



Speak up: Preparing an Engaging Presentation

Try these tips when you prepare and present your next public speech. These practices will help you feel confident and engage your audience during the presentation. For more speaking support at any stage in your preparation, consult with Susan Daniels, Associate in Public Speaking. Make an appointment by email: sgdaniels@amherst.edu.

When Preparing	
<i>TRY to...</i>	<i>INSTEAD of...</i>
Give yourself a firm writing deadline so you have days (not minutes) to rehearse the final speech out loud.	Editing your speech right up until your performance.
Prepare numbered note cards or an outline with main ideas, transitions and important arguments. Use these notes when practicing to get familiar with them.	Reading your speech from 8.5" x 11" pages. Notes encourage you to focus on your audience, while shaking pages reveal your nerves.
Memorize your short, attention-grabbing introduction for maximum eye contact.	Reading it or "winging" it.
Rehearse with another person in the actual performance space.	Rehearsing your speech alone at home.
Time your speech several times, rehearsing out loud and even slower than you normally speak.	Assuming (and hoping) that your speech will fall within the time limit.
Provide your introducer with a speaking bio in advance. Having someone introduce you will enable you to start with the first word of your speech.	Assuming someone will introduce you with accurate, flattering details.
Arrive early at the speaking venue and test the technology. Have a "Plan B" if the power goes out.	Assuming that the technology will work.

When Beginning

TRY to...

Start with the first word of your speech.

Grab the audience's attention with a story, a startling statement or statistic, or another kind of "hook" to get their attention.

INSTEAD of...

Starting with "Hello, my name is..." or "I would like to talk about..."

Saying: "So, my topic is..." or "I've been asked to speak a bit about..."

When Presenting

TRY to...

If you get nervous, have technical problems, or lose your place: take a moment, take a breath.

To be clear without improvising or rephrasing, use simple language and organize your presentation for clarity. Keep the audience engaged the whole time.

Make your slides as clean as possible. Circle in red the parts you want your audience to notice, then point to those parts and explain.

INSTEAD of...

Apologizing: "Sorry" or "excuse me if I seem nervous" or "I'm not good at public speaking." Or using filler words: "ah, umm," "like, you know" or "so..."

Saying: "Sorry, let me rephrase..."

Saying: "I know this slide is really busy."

When Ending

TRY to...

Leave your audience with memorable last thoughts about your presentation. Sum up the 1 or 2 main points you wanted to make. Recapture your audience with your final statement; end with a downward vocal inflection to let them know the speech is over.

Say the words "thank you" only during the audience's applause, not as your conclusion.

INSTEAD of...

Saying: "I think I've bored you enough" or "I didn't have enough time" or "That's all I have..."

Abruptly ending your speech with "Thank you."