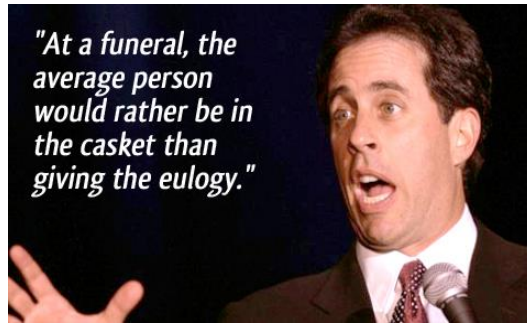


Professor's Guide to Public Speaking

Just the Essentials



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1. **Nervousness is NORMAL.** The #1 fear reported by Americans in a national survey year after year is cited as public speaking. That's right. Apparently Americans fear the thought of giving a speech over their own death. Snakes came in at #2. Regardless, nervousness often leads to physical manifestations that freak you out even more such as profuse perspiration, wobbly knees, "butterflies in your stomach", etc..." What you may not realize is that the nervousness you might feel before giving a speech is actually the same nervousness you might feel if you were up to bat during a full count in a baseball game. In a sports scenario, we refer to this energy as "adrenaline" which is great for getting yourself amped up for the big game. Same energy...different situation. Prior to presenting a speech, remind yourself that nervousness is normal. Then, focus on using that nervous energy as adrenaline to get yourself pumped about your speech, or at least pumped about getting it over with. Either way you'll be pumped.
2. **Know your stuff.** While it should go without saying that you should know what you are talking about prior to speech delivery, apparently it does need to be repeated on occasion. If you are taking a class in which you are afforded the luxury of topic selection, be wise and choose a topic that you already know about to some degree. Selecting a random topic from the sky that you know nothing about is not the way to go. Many speeches are information specific according to your profession, responsibilities and/or occasion. In either case, speech preparation cannot be overstated. Part of speech preparation is knowing and understanding the material that you will be speaking about and organizing the information into a logical order for delivery.
3. **Practice. Practice. Practice!** Did I mention practice? To be clear, practice does not mean memorize. Effective speech practice should include using a prepared list of organized talking points, or bullet points in which you are able to expand upon by speaking extemporaneously, or conversationally. In the old school days, we used notecards as our talking points list. But a PowerPoint slide can just as easily serve as your "notecard" in this new and modern world. Note cards in any form should not be written in full sentences. You definitely want to practice your speech using full sentences. However, limit your dependence on your notecard

as simply a means to keep you organized and on track. I used to lock myself in an empty room and practice delivering my speeches to an invisible audience. This way, I was practicing extemporaneous delivery style as well as other techniques such as facial expression, gesturing, vocal variety, eye-contact, etc... Practice like you are doing the real thing. Then practice some more. Trust me on this, you cannot be over-practiced. Sufficient preparation and practice also help in reducing speech related anxiety.

4. **Set-up early on the day of the speech and have a plan B.** Setting-up early or ahead of time allows you to have more control of the situation. If you have never been to the location of where you will deliver the speech, arrive early enough to get a feel for the room layout, where the projection screen is located (or any other visual aids), make adjustments to the podium location and most importantly, test the technology to be sure it functions as you had intended, including microphones. Software compatibility issues are actually quite common. So should you have technical issues, early arrival may allow time to correct the situation. It's also a good idea to e-mail yourself any files you may need just as a backup. Last but not least, have a plan B for worst case scenarios. If your PowerPoint slideshow fails to open, the show must go on. Be sure that you have a complete copy of your slideshow just in case you end up having to deliver the speech sans technology.
5. **Know your audience...at least a little bit.** If it should be appropriate to the occasion, greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of people you at least sort of know than to a group of complete strangers.
6. **Know that the audience is on your side.** Before beginning your speech, remind yourself that the audience is absolutely rooting for you. Albeit more for selfish than heartfelt reasons. Nevertheless, they want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. If not, they're doomed to certain boredom and nobody wishes for that.
7. **Engage your audience.** As much as I wish that I could tell you that it's all about you as the speaker, but I'd be a liar. As the speaker, you are indeed important. The audience, dare I say, is just as important and quite the active if not equal participant in the public speaking process. Indeed, it is a process and it takes two to tango. Embrace a speaker-listener partnership that engages your audience by incorporating them into your process. Be personable and relatable; engage in regular eye-contact. Be responsive to nonverbal feedback and make adjustments when necessary.
8. **Accept mistakes and move on.** Nobody is perfect. Ever. So, don't bother holding yourself to the unattainable. It won't do you a bit of good. I've never delivered a perfect speech and I've yet to see a perfect speech delivered. It's best to accept that you might make some little mistakes or fumble for the right

word, or lose your train of thought, etc.... You're human, far from infallible. So get over it and move on. Don't let mistakes derail you during a speech and don't allow for harsh self-criticism afterwards. Learn from any mistakes you might have made and aim to improve.

9. **Don't apologize for anything, ever.** (caveat –inadvertent projectile spitting on members of your audience. If that does happen, wait until after the speech and apologize to that person(s) individually). Absolutely do not under any circumstances apologize for being nervous, anxious, or for making mistakes while delivering your speech. Let us not shine a spotlight on what weakness we may have already demonstrated.

10. **Forget all the public speaking advice you received in high school.** Forever. Most especially discard that shiny gem about focusing on a spot at the back of the wall for the entire duration of the speech, thus vehemently avoiding eye-contact with the audience. Worst. Advice. Ever. And, you look super ridiculous trying to pull it off. Or how about the one where you can overcome your speech anxiety by imagining that all of your audience is scantily clad in only their undergarments? Really? That personally makes me feel exponentially more nervous...and distracted. I am genuinely at a loss as to why such an image would ever serve to lessen one's anxiety. It's poppycock. Absolute poppycock.

