



SOCIAL MARKETING TA TEAM

Pointers for Public Speakers

Set the stage by sharing information about yourself up front. This personalizes you to the audience and helps them feel that they know you. No matter how long you are speaking, the introduction should be 15 percent of your speech, the discussion about 75 percent, and the closing 10 percent.

Understand what is culturally appropriate for your audience. This will allow you to make the most effective presentation.

- **Practice, practice, practice.** If possible, spend time alone just prior to your speech; take some deep breaths and think about your central theme. Avoid practicing in a mirror; it leads to overcorrecting of natural gestures and facial expressions.
- **Body language.** A picture is worth a thousand words. Defensive, negative body language is communicated through crossed arms, a “fig leaf” stance, or a military stance. Positive body language is seen through openness, gestures, moving away from the podium, and taking off your jacket, if appropriate.
- **Eye contact.** The reason you maintain eye contact with your audience is for feedback and to make your story more personal. One way you’ll know if your audience is getting the message is through eye contact. Look for eyes following you and heads nodding with you.
- **Smiling.** Does your face say you are approachable? It does if you smile at appropriate times.
- **Facial expression.** It is impossible to hide your feelings when you talk about something you really care about. The kind of passion people feel and exhibit when they talk about their loved ones, their mate, or their children is the same passion that should be harnessed when talking about your issues. That kind of passion gives off energy, and energy makes you convincing.
- **Gestures.** Gestures help tell the story. Remember, 50 percent of what people retain is through your body language. Gestures reinforce and highlight your story and add energy to your delivery.
- **Humor.** Jokes and anecdotes make for an entertaining speech, but make sure you practice them. Choose material carefully, and never tell “off-color” or possibly offensive jokes.
- **Voice.** You have six different octaves—use them. Never try to camouflage a regional dialect. Tell people where you’re from and they’ll expect you to sound the way you do.
- **Pauses/silence.** There are four good times to pause: 1) when you move from one subject to another; 2) when you want the message to sink in; 3) when you need to collect your thoughts; and 4) when you receive laughter or applause.
- **Avoid distractions.** Don’t fiddle with your hair, shuffle your feet, sway back and forth, jingle change in your pockets, play with your eyeglasses, or make other possibly distracting movements.
- **Don’t use the podium as a crutch.** In fact, don’t use the podium at all if you can help it. Let your gestures and body language tell your story, and give your audience a refreshing break from the other speakers who may have spoken exclusively from behind the podium.
- **Take time to focus before you start to speak.** Most of us feel we have to immediately say something to our listeners. The audience needs and wants a little time to visually process a new speaker. If you start too soon, they will feel anxious and rushed and may initially tune you out.
- **Talk with—not at—your listeners.** Think of your audience as individuals, not a large, impersonal group.

Don’t forget that being nervous is normal. Try to reframe your fear into excitement and enthusiasm. Remember, you are the expert on your own story. People have come to hear you talk about what you know.

