



Speak Up!

Tips for a Successful Presentation

Everyone feels nervous before speaking in public, so it's no surprise that you might feel that way, too. But even if you're sweating, blushing, breathing faster, and feeling butterflies in your stomach, there are some simple techniques to reduce speaker's anxiety and make a terrific presentation.

Know Your Topic. Read and reread your materials. Make sure you're comfortable with the information you're presenting. Knowing your facts cold is a great way to feel at ease in front of a group.

Rehearse. Practice your presentation several times. Rehearse in front of a friend or family member or in front of a mirror. Consider making an audio or videotape of your presentation so you know how you will look and sound to your audience. Practicing your speech will also help you find natural places to pause and take a breath. If you can't find them, look at the text: have you varied the length of your sentences, or is your speech full of long-winded run-ons?

Relax. Here are two simple relaxation techniques to calm your body and mind.

Breathing: Take a slow deep breath. Inhale through your nose; expand your abdomen by filling it up with air. Exhale slowly out of your mouth. Repeat three times.

Muscle Relaxation: Flex your toes and count to 3. Release. Moving up the body, flex your calf muscles and count to 3. Release. Continue moving up the body and repeat the same technique with your buttocks, chest, arms, and hands.

Be Aware of Body Language. When it's your turn to present, be sure to face your audience; turning your back even a little will make it difficult for them to hear you. If you're using visuals like a poster or a slide show, stand to the side so your audience can see them and you at the same time. Stand up straight and keep your hands at your sides. Do NOT slouch and put your hands in your pockets; that tells your audience that you don't care about your presentation and they shouldn't either.

Speak Clearly. We rarely think about how we speak, but here are a few elements of public speech to consider.

Volume: Don't yell and don't mumble. The students at the back of the room need to hear you, but you don't want to blast those sitting in the front row.

Speed: It's natural to talk fast when you're making a presentation because you want to get it over with quickly. But your audience won't be able to understand you if you're zipping through your speech. Take your time and remember to take a pause now and then.

Pitch: Talk like you would talk with your friends, letting your voice rise and fall naturally. Don't drone on in a monotone.

Make Eye Contact. Look at your audience while speaking. Scan the room from side to side and front to back. Staring at one place the whole time will cause you to lose your audience's attention.

Knock 'Em Dead! Now that you know all the tricks and have practiced your presentation, you're sure to do a great job!