

The A to Z of Public Speaking!

The Speakers Conservatory

Speak Well and Prosper



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The A to Z of Public Speaking

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Comments and suggestions are always appreciated.

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The A to Z of Public Speaking

Hello and welcome to the A to Z of public speaking.

In this short pamphlet, I assign a fundamental technique of public speaking to each of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Yes, there are that many fundamentals. Actually, there are more, but I ran out of letters. These are the basic concepts every effective speaker needs to know thoroughly. They also form the foundation of my training courses.

I hope you find this to be a valuable tool in your journey to becoming a top-notch speaker. Feel free to contact me with any questions, and I hope to have the privilege of working with you in person someday.

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Articulate – Having or showing the ability to speak fluently and coherently. Be articulate, speak clearly, completely form your words, use correct pronunciation, and be careful of lazy words, i.e., butin/button, yeah/yes, gon-a/going to, would-a/would have, etc. Sloppy pronunciation makes you appear dull and uneducated, if not downright stupid, and it is unprofessional. Now, this does not mean these sorts of unofficial contractions have no place in your presentation, but they should not be your standard mode of operation.

Body language – Body language is one of your most powerful tools, as well as your worst enemy if bad habits develop. More is conveyed to your audience by how you say something and emphasize it with body language than by the words themselves. Body language accounts for up to 70% of what your audience understands exactly as you intended. An immobile, rigid speaker is a dead one. They will be ineffective, boring, and little, if any, of their message will be understood as they intended. You must move it, move it.

Cadence – Be aware of it, it has a lot more to it than your pace or speed. Speak slower than you think you should, slower is better than faster, vary it, pause occasionally, silence can be golden. Speaking too fast is one of the most common faults in presentations. Modulate

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your volume and inflection, variety is the spice of life as they say. There is a time and place for every mode of speech, fast, slow, moderate, soft, loud, rhythmic, deadpan, energetic, the key is to know when to use each and mix it up.

Distractors – Always be on the lookout for them, they creep in when least expected. Verbal, uhmm, ahhh, you know, and other repeated time fillers. Body language, jingling change in pockets, stuck to the floor (not moving), arms crossed, hands clasped in front of you (Adam & Eve syndrome), and the list goes on.

Eye contact – Make it, continuously, with everyone. This is what connects you to your audience. One big issue in this respect is speaking to your visual aids (projection screen, whiteboard, etc.). If you are doing that, you are not connected to your audience, your voice is muffled, and it becomes a distractor.

Facial expressions – Watch this one closely. Just like body language, facial expressions can be your best friend or worst enemy. Facial expressions can reinforce your message or give away things you may not want your audience to be aware of, such as when one of them is annoying you. This will happen from time to time, but the key is, as the old saying states, don't let them see you sweat.

Gestures – The art of speaking with your hands. Here, balance is the key. Without gestures, your message loses a lot of its power. The challenge is not getting carried away and finding the balance between what works and what becomes distracting. Do not underestimate the power of gestures in speaking. Gestures are one of the key elements of body language, if not the key. You can use gestures to show how big something is, display fear or joy, you can praise or reprove, motivate or humiliate, emphasize or deemphasize, all with your hands.

Hyperbole – Avoid it; exaggerating a point is different from emphasizing it. Exaggeration is a form of falsification and must be used with great care; it has its place, but not as a means of bolstering an otherwise dull presentation or weak argument.

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Inflection – In real estate, it is all about location, location, location. For a speaker, it is all about inflection. We have all suffered through a monotone presentation, counting the seconds until it's over, and missing virtually everything the speaker said, regardless of how interesting the subject may have been. Inflection is to a speaker as color is to a painter; it is what we use to express feelings, to emphasize, to persuade, to motivate. Without it, we fail as presenters. Your voice is infinitely variable; use it.

Jest – Humor is a powerful tool and an opportunity for disaster at the same time. A well-timed joke will liven up a presentation tremendously; a poorly timed or inappropriate one can be a disaster. Don't be afraid of humor; you don't have to be a stand-up comic to use it effectively. But plan carefully and rehearse sufficiently. Humor is often all about timing and delivery. Properly used self-deprecation can also be very humorous and build your credibility as being self-confident enough to share your weaknesses.

Knowledgeable – Anytime you get up to speak you automatically become the expert in the eyes of your audience, don't let them down. You need to know your material and be well-prepared. No one but you knows exactly what you are going to present, or in what order, or with what emphasis, but if your facts are wrong, someone is going to call you out on it.

Lessons – Every presentation should teach something. There should be a lesson to be learned, a takeaway that the individual can use in life and or in their career. Unless you are just there to entertain, there is something in your presentation that you want your audience to retain and remember: the lesson. Regardless of the speaking style you use — persuasive, informative, motivational, etc. — there are key details you want your audience to remember. Make sure those are clear and concise so your audience will remember them.

Main topics – Limit your main topics or points to three or four. Information overload is one of the primary complaints you hear from attendees. The human brain is an amazing thing, but it has its limits. If you cannot get your point across with three main points, you are trying to cover too much material for your venue. If you are teaching a

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multi-day course, then that is different. Then the goal is to instruct. In a speech, the goal is to inform, and they are very different concepts.

No – Don't be afraid to say it and admit you don't know something. Your audience knows you are not perfect, just like them. There is nothing worse you can do than try and bluff your way through a question you don't know the answer to. It will usually be obvious, and if caught, your credibility is gone, as is your effectiveness. Admitting your fallibility also adds some humanity to your persona. As the speaker or instructor, your audience will look up to you as an authority figure, the expert, the big Kahuna what be in charge, and admitting you don't know something reinforces that perception by showing that you have the courage to admit your limitations.

Opening – You need a memorable one. Your opening can often make or break your entire presentation. People remember the first thing they hear, and you want them to remember something positive, interesting, amazing, funny, the possibilities are endless as long as it is memorable and or powerful. You don't even need to open by introducing yourself. Jump right in with one of your main points, a story, a question, and after you have set the stage, caught their attention, and given them something to remember, then you can pause to introduce yourself. Openings and closings are the most important parts of any presentation. Nail those, and everything else is easy.

Pause - The strategic pause is one of your most valuable speaking tools. Dead air is effective when used deliberately for dramatic effect. Don't be afraid to pause to emphasize a point, gather your thoughts, to reel your audience back in if some of them are not paying attention. Used correctly, a properly placed pause can add drama, draw attention, give your audience time to absorb what you just said, and make your presentation more dynamic. Often, it is better to say nothing than just anything to prevent dead air.

Questions – Ask them. Interaction with your audience is crucial. It helps you gauge how well they are understanding your message, and their input adds to the quality and interest of your presentation. Asking questions also lets your audience know you value them and their input.

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Repetition – People learn through repetition. Something they hear once goes into short-term memory, something they hear repeatedly goes into long-term memory. It normally takes three repetitions to really anchor the point. Repeat keywords, re-emphasize your main points, and remember to summarize the presentation at the end. This provides you with a great opportunity to reiterate and reinforce your main points.

Simple – Keep it that way. One of the main pitfalls of speaking is trying to cover too much information. Your audience will be able to keep track of and follow three to four main points at most. As the subject matter expert, you will be tempted to show how much you know, don't do it. Your job is to inform, motivate, inspire, etc., not showcase your own knowledge.

Timing – Timing is king. Knowing when to do a specific thing during your presentation for maximum effect is critical. An example of this is the strategic pause. Knowing when to stop talking to let a point sink in, give the audience time to think, build suspense and anticipation, is one of the most powerful tools in your speaking arsenal. Humor is another area where timing is important. A joke at the wrong time may not be funny because the context is not obvious. Poor timing of a joke may also make it inappropriate, where if given at the right time, it will be funny and add greatly to your presentation.

Upbeat – Be positive. Even when the subject of your presentation is negative, such as poor sales results, you should still maintain a positive attitude and remain upbeat. The goal is to motivate people to do better, not to make them feel like failures. For every negative situation, there is a bright side; find and exploit it. Also, be energetic; no one really wants to listen to Eeyore; they would far prefer Tigger. This does not mean being over the top and over-animated, but your mood will transfer to your audience. If you are positive, energetic, and motivated, your audience will feel it and react in kind. If people are nodding off, reassess yourself and see if you need to up the energy level.

Volume – If you seem a bit loud to yourself, you are probably spot-on for your audience. It can be difficult to judge how well everyone can hear you, so ask at the beginning. Except for small groups in small

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rooms, use a microphone and amplifier if possible. A mic is not just a piece of gear, it is also an excellent tool if used properly.

Welcoming – Your audience needs to feel that you are happy to be with them. They want to feel appreciated and that you are one of them. If you are with a small group that has name tags or cards, use their names. Nothing makes someone feel included like hearing their name used.

Xenagogue – To guide, you are the tour guide through the material you are presenting. Be organized, ensure your material flows in a logical manner that the audience can follow. Just because it is clear to you does not mean your audience will understand.

Yes – Yes, you can do this, you can overcome your fears and doubts and become a top-notch public speaker. It just takes knowledge and practice, and if you want to be the best you can be, professional training and coaching are essential.

Zeal – If you are not enthusiastic about your subject, it will show. You will end up giving a lackluster presentation, not achieve your goals, and your audience will feel let down. Even if you are not thrilled by your speaking assignment, we don't always get to choose; you need to act like you are. It comes with the territory; sometimes you must be an actor. When given a speaking assignment you have little interest in, consider it a challenge. See it as an opportunity to prove you can transform anything into a memorable presentation.