

Public Speaking Tips

Be confident!

- Eye contact is vital. Make sure that you engage members of the audience, regardless of how many people there are. Look at different people in different places in the room, momentarily making eye contact with individuals. This is why it is so important to know your topic well. It isn't a problem if you have to look down occasionally, but if your eyes are locked on the paper, your audience will lose interest fairly quickly.
- Look comfortable in your posture. If you are at a podium, you have a bit more freedom than if you are simply standing, but in any case, you should avoid distracting your audience with your body language and movement.
- Use your hands to emphasise points, but otherwise keep them still. If you are not at a podium, keep them at your side as much as possible. Try not to fiddle with anything on the podium in front of you.
- Emphasise important ideas by changing the rate and tone of your speaking. The human voice is an amazing instrument - make sure that you use it to your benefit.

Visual aids & Handouts

You should use visual aids to help present your talk whenever possible. This is because they are a powerful means of assisting communication. Sight, not hearing, is by far the most powerful of the senses for absorbing information - hence the saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words." If you can convey your ideas in pictorial or diagrammatic form, that is ideal, but a neat and clear list of words or phrases can help also.

Discussing electoral reform sometimes involves quoting statistics. These are more easily absorbed if they are presented visually as well as orally.

A well-chosen visual aid assists communication by:

- helping the audience to understand
- helping the audience to recall information after it has been presented
- creating interest in the subject matter

The wrong visual aid, badly used, can be a distraction rather than a help. Here is some simple advice that will help you to make the most of the opportunity you have for using visual aids.

PowerPoint (.ppt) Presentations or Flip-Charts

- **Designing and maintaining your visual aids.** Make it as simple and bold as you can. Headings are much more effective than full sentences - you will, in any case, explain them as you talk. If the visual aid consists of so much text that it has to be read out loud to the audience, then it would probably be better as a handout.
A diagram, a pie chart, a bar chart or a drawing are more interesting, visually, than straight text and the use of colour can also add interest, even if it is no more than drawing a box in red around a key phrase.
- **Selecting your visual aids.** Don't use a visual aid just because you have it, or because you feel that you should. Use it if it will fit naturally into your talk and will help the audience to understand and remember what you have to say.
- **Using your visual aids.** If you have a visual aid that you plan to use progressively through the talk, then remember that audiences are easily distracted. Their eyes will wander over all parts of the aid, perhaps distracting their attention from what you are discussing to the points you propose to come on to a few minutes later. You can reduce this risk by revealing the information step by step.
- **Viewing conditions.** Position the projector high enough so the whole audience can see the visuals. Do not obstruct viewing, either by standing between the audience and the screen/flipchart yourself, or by placing the overhead projector on top of a desk or table.

Some common mistakes

- **Talking to the visual aid.** It is very easy to find oneself looking at the words/figures being explained, rather than at the audience. However, it is extremely important to try and maintain eye contact with the audience because otherwise their attention will not be engaged and it may even be difficult for them to hear what the speaker is saying. It is obviously necessary to look at whatever it is you are referring too, but if you are familiar with your material then a glance should be sufficient. If you are using an overhead projector, remember that you can look at the transparency itself rather than at the screen.
- **Reading word for word** what is on the screen. This could be interpreted as an insult to the audience's intelligence and it is also extremely tedious. The headings on the screen may need to be explained, but the speaker should do more than simply repeat what the audience can read for themselves.

- **Waving a pointer in front of the aid.** If you need to point to something on the aid, do so via the appropriate cursor. If it is at rest there it will not distract attention by appearing to hover across the image.
- **Giving a continuous commentary.** If the information on the aid is detailed and complex, you may need to point out the particular points the audience should study - and then allow them a little time to study them without interruption. They cannot be expected to concentrate on the visual aid and hear a detailed commentary at the same time.

Handouts

There are different options for distributing handouts, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. To avoid disruption and wastage of time, it is important to consider your strategy before you begin your talk. These are the options:

- a) Before the talk begins. This is the best approach for a long text or series of aids that you want to draw attention to at different points during the talk. Inevitably, however, some members of the audience will not wait for you and will be engrossed in page 5 while you explain page 2.
- b) During the talk. This can work well with a small audience where the handouts can be distributed quickly and without disruption. With larger audiences however it is likely to cause unnecessary distraction and by the time the people at the back have received the sheet, the speaker may have moved on to another topic.

At the end of the talk. This will aid recall and avoid distracting attention during the talk, but will not help in explaining or illustrating the subject