

General Speaking Guidelines-Do's / Don'ts / Language

Public speaking can be fun and it can be difficult. Here are a number of basic tips to help you sound right, build your credibility, and increase your level of persuasion. Courtesy of changingminds.org (the main point on each line is clickable for additional detail).

What TO Do:

Use the Emerging Speakers Bureau as a place to practice these tips, making your presentations stronger as you become a more persuasive speaker.

- [Approach on Key Points](#): Move forward to emphasize.
- [Be Conversational](#): Like you're talking to one person.
- [Bite-sized Chunks](#): Break it up. Make it digestible.
- [Breathe](#): Breathe deeply and slowly.
- [Control Your Speed](#): Don't rush. Pause for impact.
- [Eyeballing Individuals](#): Address individuals.
- [Forget Yourself](#): Get into the flow.
- [Getting Applause](#): Help them put their hands together.
- [Go with the Flow](#): Flex to your audience.
- [Handling Questions](#): Engaging and answering.
- [Hushing](#): Ways to quieten them.
- [Keep It Simple](#): Seek to inform, not impress.
- [Listen to the Audience](#): Verbally and visually.
- [Look Around](#): Use eye contact.
- [Lower and Slower](#): To be credible and heard.
- [Managing Attention](#): At any time, to get and keep them listening.
- [Managing Mistakes](#): Do it with integrity.
- [Memorize Key Points](#): Remember the start, end and important bits.
- [Think Generously](#): Think well of everyone.
- [Reference Other Speakers](#): Integrate what other speakers have said.
- [Repeat Key Phrase](#): Emphasize through pattern.

- Set the Tone: Create a consistent feeling.
- Short Pauses: Like normal speech.
- Show You Care: With passion, conviction, concern.
- Speak Expressively: with variation, to sustain engagement.
- Signpost: Words that show the way ahead.
- Smile at Your Audience: Prompt their happiness.
- Speaking don'ts: What not to do.
- Transitioning: Closing current and opening new section.
- Use Sensory Language: Appeal to every sense.
- Use Technology: Supporting, not featuring.
- Using Your Body: Your body speaks, so make it say the right thing.
- Using Your Voice: How you sound is important.
- Using Flipcharts: Can be good, if done well.
- Using Questions: Make them think.
- Using Props: Use physical artefacts.
- Voice Roll: The moving cadence of speech.
- Watch the Audience: See their emotional state.
- Working the Diagonals: Eyeballing many at once.
- Walking On Stage: Arrive with confidence.

What Not to Do:

Here is some advice on what not to do when you are speaking in public or making presentations. **Your goal is to minimize the distractions, so people focus intently on you, your topic, and your message – to drive connection and impact.**

Don't read

Don't read things out to the audience. This means you should not read a written speech, although some who speak a lot (and long) such as politicians resort to autocues and other 'cheats'.

When you display slides you should not just read out the words--the audience can read this themselves. In fact when you put up slides with words on it is often best to pause to allow the audience to read the words (which they will do anyway, ignoring what you are saying).

Reading things out is disrespectful of your audience. It says 'You are so unimportant to me I did not learn the words'.

Don't ignore them

If you act as if the audience is not there, for example by talking to the back wall or generally with de-focused eyes, you are telling them that they are not worthy of your attention. Some speakers do this to avoid the discomfort they feel when being watched (which is often based on a fear of being judged). A few actually do feel too superior to acknowledge them and look around as if there are more interesting other things to look at.

Turning your back on audience is also disrespectful. It generally says 'You are so unimportant I can ignore you'. This can be done by accident when you turn to point at the screen behind you (this also makes you much harder to hear).

Don't slouch

A generally useful rule when speaking is to stand straight up and keep your hands out of your pockets. Hands are useful in presentations to communicate with larger gestures so those at the back get the message too.

There are some contexts where being casual is acceptable and maybe even desirable, such as at 'geek conferences', although even these have an intense desire for sharp content.

Don't um

We have a tendency to fill the gaps between phrases and sentences when we are thinking of what to say next with words and sounds like 'um', 'ah' and 'er'. This makes you sound uncertain and also makes it more difficult for your audience to understand you.

A purpose of 'ums' in conversation is to send a signal to others who might interject that you are still talking. This is not needed in public speaking as nobody is going to interrupt you.

(NOTE: this is tolerated / forgiven when you are likeable, relatable, relevant, on point)

Don't twitch

When you are nervous, this often comes out in sudden gestures and whole-body twitches. You should not look like a marionette being controlled by a poor

puppeteer as this conveys your nervousness and either makes the audience empathetically nervous too or exasperated at your lack of control.

Also avoid 'verbal twitching', such as making clicks, little coughs, lip-smacking, clearing the throat, nervous laughs, biting the lip and so on.

The best way to avoid twitching is be relaxed, and there are ways you can help this before you start. If you are still jumpy, do try to control yourself. Force yourself to stand in one position by 'planting' yourself, rather than dancing around with 'happy feet'. Hold your arms steady or slow them down rather than doing a 'windmill'.

Don't hurry

When you are nervous, a reaction can be to speed up, subconsciously trying to get to the end sooner. When you talk quickly, though, it is more likely that people in your audience will miss what you say and so become lost (and hence annoyed).

If you are conveying complex ideas, then people need time to digest them. You understand them already so may not feel the need to slow down, but the general rule is to 'talk at the speed of understanding'.

If you have slides containing text, people will try to read them. If you remove the slides before the people have finished, this will likely irritate them. One secret is to use less words. Another is to give plenty of time for the slower people to read carefully.

Don't dawdle

The opposite of hurrying is dawdling, talking slowly and casually as if you have all the time in the world. This is likely to bore people who want value from you and do not like wasting their time.

A classic method of dawdling is the digression or side comment. If you go off-topic, do so only briefly and do not ramble away about things that interest you but just leave your audience yawning.

Don't apologize

Generally avoid apology and particular when it just makes you look incompetent and uncaring. For example you should never start with something like 'Sorry but I didn't have time to fully prepare' as this tells your audience that they are unimportant to you.

If you say something that is incorrect and especially if this is pointed out by someone, then it certainly is appropriate to apologize, but in such cases do so clearly and briefly. Blustering on when you are clearly wrong only makes you look foolish.

Don't show disrespect

Always, always be respectful of your audience, even if they are rude, stupid or uncaring. First, be well-prepared. Then speak to them, not at them. Talk with authority, but not arrogance. And listen carefully to any comments you receive. If people criticize you, even personally, do not descend into a slanging-match as you are the person who will look bad, even if you did not start it. Take the high ground. Respect their views and their right to hold them, even if you disagree profoundly with them. Ignore personal criticism. Don't lie. If you don't know, say so (and maybe promise to find out).

Language to Persuade:

All use of language can act to persuade, and there are many other pages in the language section of this site that include persuasive elements. This page adds more focused and specific techniques to change the minds of other people.

- [Assumptive Adverb Opener](#): Obviously, it works.
- [Connection Language](#): Attaching and pushing away.
- [Experiential Language](#): Talk about real experience.
- [Final Impact](#): Put the impact at the end of the sentence.
- [Future Language](#): Using the future in persuasion.
- [Hidden Commands](#): Burying commands in sentences.
- [The Hook](#): Grabbing them.
- [Intensifiers](#): increasing the emotional impact of a statement.
- [Money Words](#): Appeal to greed.
- [Object Focus](#): Focus on the object and let the subject slip by.
- [Perceptual language](#): What you perceive, not what is.
- [Possibility Language](#): Talking about what could be.
- [Power Words](#): Words that have special meaning.
- [The Power of Abbreviation](#): Short but powerful.

- Pre-apology: Sorry, but...
- Pre-excusing: This may not work, but ...
- Pre-thanking: Thank you for...
- Pronoun Language: I, you and so on add power.
- Punch Words: Words with impact.
- Sensory Language: Language that evokes senses.
- Short Sentences: Like this. That work. Of course.
- Superiority Words: That grab status.
- Temporal Language: Changing time and hence meaning.
- Trivializing Words: Deflating what others say.
- Using Pauses: Adding power with very largely nothing.

Source / Credit:

http://changingminds.org/techniques/speaking/speaking_tips/

<http://changingminds.org/techniques/language/persuasive/>

<http://changingminds.org/techniques/techniques.htm>

(When you have time – there is a plethora of valuable information here to help you on your Emerging Speaker journey. If you need coaching, guidance, or assistance, just reach out. If you are not a member of the Emerging Speakers Bureau, [consider joining](#)).

RESOURCES:

Changingminds.org
Persuasion / Psychology of Influence
Made to Stick
How to Win Friends and Influence People