

Public speaking

Be credible. Make sense. Feel it.

The following is intended as an essential toolkit on the most important aspects of public speaking. It can also be used as a checklist for the purpose of preparing and practicing your speech. I also included a few great examples of speeches I enjoyed. It is recommended that you record yourself on audio and/or video as often as necessary, before you deliver a speech. Remember: it is quite normal not to like your voice or body language, but in the evaluation of oneself, one is always biased. If you can, get somebody else to give you feedback, based on the catalogue of criteria below:

Tell the story!

Aristotle identified three key components for a good public speaker:

- Ethos - credibility and integrity of the speaker

(For example, ask yourself: Why are you the right person to give this talk? Do you have credentials or qualifications that are worth mentioning? Are you speaking for yourself, or for someone else? Why should you be trusted? Do you have conflicting interests?)

- Logos - logic and substance of the contents

(What kind of evidence do you have for what you say? Can you make it short: no longer than 15 minutes? Can you say it in 3 sentences? Are your arguments valid and sound? Can you think of different ways or metaphors to explain it? Are your listeners convinced by what you say? Can you respond to criticism of your argument?)

- Pathos – passion and empathy

(Why are you passionate about this topic? Why should others be? Do you have a personal story to tell your audience? Are you courageous enough to show your feelings, if appropriate? Do you have a moment of surprise or shock for the audience? What about your sense of humour?)



Malala Yousafzai addresses United Nations Youth Assembly (on YouTube)

Verbal communication

When you speak, pay attention to:

- **volume**

(Try to focus on somebody in the last row or at the back of the room and your voice will become louder automatically.)

- **speed**

(Most of us speak more quickly than our listeners can think. This is normal. If you find yourself wanting to say it all at once, remember: every sentence is one step. Messages need to sink in.)

- **run-on sentences**

(If you are afraid that people stop listening when you finish your sentence, then know this: the opposite is true! A pause makes people think. Make shorter sentences. Lower your voice at the end of the sentence. Everyone will be with you.)

- **'direct tone'**

(Remember Martin Luther King's: "I have a dream" or Obama's "Yes, we can" ? They were loud and clear so people could hear. No need to sound like a guru to try to change the world.)

- **monotony**

(People use different tones of voice when they tell a story. Listen to it and play with your own voice, when you practice. For example, it can be fine to smile when you say: I made the biggest mistake of my life.)

- **filling words**

(ehm... This can be, ehm, easily avoided by, ehm, just pausing, ehm, or making sentences shorter. It is ok to think, ehm, before you say something. Also, here, frequent recording can be very helpful to get rid of this habit.)

 *TED talk: "How to speak so that people want to listen" by Julian Treasure (on YouTube – great speaker and great speech)*

Non-verbal communication

When you stand in front of people...

- **find stillness / calmness**
(Stillness does not mean that you cannot move. Of course, you can move. Just watch *how* you move your hands and arms, if you change legs, or walk around the room. You can stand so that you are comfortable. Decide what you want to emphasise with your hands, and what not. But test yourself once: how long can you keep a small object on top of your shoes without it falling off? Go for 60 seconds minimum.)
- **open up to the audience**
(Keep your head up, open your chest to the audience, ground yourself on the floor. If you do not wish to speak to your audience, better to keep silent.)
- **keep eye contact**
(Talk to the audience, look at them. No need to stare at one person, but you can pick someone out for a few seconds. Make sure you look at people all the way on the left or right margin a couple of times. If you find that difficult, you can focus on the people in the back row.)
- **use a “safety object”**
(If you wish you can hold a pen, a glass of water, a piece of paper etc... to make you feel more comfortable when you find it difficult standing in front of people. Holding something in your hand can be a great help.)

 TEDx talk *“Body language, the power is in the palm of your hands”* by Allan Pease (on YouTube, a speech so simple and true)

Use of media

Depending on the setting of your speech, different media may be helpful. But remember: media is only a help, not a substitute for a good speech. Most often: less is more.

- PowerPoint

(Do you use PowerPoint, or do you have something to say?)

- Show visuals: pictures, graphs, diagrams, tables
- Look at the audience, not at the projection screen, when you speak
- Try 5 - 10 words maximum; Steve Jobs mostly used only 1 word only
- Before you copy long passages on the slides, provide a handout instead

- flipchart

(for interactive brainstorming and development of ideas)

- Do not look at the flipchart too long, when you speak
- Write legibly
- Use colour

- notes /cue cards)

(if you have organized your speech beforehand)

- Make bullet points only, not full sentences
- Look at your audience and don't read from the paper
- If you have something to quote, it's ok to read it out