
Public speaking

A discussion about giving talks

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Glossophobia - The fear of public speaking

The Greeks and the Romans knew and taught this stuff ...

- Oratory
- Rhetoric
- Style
- Content



Demosthenes

Cicero

Why is public speaking worth doing ?

- You'll improve how you communicate with clients
- You'll learn something yourself, every time
- It can help to build your reputation
- It can be fun

Some key points

- Know what you're there to do
- Understand and care about your subject
- Have something interesting and useful to say
- You're sharing information, not selling
- Involve the audience

It's storytelling

- It's the way that you tell it
- A good introduction by the organiser really helps
- Talk to people as individuals
- Make eye contact
- Move around

Communication

- Voice
- Gesture
- Appearance
- Pace
- Movement
- Use of language

Getting your points across

- Tell stories
- Use examples
- Bring it to life
- Make people think
- Get discussion going

Being organised

- Structure
- Clarity
- Flow
- Timing
- Preparation

Please don't ...

- ... try to bluff your way through. If you don't know, say so.
- ... read your slides or notes to the audience
- ... look back at your slides or look down at your notes
- ... have a “wardrobe malfunction”

Slides & notes

- During the talk – gives structure
- After the talk – gives further information
- How will people make notes ?
- Electronic tools: tablets, projection systems, etc.

- *Graphics tablet with pen*
- *Whiteboard / screen sharing / meeting software*

Practical stuff

- Get there early
- Have you everything you need ? Water, microphone, etc.
- Check that everything works well in advance
- Clothes – be comfortable and “fit in”
- Warm up by talking to people beforehand

Dealing with the organisers and venue

- Agree who's responsible for what
- Agree the title, synopsis, speaker bio. and introduction
- Advertise it as early as you can
- Agree how it will be publicised and followed up afterwards
- Use the minimum necessary equipment and adapt to what's available at the venue

Public speaking

Enjoy it and have some fun along the way

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Notes for speakers:

Public speaking is one of the key things that can really help you and your business. It's useful to practice as much as you can in a 'safe environment'. It's a good idea to go to several sessions and speak regularly, then you will improve rapidly and become used to it.

First - you must have something to say which is interesting, useful and that people are prepared to listen to. I've seen too many people wanting to make a career of being a "speaker", but haven't anything much to actually talk about!

Second - it's storytelling. You're generally teaching or explaining things in one form or another, using stories and events as examples to illustrate the points you're trying to get across.

Third - learn to speak slowly and vary the pitch / volume / tone of your voice and to control your breathing. That's where most people fall apart, especially at first. Being nervous makes it all rather difficult. In big spaces, radio microphones are great, but don't leave them on when you go to the loo (and, yes, I've heard it done)!

Fourth - Slides are there for structure to help you and the audience, or (worse) for you to read to them. They need to be clear and simple, not densely packed.

Fifth - walk around, make eye contact, talk to individuals within the audience, try not to see the whole audience, especially in a big space. Treat it a bit like chatting to friends in a bar and giving advice.

Sixth - answer questions and never, ever, try to bluff your way through. If you don't know - say so. Someone else will be only too pleased to demonstrate their knowledge to your discomfort - so use that to your advantage and facilitate discussion, then close it gently and move on. Come back to difficult people or points at the end and deal with them individually without getting the main flow disrupted and losing everyone.

Seventh - Try to 'fit in' with your audience - be a bit more smartly dressed than they are, but don't overdo it or underdo it. Being the only person in a business suit with tie with an audience full of people in jeans and t-shirts doesn't generally work, but a nice shirt with decent jeans would work. Sometimes you can choose to be very different, but it's a case of judging it - for example in the USA recently I chose to be 'the Brit abroad' at a big event, so I was in suit & tie and it worked, because that's what they expected of a Brit.

If you can, find someone who you think is quite good and whose style and subject areas you like, then talk to them and ask for advice. Most people will help if only you ask them nicely and thank them properly afterwards. My friend Gerald is a firm

believer in the Sir John Harvey-Jones school of thinking - an unexpected case of wine or something as a token of genuine appreciation is always well received.

I've done a reasonable amount of public speaking now and I've learned to enjoy it. I really like teaching and explaining things and I always learn something from trying different ways to get points across. There's another important point - if someone doesn't "get it" - it'll be your problem, not theirs, because you've not found a way to explain things in a way they can understand.

Go for it. Enjoy it. Public speaking in an educational way can be a useful way to find projects - most of the interesting stuff I've been involved with has come about as a result of people I've met or come to know better as a result of giving talks and so on at various events. It can be a lot of fun and can really help you professionally.

If you get the chance - have someone video you and then see what it looks like. It's quite a salutary experience.

Something else I discovered is that doing a 'video podcast' or webinar is very different to a live audience. There's no-one visible to 'bounce off', so you need to be a lot clearer in your own mind about the structure and flow. What helps is having someone else involved who knows the subject matter gathering up the incoming questions, filtering them, then interrupting your audio flow to ask the questions, almost interview-style. The other thing with non-live video is that you can always redo it - the editing suite is extremely useful!

As an example of someone who's truly brilliant at teaching 'live', watch Richard Feynman (known as "the great explainer") giving lectures on physics: <http://research.microsoft.com/apps/tools/tuva/index.html#data=3%7C%7C%7C>. You can see why he has the reputation he has and why he received all those prizes and awards. Wonderful stuff.

If you become interested in learning more, there's Toastmasters (I've been once to one in the USA as a guest - very good it was too). There's the Professional Speakers Association (I went a couple of times to a local group that's now folded, but I hear good things about them as an organisation to help people with public speaking).

There are many organisations, clubs, business and industry networking events who need speakers, all of which give you the opportunity to practice in one form or another.

Give it a go!

Cheers, Colin.

Notes for organisers:

Here's some additional thoughts based on my experiences about organising events at which you have a speaker:

- analogue clock on back wall facing speaker (to see how time is going while talking)
- or even a countdown timer on an iPad

- display on back wall or monitor on floor near front centre facing speaker (to see your slides while talking without taking your eyes away from the audience)

- radio microphone with fully charged batteries and a spare set to hand, plus spare radio microphone for use by introducer / others.

- portable microphone for audience questions if appropriate for the venue

- space to walk around without tripping over the audience or your own stuff

- bottle of water (no ice) and sensible sized glass to drink from. Keep it away from your laptop and have a clutter-free space so as not to knock it over.

- desk space for laptop + other odds & ends (eg: graphics tablet) + power extension + country adapters if needed

- remember to disable screen saver and other stuff (WiFi, Skype, firewall, virus scans, etc. popups) on the laptop

- chair for speaker by desk (eg: when using graphics tablet, or [in my case] when my hip replacement plays up)

- secure storage for speaker's stuff (bags etc.), preferably out of sight of the audience. Don't forget that many speakers will want to take their wallet, phone, car keys etc. out of their pockets and put them somewhere else. Be wary of people wandering around that area when there's a break or afterwards. Make sure there's a person keeping an eye on things, especially the speaker's things!

- test audio setup in advance

- check that sound is audible throughout room

- test video setup in advance

- ask speaker first if you wish to record it and let them review it prior to publishing it.

- check that displays are visible throughout room

- check hand-held remote control (and have spare batteries to hand)

- tell speaker how camera setup etc. works and how much to move about if it's being recorded
- any special software or other requirements? (eg: use host laptop, not speakers own; need for additional software; etc.)
- does speaker wish to play a video as part of presentation? If so, check that audio quality and video resolution are good enough to be projected.
- does speaker wish (or need) to access the Internet (eg: demos, access to remote equipment etc.)? If so, check wired/wireless connection. If not available, then let speaker know well in advance so that they can make alternative arrangements (eg: use WiFi hotspot and cellphone with 3G or 4G connection)
- advise speaker to send slides in advance (as backup) and have them on a USB flash drive.
- have the slides in both PowerPoint and Adobe PDF format. Only make them available on the web in PDF format. That also (conveniently) reduces the risk of overly complex slides and transitions.
- have a fall-back plan if the host machine fails and the speaker's system is not able/allowed to connect to your system/network
- does the projector require specific screen formats or cable access? - many speakers now carry various screen/pc/tablet formats and not all projectors can adapt (especially if using Apple stuff or tablet stuff that needs special adapters)
- brief CV / intro from speaker agreed with whoever's doing the introducing
- agree with the speaker well in advance the details of how long the talk is expected to run for, plus questions.
- agree with the speaker well in advance the details of what is appropriate (and more importantly what is not appropriate) for the speaker to hand out to audience members (eg: marketing brochures, business cards, etc.). Depends on the talk / location / host organisation / etc. Many "user group" style organisations (and audiences) do not like marketing stuff.
- agree with the speaker well in advance how the material will be published (paper hand-outs on the day, PDFs afterwards, etc.). Some audience members like to have the PDFs in advance of the talk to annotate them during the talk, especially for talks with a high degree of technical and complex content. Acrobat Reader allows you to makes notes - a useful technique.
- ask how the speaker wants to handle questions and make sure that the introducer tells the audience

- the introducer needs to explain the basic stuff as well (fire escape routes, toilet locations, "turn cellphones off now", etc.)
- give the speaker some idea of who the audience is and what their backgrounds are
- tell the speaker who the key people to interact with are (committee members, organisers, etc.) and make sure that they talk to the speaker in advance
- welcome the speaker when they arrive and check that they have everything they need
- thank them at the end. If you're going to give them something, do check with them first, just in case it turns out that they're teetotal, or don't feel they can accept anything, or would prefer you to make a donation to some charity, or whatever.
- make sure that the security staff know that the speaker is expected. It's often the speaker's first contact with your organisation, so it needs to go well. Book a parking space, send a map, organise a taxi, organise a hotel, whatever is needed. Also let them know if they need to pay or if it is being covered by the organiser. It's vitally important to be clear and save confusion on the day. It all makes a big difference to how the speaker feels, which affects how they perform.
- agree with the speaker how to publish the slides, recording etc. afterwards - and how the audience will be notified that the materials are available (eg: LinkedIn group, e-mail list, etc.).