Tips for Public Speaking

We’ve researched the subject wide and far and have come up with the combined wisdom of many experts in the field of presentation skills and public speaking. Below are the top 11 tips, we could discern.

1) Speak like an Actor: When you are presenting in front of an audience, you are performing like an actor on stage. How you are being perceived is very important. Dress appropriately for the occasion. Be solemn if your topic is serious. Present the desired image to your audience. Look pleasant, enthusiastic, confident, proud, but not arrogant. Remain calm. Appear relaxed, even if you feel nervous. Speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and show appropriate emotion and feeling relating to your topic.

2) Engage the audience: Establish rapport with your audience. Speak to the person farthest away from you to ensure your voice is loud enough to project to the back of the room. Vary the tone of your voice and dramatize if necessary. If a microphone is available, adjust and adapt your voice accordingly. Body language is important. Standing, walking or moving about with appropriate hand gesture or facial expression is preferred to sitting down or standing still with head down and reading from a prepared speech.

3) Maintain sincere eye contact with your audience. Use the 3-second method, e.g. look straight into the eyes of a person in the audience for 3 seconds at a time. Have direct eye contact with a number of people in the audience, and every now and then glance at the whole audience while speaking. Use your eye contact to make everyone in your audience feels involved.

4) Do not read from notes for any extended length of time although it is quite acceptable to glance at your notes infrequently. Speak loudly and clearly. Sound confident. Do not mumble. If you made an error, correct it, and continue. No need to make excuses or apologize profusely. Speak with conviction as if you really believe in what you are saying.

5) Pause Often. Allow yourself and your audience a little time to reflect and think. Don't race through your presentation and leave your audience, as well as yourself, feeling out of breath. Indeed remember to breathe.

6) Show Meaning. Persuade your audience effectively. The material you present should have a logical progression from INTRODUCTION to BODY (strong supporting arguments, accurate and up-to-date information) to CONCLUSION.
7) Add humour whenever appropriate and possible. Keep the audience interested throughout your entire presentation. Remember that an interesting speech makes time fly, but a boring speech is always too long to endure even if the presentation time is the same.

8) Visual Aids Use audio-visual aids or props for enhancement if appropriate and necessary. Master the use of presentation software such as PowerPoint well before your presentation. Do not over-dazzle your audience with excessive use of animation, sound clips, or gaudy colours, which are inappropriate for your topic. Check out the location ahead of time to ensure seating arrangements for audience, whiteboard, blackboard, lighting, location of projection screen, sound system, etc. are suitable for your presentation.

9) Have handouts ready and give them out at the appropriate time. Tell the audience ahead of time that you will be giving out an outline of your presentation so that they will not waste time taking unnecessary notes during your presentation.

10) Be Flexible Speak to your audience, listen to their questions, respond to their reactions, adjust and adapt. If what you have prepared is obviously not getting across to your audience, change your strategy mid-stream if you are well prepared to do so. Remember that communication is the key to a successful presentation. If you are short of time, know what can be safely left out. If you have extra time, know what could be effectively added. Always be prepared for the unexpected.

11) Know when to STOP talking. To end your presentation, summarize your main points as a CONCLUSION. Terminate your presentation with an interesting remark or an appropriate punch line. Leave your listeners with a positive impression and a sense of completion. Thank your audience and sit down.

Finally…

- Know the needs of your audience and match your contents to their needs.
- Know your material thoroughly.
- Put what you have to say in a logical sequence.
- Ensure your speech will be captivating to your audience as well as worth their time and attention.
- Practice and rehearse your speech at home or where you can be at ease and comfortable, in front of a mirror, your family, friends or colleagues.
- Use a tape-recorder and listen to yourself.
- Videotape your presentation and analyze it.
- Know what your strong and weak points are. Emphasize your strong points during your presentation.

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We use trainers from many walks of life including radio presenters, corporate coaches but we are best known for offering our groundbreaking course on “Presentation skills training from a Stand-up Comedian”

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