of professionalism and intelligence.

If you are new to public speaking it might be helpful to write your speeches fully in order to identify and effectively place the power words that should be underlined by pauses. However, with practice you will learn to instinctively speak this way which will noticeably increase the impact of your presentations.

4.6 Visual aids

They often say that a picture is worth a thousand words. Adding a visual dimension to your presentation can make it look more vivid, graphic and professional-looking. Although, not every business presentation or public speaking event should forcedly be accompanied by slide shows, graphs and pictures. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is a mere 269 words long, but it would take over 2000 pictures to transmit the same message to the audience.

When planning your public speech or your presentation you should always keep your main objective in mind.

- What is the purpose of your speech?
- What is it that you want to achieve with your performance?
- What do you want your listeners to take from your presentation?

Is your goal to motivate, empower or persuade your audience to take action? In this case you might not need to use visual aids, as your listeners already know what they should be doing. Slides of explanations, charts, graphs and pictures will not add any value to the presentation. On the contrary, doing too may actually interfere with the momentum and weaken the emotional connection established by the speaker with the audience.

On the other hand, if your goal is to help your listeners understand and remember some key points of your presentation, there is no doubt that you can benefit enormously from including some visual elements and data in your presentation.

4.6.1 Why adding visual dimension to your speech?

As mentioned previously, not every speech has to be backed up with PowerPoint presentations, statistical research graphs and videos, in order to become memorable. Yet wisely-chosen visual aids can take the speech from being "barely informative" to "utterly brilliant".

In addition some convincing scientific evidence suggests that including visual support in your presentation makes it more persuasive and easier to remember.

Psychological studies conducted in the field of education reveal a few interesting facts on how we learn and retain different types of information:

- Approximately 83% of learning occurs visually and only 11% through hearing. When it comes to analyzing and committing information to memory our mind places greater importance on visual images and not to the spoken words.
- Visual aids add impact and clarity to the presentation as they allow a speaker to appeal to more than one sense at the same time, thereby increasing the audience's understanding of abstract concepts and complex data material.
- The retention level that the listeners demonstrate three days after a public speaking event is 6 times greater when visual aids are included in the presentation rather than when they are not.

After analyzing the research findings it is safe to say that including a visual dimension to weekly business reports, product presentations and other speaking events can be beneficial in many ways, as doing so:

- Multiplies understanding of the message
- Enhances retention level of the valuable information
- Helps the audience to organize complex ideas
- Allows the speaker to gain and to maintain attention
- Helps to illustrate the sequence of events
- Allows the speaker to add humor and create excitement

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- Encourages gestures and movement on the part of the speaker that make it easier to establish a connection with the audience

Used wisely visual aids can turn into a powerful tool that helps your listeners remember your speech, while allowing you to prove, reinforce and engage in your ideas.

While poorly selected visuals or too many of them can serve as a distraction to the listeners as they bury the message and take the focus away from the presenter - i.e. YOU.

4.6.2 What are visual aids?

Once you have decided to add a visual dimension to your speech it is critical to choose visual aids that empower your message, stimulate and create an emotional response in your audience as well as work well in the physical settings of your presentation.

When public speakers talk about visual aids they usually intend one of the five communication power tools: flip charts, overhead projectors, slide shows, handouts and props.

Flip Charts

Flip charts are one of the most commonly used visual supports in business presentations for briefing smaller, more informal groups of people. As the name implies, a flip chart is a large pad of paper on an easel which allows the speaker to illustrate or write down their ideas and then simply flip the used sheet of paper and start anew. Flip charts are quick, inexpensive, portable, universally understood communication tool that does not require electricity or hi-tech knowledge.

Overhead projectors

Overhead projectors are similar in many respects to flipcharts. They are convenient, unpretentious, and can be ideal in transferring data for an audience settings of 20 to 50 people. Many smaller companies and organizations are still using overhead projectors and transparencies in meetings and team-training workshops, though, this system is being largely replaced by LCD projectors and interactive whiteboards. If you are looking to impress your audience with something more high tech, slide shows will be your best bet.

Slide shows

With the advent of computer programs like PowerPoint and Keynote it is now easier than ever to put together a professional looking slide show in just a couple of hours. A slideshow is a series of pictures, diagrams, maps and charts projected on to a screen. The main objective of a slide show is to reinforce the oral presentation and to 'sell' the message, the product or the company without being too aggressive or 'salesy'.

One of the biggest strengths of this communication tool is its universality. Whether you are presenting your idea to four hundred professionals or holding a weekly meeting for selected members of your team, you can still win greatly from weaving a slide show into your presentation.

Handouts

Handouts are printed copies of notes and slides given to the listeners during or after the presentation. Handouts are often unjustly disregarded by many speakers even though they come in very handy, especially during lengthy business presentations that contain vast amounts of facts, figures and data. Quick and inexpensive to make, handouts allow your audience to follow your presentation, gain added information and even take it home with them.

Props

A prop is an object used during the presentation to help illustrate or reinforce a point. Using a prop that relates to the content of the speech, can be an original way to create an atmosphere of surprise, draw people's attention to the speaker and help people recall the point of your speech weeks and even months after the presentation.

While all of the above-mentioned visual supports can enhance and add interest to your performance on the stage, slide shows without a doubt are the most popular and the most misused visual communication tool out there.

There are many questions that public-speakers-to-be face when they prepare their first PowerPoint or Keynote presentations – What is the best number of slides to use in the presentation? How much text to put on the slides? What size fonts to use? How much time to dedicate to each slide in order to stay on the same page with the audience?

The prominent Silicon Valley capitalist, author and entrepreneur **Guy Kawasaki** shares his Universal 10-20-30 Rule that answers most of these questions and offers valuable advice that both startup entrepreneurs and experienced business executives can benefit from.

4.6.3 10-20-30 Rule for Effective Business Presentations

After listening to hundreds of entrepreneurs trying to pitch their potential product to him, Guy Kawasaki elaborated his well known 10-20-30 Rule, designed to encourage speakers to make smarter, sharper and more successful business presentations.

Written as a formula **Guy Kawasaki's 10-20-30 Rule** looks like this:

10 slides + 20 minutes + 30 point font = effective business presentation

10 slides.

Guy Kawasaki believes 10 to be the optimal number of slides for any PowerPoint or Keynote presentation. Guy’s premise, “a normal human being cannot comprehend more than ten concepts in a meeting ... If you must use more than ten slides to explain your business, you probably don’t have a business.”

There is no need to overcomplicate your presentation with too many minor facts and details. Identify two or three main ideas you want your audience to take away from your presentation and build your speech around them.

20 minutes

Twenty minutes is the longest amount of time your business presentation or product pitch should last. This leaves you, as a speaker, anywhere from 20 seconds to 2 minutes for each slide. Try not to stay on each slide for too long, as you can quickly lose your listeners’ attention. If you have more time to deliver your speech, you might use it to interact with your audience, answer questions, and clarify some points.

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30 point font

30 point font is the smallest font size you should use on your slides. The reasons for doing so are twofold. First, using smaller font will make your message challenging to read, especially to people sitting in the back rows. Second, choosing bigger size font forces you, as a speaker, to put less text on your slides, keeping your presentation simple and preventing you from reading it.

Although, Guy Kawasaki's 10-20-30 Rule offers some valuable advice for preparing effective PowerPoint and Keynote presentation, it is important to remember that there is no universal formula that works in all public speaking settings and for every audience. Usually when preparing your presentation you should also take into consideration a few technical details such as the lighting of the room, the distance between the audience and the screen, the time of day, the quality of the projector and so on...

4.6.4 Do's and Don'ts of Visual Presentations**Do's:**

- Make sure the details of your presentation can be seen from all sides of the room. People should not exhaust their eyes to see it.
- Keep your visuals simple and clutter free. One image should demonstrate one concept or contain one message.
- Choose professional-looking images for your presentation. Spelling mistakes and poor quality images have a negative impact on your credibility and professionalism.
- Select visual aids that have relevance to your audience. Use images that your audience is familiar with.
- Keep visual aids brief. Do not spend too much time explaining each slide
- Use charts and graphs to support the presentation of numerical information.
- Use a laser pointer to direct the audience's attention to the part of an image or graphic that might not be obvious to them.

Don'ts:

- Do not turn your back to the audience when explaining your visual aids.
- Do not read from your visuals. If the audience can read what you are saying, there is no point in listening to the speech
- Do not place more than one message on each slide, as it confuses the audience
- Do not over-use color or mix different fonts
- Do not assume that your images are self-explanatory. Most visual aids should be explained and even linked to a particular story.
- Do not wave the laser pointer all over the screen as you talk. It is distracting and makes it hard to keep up with your speech.
- Do not just list the information. Make a point with each slide!

5 The Three P's of a Successful Speech

5.1 Introduction

The positive outcome of a speech does not depend solely on the oratory skills of the speaker. It is influenced by many factors such as the topic of presentation, the attitude of the audience, the quality of the material, the length of the speech and so on. Some of factors are out of the speaker's control. However, the remaining 98% of the success will depend on how well the presenter follows the Three P's:

- Preparation
- Practice
- Performance

At each of these stages public speakers should watch out for pitfalls that can trip them up.

5.2 Preparation

"Only the prepared speaker deserves to be confident." - Dale Carnegie

Here is why the most experienced public speakers never go to talk in front of an audience unprepared - they know that speech preparation is their credibility.

It is true that the success or failure of a speech becomes evident on the day of the speaking engagement. However, the outcome of the speech is largely predetermined by the weeks of preparation undertaken.

If you have not done your homework well, it will show on the day of the speech.

Just like hours of material research, preparation and planning will help you to reduce nervousness and appear more confident and more knowledgeable to your listeners. As you walk onto the podium feeling the eyes of your audience on you, you will be grateful for every bit of effort you have invested into your speech preparation.

5.3 A Vital Step before the Speech Preparation

In order to make your speech both interesting and memorable for the listeners, it is important to consider three key elements:

- The audience – WHO is the speech written for?
- The purpose – WHAT is the main objective of the speech?
- The direction of the speech – HOW will the speech be presented?

WHO: You can spend weeks researching your subject and preparing elaborate visual aids, but if you do not understand the people who will be listening to you, you will not be able to reach them. Knowing your audience – their number, age, gender, professional background and interests will give you a few valuable ideas on what to talk about and how to find the right angle for the speech that is both original and easy for your listeners to understand. Find out beforehand if the head of the company will be present? If all participants are experts in the topic? If there are people from different technological and cultural backgrounds?

WHAT: The purpose of the presentation does not end with simply delivering the information. Why are you speaking? What do you want the audience members to know, think, believe, or do as a result of your presentation? Is your goal to inspire? To entertain? To Persuade? To educate? To sell? Or to challenge old beliefs and dogmas? Identifying the main objective of the speech helps to choose the best presentation style. For example, a speech that has as its main goal to “sell” an idea to potential investors will sound differently from a speech that is designed to educate a group of employees on a new marketing strategy.

HOW: Professional speakers plan on HOW they are going to present the material before even thinking about WHAT it is that they want to say. Preparing a speech is similar to directing a movie. As a public speaker you become a director of your presentation, not just a mere actor repeating the words. There are some organizational details of the speech that need to be decided upon and brought together.

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For example, you should know if you have to prepare any handouts to give at the end of your presentation? If you want to invite another guest to talk about your product or your company? Whether or not your speech includes showing any videos or slide shows? If you want to leave time for Q&A session at the end of your speech? All these seemingly insignificant details make a huge difference in your presentation and can not be left until the last possible minute.

5.4 Finding time to Prepare Your Speech

When you are developing a new presentation set about an hour of time for each minute that you spend speaking on the stage. In other words, if your presentation lasts 20 minutes you should block off at least 20 hours for material research, presentation development, outlining of the speech and for its rehearsal. 20 hours may seem like a lot of time at first, but at the end it is the hours of preparation and continuous effort that makes the speech look effortless and spontaneous to the audience.

1 Hour of Preparation = 1 Minute of Presentation

5.5 SMART Speech Preparation

After you have learned as much as you can about your audience, their needs and speech settings, the next step is to create an amazing presentation. Easier said than done?

What ideas do you want to share with your audience? How do you make your presentation memorable? What do you start with?

All these questions in combination with a blank sheet of paper or an empty Word file can intimidate and overwhelm even the most creative and knowledgeable people.

A SMART Speech Preparation formula allows any speaker to overcome writer's block and put together a great presentation.

1. Select your material.

The information presented by a speaker can be compared to the **tip of an iceberg**. Only 20% of an iceberg is seen above water. The rest is hidden below the surface. Similar your knowledge and experience of the subject should be much greater and much deeper than what you decide to cover during your presentation.

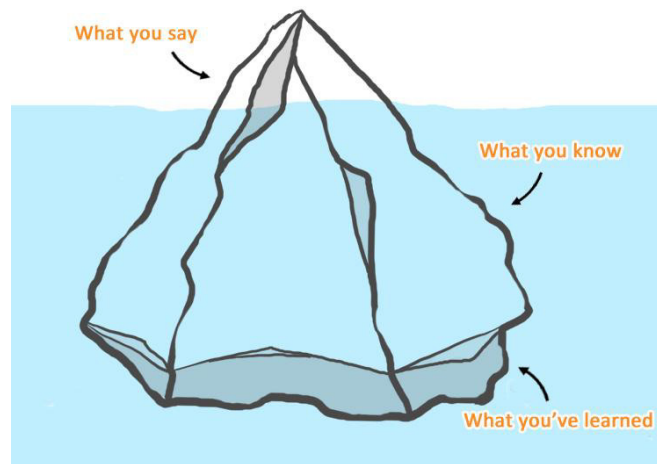
It is crucial that your listeners are not left with the impression that they know more on the subject than you do, otherwise you will quickly lose your credibility while your presentation will lose its appeal.

To make sure that this does not happen, gather as much information as possible about the topic of your speech:

- Start with what you already know. Write down all the information that might be interesting or relevant to your listeners.

- Choose 1-3 major points that you must get across to your listeners and organize your presentation around them.
- Remember, that the best speeches should leave the listeners with insights and “aha!” moments that they did not have before they went to hear you speak. Therefore, try to think ‘out of the box’ and find a unique angle from which to tackle a particular event, topic or story. This is not always easy to do, but finding an effective story angle allows you to put a spin on your speech, making it useful and captivating at the same time.
- Conduct solid research to supplement your presentation with stories, examples, interesting facts, statistical data and visual aids which should give you fresh ideas on how to make your speech even better. If you are intending to use statistics and financial data, make sure that they are meaningful, easy to understand and, above all reliable and up-to date.

Ideally, you should learn something new from your research, adding to the mass of your “iceberg” knowledge.



2. Map out an outline.

Planning a presentation or speech can be challenging, particularly if you are starting with a relatively blank sheet. Where to start? What ideas to focus on? How to make it work?

Creating an outline of the presentation could be a great starting point. An overview or an outline of the presentation allows you to organize ideas, highlight the major points, and bring together the elements of the speech in a logical sequence.

Failing to elaborate a solid outline can make the whole presentation look shaky and unconvincing.

The basic speech outline template contains 5 main elements:

- Attention grabber
- Introduction
- Body

- Conclusion
- Call-to-action

Let's look at each of these elements separately.

Attention grabber is an unusual statement, a question, a gesture, a story, a prop, or a long pause that is intended to start the presentation on a strong note, to "grab" the audience's attention and to help the speaker build confidence in the very beginning of the speech.

A challenging question "Do you think it is possible to take your company to the next level by firing yourself and going on a year long vacation?" or a powerful quote "The successful man is the one who finds out what is the matter with his business before his competitors do." (Roy L. Smith) are some of great examples to open your presentation. A phrase, "I'm delighted to be here today" is not.

Introduction is the opening part of your presentation where you state your core message, list key points that you would like to talk about in your speech, or name a problem that needs to be solved. Ideally, a well-written introduction should prepare the audience for the main part of the speech, build anticipation and answer the question "What is in it for your listeners and why should they care?" If you can not answer these two questions, you probably have not studied your audience well enough.

Body of the speech makes up around 70% to 80% of your speech. It contains the detailed explanation of the key points stated in the introduction, supports the main theory and links various concepts together.

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There are several options for structuring the elements of the presentation in an organized and logical manner. Most common ones used during business speaking events include:

- Timeline - the main points are arranged in sequential order
- Culmination - the key points are delivered in an order of increasing importance
- Cause-effect - a problem is presented, a solution is suggested and benefits are given
- Complexity - the ideas are listed parting from the broad vision to specific details

Conclusion summarizes the core message of the presentation, recaps the main points and states the main idea that has been mentioned throughout the presentation.

Conclusion should take only 5%, maximum 10% of your speech and, just as with the introduction, should end on a strong note.

Call to action is the closing punch line of the speech that leaves the audience with something to think about or empowers them to take specific action steps, be it “buying a product”, “joining your companies fan page on FaceBook” or “investing \$__ for __% of the shares”.

This 5-part outline works for a wide range of speech topics and is adaptable to most types of presentation from business briefings to conferences, from fundraisers to social events.

3. Add humor and personality

After you have mapped a clear outline of the presentation the next logical step of the SMART speech preparation is to create a written draft of your speech.

You do not have to write the whole speech, but you should definitely include the paragraphs that you do not want to forget or rephrase.

Just make sure that it does not sound like an essay or a detailed description of a scientific experiment. Whether you are explaining the confluence of multiple market dynamics on the company's profits or sharing the latest strategic decisions with your team, let your personality, your opinions and even your sense of humor shine through your speech.

The advice that the famous author, speaker and founder of Authentic Jobs Inc. - Cameron Moll gives everyone who wants to master the art of public speaking - is to entertain and provide the meaty content to the listeners.

He states:

“Your primary responsibility is to entertain a room full of people. This doesn’t necessarily equate to jokes and magic tricks, but it does mean that the content of your presentation, and the delivery of that content, should be compelling and engaging. Keeping the audience’s eyes on you rather than their laptops benefits both you and the audience.”

Keep that in mind when writing your presentation. Write as if you had to speak to just one person in the audience, not a faceless mass of people.

Avoid hype, big words and corporate talk for something genuine and meaningful. Your listeners should feel that you are talking to them, not at them.

4. Revise your speech

After you have finished the draft of your speech, think of how it can be improved even further.

- Consider making your sentences shorter, especially the ones loaded with emotional content, e.g. “Failure is not an option”, “No excuses”, “If not us – who? If not now - when?”, “Period.” Doing this will not only make your message more powerful and easier to understand, but also creates more pause-and-breathe opportunities.
- For longer sentences consider putting the main verb early. For example, instead of saying “When we have all the facts and the rest of the marketing research data we will make a decision” say, “We will make a decision after we have all the facts and the rest of the marketing research data”
- Use memorable adjectives and adverbs to make your speech more powerful. There is a difference between stating “Our organization faces many challenges” and saying “Our organization faces many exciting challenges”. The first sentence is impersonal, the second reflects your attitude and invites your listeners to look at the situation from a different perspective.
- Add strategically placed pauses for impact.
- Repeat the key idea over and over again throughout your presentation. It helps your listeners to remember it and allows you to tie your main concepts together. The repetition technique has been widely used by many public speakers including Martin Luther King in his speech “I have a dream” as well as Barack Obama in his speech following the 2008 New Hampshire primary, where he repeatedly used the phrase, “Yes we can”
- If possible incorporate stories into your speech. Even if you are giving a serious talk in front of a large group of professionals, it does not mean that your speech should sound flat and business-like. An inspirational story or a metaphor to demonstrate your point can go a long way in making your speech memorable and interesting.

- Include questions, phrases and stories that allow you to interact with your audience and establish an emotional connection with them. A great way to promote interaction with your audience is to ask them a question that they can relate to. One of the most common questions formula used by most successful public speakers is asking “Who has ever been/felt/did ..., raise your hand!” while raising their hand as well.

5. Tie loose ends together.

Make sure that the ends of your speech are tied together, that you start and end with a strong statement, that your introduction is consistent with your conclusion, and that your visual aids are coherent and support your main ideas.

To Summarize:

A well-structured speech consists of a core message, supported by clear major points that are, in turn, explained further by adding relevant details and examples. If you decide to add a visual dimension to the presentation, your visual aids should enhance your presentation, not distract from it.

You can use the table below to double-check that you have done everything and to make sure that your presentation flows smoothly and all of its elements are tied together in a logical and meaningful way.

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Main ideas	Supporting ideas	Details & Examples	Visuals
What are your main points and ideas?	What will you tell the audience to support your main points?	What details or examples do you have?	Will you have any visuals to help explain your points?

5.6 Practice

“If I don’t practice the way I should, I won’t play the way that I know I can.” - Ivan Lendl

Public speaking, just as any other skill, requires constant practice in order to be improved. The more you talk in public, the more you train your mind and body to recognize speaking as a familiar and safe situation, the more confident you will feel in the spotlight.

As paradoxically as it may sound, practicing your speech ten, twenty and even thirty times before the actual speaking engagement is what will make your presentation look a lot more spontaneous, natural and effortless. Of course, practice alone will not necessarily make your performance stress-free, but practicing your speech at least a couple of times before the presentation holds 3 Significant Benefits:

- It allows you to discover awkward phrases and tongue-twisters that are hard to notice when you first write your speech.
- It reduces nervousness and helps to transform anxiety into excitement on the day of the presentation.
- It helps you to gauge your timing.

5.6.1 Practice alone

Before practicing your speech it might be a good idea to prepare **“cue” cards** or your cheat sheets that you will use during the presentation. The cue cards may contain the high-level speech elements mentioned in your outline, as well as transition phrases, key words, statistic data or punch lines that you want to share with your audience.

After you have your cue cards – you can start practicing your speech. Find a place where you will not be distracted by anything or anyone, close the door, turn your cell phone off and concentrate solely on your speech. As you practice, pay particular attention to the transition between sections and slides so that your presentation flows smoothly. An audience struggles to follow a speech, when a speaker loses their train of thought or jumps from one idea to another.

Many public speaking books advise new speakers practice in front of a mirror. Research suggests that this may not be as helpful as people often become distracted by how they look and lose their ability to stay focused on the content of the speech and the listeners.

The only case when practicing your speech in front of the mirror could be beneficial is when you want to 'polish' your body language and gestures for the presentation.

5.6.2 Practice in front of other people

Speaking in front of a small and supportive group of friends and family members can be the next step to overcoming stage fright and to train your mind to associate speaking in public with a positive experience, rather than a frightening one.

Always seek feedback from your audience at the end of a presentation. Ask for their opinion on topics such as:

- How convincing and intelligible your speaking was
- How interesting, useful and clear different parts of your presentation were
- How well you answered questions at the end of your speech
- What was their overall impression of your performance

Listen objectively to the feedback. Do not take any suggestions or observations as personal criticism. Instead seek ways to enhance your presentation and improve your performance.

5.6.3 Do the final dress rehearsal

The environment you are to speak in can have a huge part to play in shaping the final presentation of your speech. If it is possible try practicing at least once in the actual auditorium where the presentation will take place. Walk on the stage, consider where you will be in relation to the audience, test the required audio-visual components, note if your presentation is visible from all parts of the room. Then go all the way through your presentation without stopping.

Being familiar with your environment and having all the technological aids ready and tested will mean one less problem to worry about on the day of your public speaking event.

Some of the points to consider when rehearsing your presentation:

- Will your audience be able to see your presentation easily?
- Will you have to use a microphone or not?
- Is there a place to put your notes?
- What electronic devices are provided (e.g. LCD projector, screen, microphone) and what do you have to bring with you?

Many fully prepared speeches fail because insufficient thought has gone into where they are to take place.

5.6.4 Other Opportunities to Practice

There is no need to wait for an occasion to speak publically in order to hone your public speaking skills. Clubs such as Toastmasters International, Association of Speakers Clubs (ASC), Rostrum, International Training in Communication (ITC), Speaking Circles, or POWER talk International offer their members an opportunity to learn the art of public speaking by observation, practice, and through completing a number of effective exercises.

5.7 Performance

“If something can go wrong it will.” - Murphy’s law

When getting ready for your speech, become a long-term optimist and a short-term pessimist. Believe in your heart that your presentation will go wonderfully and that the audience will love it, but prepare yourself for little slips, unexpected technical troubles, and other problems that may arise on the day of your performance.

Plan your presentation keeping in mind every micro detail that could go wrong and finding effective solutions to either prevent or resolve it.

Leave the house early, to avoid traffic. Check your computer and LCD projector ahead of time. Think of unexpected and challenging questions that you could be asked during your presentation. Avoid eating a heavy meal or drinking coffee before the presentation, as doing so affects your vocal cords and your energy level.

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Here are some tips that will allow you to improve your performance even more:

- **Relax before you get up to talk.** Remember to stop and take a few deep breaths to slow down your heart rate and reduce muscle tension. Feel your feet on the floor. Gently roll your shoulders back. This opens your chest, drops your shoulders, opens your throat, releasing tension and making you look more confident.
- **Greet your audience with a smile.** Even if the topic of your business presentation is a serious one, you can still greet your listeners with a genuine, welcoming smile to win their favor and regain your confidence.
- **Do not rush through your presentation.** Give your listeners time to absorb your concepts and key ideas.
- **Make yourself be heard.** Speak to the person sitting farthest away from you so that your speech can be easily heard by everyone in the room.
- **Face your audience at all times.** In presentations where visuals are used avoid turning your back to the listeners and looking at the slides too much. The audience is the focal point of your speech. Visuals are merely a tool to convey a message. Besides, speaking towards the screen or the wall makes it hard for your listeners to hear you.
- **Talk to people, not at them.** Find a few people that you know in the audience and imagine yourself talk directly to them. Shift your gaze through your audience and as you feel more confident, establish eye contact with other listeners as well.
- **Claim attention.** The attention span of an average person lasts about 5-10 minutes. It is the task of the speaker to keep the listeners focused on the presentation by bringing their attention back through fluctuation of the voice, storytelling, questions, and body language.
- **Do not stick your hands in your pockets,** hook your thumbs under your belt, or engage in other creative diversions as you speak.
- **Do not introduce a topic with** “Just real quick,” “Briefly,” or similar words. The subconscious message that your audience receives is “this isn’t really important or relevant, but I’m going to inflict it on you anyway.”
- **Answer any questions as succinctly and briefly as possible.** Not everyone may be interested in this specific question.
- **Do not diminish or underestimate your audience.** Even if you are a world-known expert in your area of expertise, it is still not a good idea to use phrases like “this is probably new to you” or “you probably don’t know what this means,” unless you are sharing ground breaking news that nobody has heard of.
- **Wrap up your talk on time.** People rarely want to listen to someone, who talks longer than was expected. Therefore, assign to a person that you know the task of giving you time cues, indicating when you have ten minutes left, five minutes, two minutes and when you should stop talking.
- **Never apologize for anything:** be it your presentation, your accent or your lack of knowledge in certain areas or your mistakes. You will quickly lose your credibility.
- **Be flexible.** Organize your business presentation and know it well enough to have the flexibility to skip certain parts or expand on others depending on the circumstances and non-verbal cues that you receive from your audience.
- **Be your best self.** Too often, people giving business presentations believe that to look professionally they need to act or speak in a certain way, a stiff way. There is a huge difference between being professional and being downright boring. People came to listen to YOU, so let your personality shine through. Share something real about yourself, either in words or delivery, which connects you to your listeners.

- **Have fun.** If a speaker is relaxed and enjoying every moment of their speech, it will make the speech much more enjoyable for the audience as well.
- **Connect with people after the presentation.** At the end of the speech, instead of recoiling backstage and doing a vicious deconstruction of every little mistake made during the presentation, continue to be fully present with your listeners. Talk to people, answer questions, accept invitations, exchange business cards, network and so on.

Analyze your performance the day after your presentation.

Approach your business presentation with calm clarity and some take time to reflect:

- How effectively did you handle nervous tension during your presentation?
- What technique(s) has helped you the most?
- When did your listeners appear more engaged with your talk?
- What ideas, images, and stories did they compliment on after the presentation?
- When were you most engaged with your listeners?
- How might you deliver the same presentation again based on what you now know?

Becoming a great public speaker, feeling at ease with the audience, controlling your body language and delivering killer business presentations takes some time. Of course, it would be much easier to just speak with one person at a time. However, in every business area, there comes a time to promote, influence, inspire, persuade or make a good impression on a much larger scale than the safety of a coffee nook. As you have learned from this book, speaking in public does not have to be something we should avoid at all costs.

With some creativity, intelligent planning and consistent practice absolutely ANYONE can become a brilliant public speaker.

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