

Presentation Skills: Getting Your Point Across with Confidence



Good speakers know that no matter how many good or persuasive ideas they might have, if these ideas are not communicated properly, their ideas cannot be effective. It will be your job to make your speech as persuasive as possible. To do so, you must use the time-honored skills that good speakers have used more than 2000 years.

Good speakers use their voices to animate their presentations or bring them to life. If you don't know how to use your voice, body, and feelings, then you will be afraid to give speeches. Another problem may be that you are afraid of being criticized. Being able to take constructive criticism without having hurt feelings is a sign of maturity.

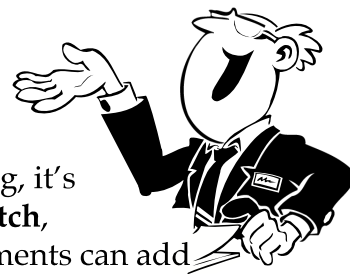
Here are some suggestions for gaining confidence when speaking in front of a group:

- Practice your speech—that means more than once. Practice in front of a mirror. Pay attention to hand movement and facial expressions.
- Keep in mind that your audience is sympathetic. Make eye contact with the audience. Smile and act naturally.
- Relax. Breathe deeply and exhale completely before you first begin to speak and during your speech.

Remember that many people feel nervous when they speak to a group. You are not alone. One key to looking comfortable and relaxed when giving a speech is being prepared!

Speak Out: Using Your Voice to Good Advantage

Now that you feel confident about public speaking, it's time to work on voice. Voice has five elements: **pitch**, **volume**, **inflection**, **rate**, and **quality**. All five elements can add power to your speech.



Pitch is the highness or lowness of tone. Pitch can be used to suggest emotion. Use a low-pitched voice to express sorrow or grand ideas. Use the higher pitch for lightheartedness, fear, or anger. A well-modulated tone or pitch can be convincing without being intimidating.

While *volume* refers to the loudness of the voice, *inflection* is a change in pitch in individual words and has a lot to do with meaning. Inflection means saying a word louder or softer than the rest of the sentence. Notice the difference in meanings caused by changing the inflection in the following sentences. Note that the underlined word is the one that is said louder or with more emphasis. Notice how inflection changes the meaning of a sentence.

Inflection	Meaning
1. <u>I</u> love you.	The emphasis is on the I.
2. I love <u>you</u> .	It tells who I love.
3. I <u>love</u> you.	It becomes more tender.
4. I love <u>you</u> ?	It becomes a question.

Rate or tempo is the speed at which words are spoken. Your rate of speech should be normal and moderate in most cases. The average rate is 160 words per minute. You can use rate to your advantage in a speech or when telling a story. One example is to speak faster to show excitement or fear. However, if you give your whole speech too quickly or too slowly, the listener may interpret this as anxiety or nervousness.

Quality is the characteristic of a voice that makes it different from another voice. A speaker often changes his voice quality to imitate the different characters in a story.

Enunciation, or speaking each word distinctly, is very important in being clearly understood by your audience. Remember to fully pronounce each word, especially the ends of words. Additionally, correct **pronunciation** of each word is essential. The best guide for pronunciation is the dictionary.

Use these guidelines to analyze your own voice production.

- **Enunciate and pronounce words clearly and distinctly.**
- **Speak at a suitable volume—neither too loudly nor too softly.**
- **Speak at a suitable tempo—neither too slowly nor too quickly.**
- **Make the pitch of your voice appropriate to what you are expressing—neither too high nor too low.**

Good speakers also make their speech flow evenly. In casual conversation, people commonly say words and sounds that should be avoided in formal oral presentations. Study the following list and ask a friend to help you identify which expressions you use frequently. Add your own expressions to the list if it does not cover them.



Body language, or nonverbal communication, has a message all its own, and you need to learn to use it effectively when making a presentation. Nonverbal communication includes facial expressions, eye contact, voice tone, posture, and gestures.

Very large or exaggerated body language can cause your audience to watch your movements rather than listen to what you are saying. Be sure your facial expressions and voice tones do not conflict with what you are saying. Your facial expression should appear attentive, interested, and responsive and match the words you are speaking. During an oral presentation, eye contact should be frequent and direct. Your gaze should

be steady, firm, and decisive. Try to look for friendly faces in the audience and focus on them during your talk.

Accent your messages with appropriate gestures. Your audience will interpret finger shaking and making fists as being aggressive, and wringing your hands, playing with your hair or objects, or appearing nervous as being passive. Use purposeful, smooth movements during your talk that help emphasize major points in your presentation.

By being aware of this and learning some body language guidelines, you can improve your nonverbal communication as well as your ability to make good oral presentations.

Tips for Using Presentation Body Language

Stand straight, with one foot slightly in front of the other. Keep your posture relaxed and natural. Standing straight will increase your ability to breathe deeply and easily, making your voice quality sound its best.

Maintain eye contact by looking at members of the audience during the entire speech. Be sure to gaze around the room, looking at as many people as possible. Looking at one area or one person will make the listeners uneasy. Moving your gaze will make everyone feel included in your presentation and that you are talking *to* them and not *at* them.

Keep your face expressive. Use your face and body to get the message across to the audience. Make sure that any emotions shown are appropriate to your speech. A cold, stony expression will make you look disinterested and the audience will be lost to boredom.

Use gestures and shifts of posture to emphasize key and important ideas or statements. Let your arms and hands rest naturally at your sides (or rest on a lectern) until they are used to make expressive gestures.

Understanding what is meant by a “good speech” and knowing the characteristics of a “good speech” are your best tools for delivering a speech that your particular audience will enjoy.

The characteristics listed on the following chart will help you to deliver a good speech. This, in turn, will help you to gain confidence when you speak to an audience. Use this checklist to practice presenting your speech.

Characteristics of Good Oral Presentations

Elements	Characteristics	Definitions
Preparation	1. Subject Knowledge	- the presentation subject is thoroughly researched and the speaker is prepared for any questions that may be asked
	2. Organization	- the presentation material is arranged or put together in an orderly way—using index cards, outlines, or visual materials to keep presentation well paced and on track
	3. Audience Awareness	- the presentation is prepared for the type of audience receiving the information—speaking or writing is appropriate for and understood by the target audience
Speaking	4. Enunciation	- words are spoken clearly, without mumbling, making each sound distinct
	5. Pronunciation	- words are spoken according to a dictionary's pronunciation guide
	6. Volume	- the sound produced by the voice is not too loud or too soft; the sound changes during the presentation to match what is being described
	7. Tempo	- the speed at which words are spoken is not too fast or too slow; the speed may change to match what is being described
	8. Pitch	- the highness or lowness of the sound of the voice matches what is being described
	9. Expressiveness	- the presentation (or words) are communicated in a vivid and persuasive manner
	10. Complete Sentences	- the presentation uses a group or groups of words that present a complete thought
Body Language	11. Eye Contact	- the speaker looks directly into the eyes of one or more persons—communicates the speaker's confidence, alertness, and empathy with the audience
	12. Natural Gestures	- the speaker uses normal movement of the hands, head, or other body parts to express the speaker's thoughts or feelings—gestures should emphasize presentation points, not distract from them
	13. Good Posture	- the speaker carries or holds his body straight while sitting, standing, or walking—conveys confidence and readiness; slouching conveys the opposite—unreadiness, indifference

Enhance the Presentation: Using Visual Aids

A visual aid is any material that depends on the sense of sight and is used to enhance a presentation. Visual aids often help to highlight or explain particular pieces of information in a presentation. They also keep the audience viewing and listening.

Visual aids should do the following:

- **enhance the presentation, not distract from it**
- **hold the audience's attention**
- **be easy to read and understand**
- **be interesting**

Types of visual aids are objects; pictures, charts, or other illustrations; puppets; handouts; computer-generated images; and any other props you can use to enhance the speech.



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Discussion Skills: Listening and Speaking in a Group

After each of your classmates presents his or her speech, you will join your classmates in a discussion. In this discussion, your class will analyze the techniques the speaker used. In other words, you will point out and discuss any of the techniques you noticed in each speech. During the class discussion, there may be disagreements. Any claims made should be supported. Each person should explain fully his or her claims. Be as thoughtful as possible, but try not to be overly concerned with being right. If another student presents a convincing analysis that differs from your own, consider it sincerely. Perhaps your classmate is right; perhaps you are both right. A good member of a discussion is more concerned with helping the group find the truth than in proving himself or herself right.

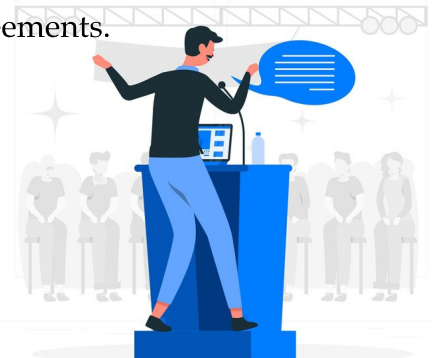


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A good class discussion does not just happen. It takes everyone participating in a knowledgeable and respectful way. In a group discussion, a group of people sit down together to talk about a problem, to make a decision, or to understand one another's ideas. In the classroom, the topic of the discussion is most often regulated by the subject of the class or the concept that the teacher is teaching. The group discussion is not just a conversation—everyone must be allowed to participate and voice opinions. However, the opinions cannot be voiced at the same time as in a free-for-all. To ensure an open and thoughtful discussion, study and use the techniques on the following page.

Techniques for Good Class Discussion Skills			
Type	Technique	When Used	When Ignored
Body Language	1. Look at the person speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps you to listen and concentrate Lets the person speaking know that you are listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may become distracted and lose concentration on the person speaking Person speaking assumes you are not listening—loses confidence
	2. Nod your head when you agree or understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lets person speaking know how you feel and what you do or do not understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Person speaking will be unsure if you are following points
	3. Sit up and don't fidget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps you to concentrate on what the person speaking is saying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may become tired You may distract the person speaking and other listeners
Active Listening	4. Take notes on main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps you to follow the discussion and remember it later 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may lose track of the main topic of the conversation and have trouble participating
	5. Allow the speaker to pause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps you to review what has been said Helps the speaker to feel relaxed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may be tempted to blurt out something irrelevant Person speaking will feel rushed and uncomfortable
	6. Ask follow-up questions for further information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes the subject clearer Allows the person speaking to go over difficult issues again; reassures the person speaking of your comprehension Encourages other people who are confused to ask questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Person speaking may mistakenly assume that you understand what's being said Other listeners may feel alone in their confusion
	7. Ask open-ended questions <i>(questions that can't be answered yes or no)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reveals and encourages the speaker to share his thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Person speaking will not receive any challenge or support to move beyond the original ideas of the presentation
Speaking	8. Stay on the subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows you to discuss the subject in depth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may turn the spotlight on yourself
	9. Summarize/restate the point you are responding to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps everyone to follow the discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may not be aware that your point has already been made
	10. Make connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps person speaking and listeners to examine all aspects of the discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion may become disconnected and difficult for participants to follow
	11. Respond to others' points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps everyone to see both sides of the subject and encourages a smooth discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others may feel their ideas are not being heard
	12. Calmly respond to the feelings behind the words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to avoid tension and encourages people to be honest and clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may unintentionally hurt someone's feelings—tension may build
	13. Think about where the subject is going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps everyone to stay aware of the time and allow for conclusions and follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion may become sidetracked or bogged down with issues unhelpful to participants
	14. Do not interrupt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps you grasp the whole point of what is being said Encourages the person speaking to finish his or her points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may anticipate and react to something not yet said Person speaking may become afraid to voice opinions

Suggested Group Discussion Topics



- At what age should a person be permitted to drink?
- Is homework necessary?
- Should teenagers have a curfew?
- Should students be allowed to smoke on school campus?
- Should no-smoking regulations be in effect in public/private establishments?
- Should males and females participate in all types of sports together?
- Why is reading important?
- Why do students drop out of school?
- How do video channels and cable TV programs affect students' lives?
- Should some types of rock music be banned? Should specific song lyrics be banned?
- At what age should a person be permitted to vote?
- Is regular attendance at school important?
- Is having money everything in life?
- What school courses will do the most good for students' lives?
- What is the ideal age to get married?
- When are people responsible enough to have a baby?
- How should students be disciplined in school?
- Why is there a drug problem amongst so many teens?
- Are the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.) and Students Against Destructive Decisions (S.A.D.D.) important organizations?
- Should parents and teachers make rules for teenagers?

Debating Pros and Cons: Line of Argument

You have been around debates of some sort all your life. Your family members may debate whether to take a certain trip or buy a piece of furniture. You and a friend may debate whether a particular movie is worth seeing. You have probably seen debates on television between political candidates. Lawyers, both in television shows and in real life, must debate the innocence of a defendant or the negligence of a particular person in a lawsuit.

Technically speaking, a debate is a discussion of the pros and cons of a particular topic. The pros are those points which assert a point of view in favor of something, and the cons are those points which present the opposite point of view.

For instance, in a debate about a particular movie, you might say that the movie is worth seeing because of its historical information, its fine acting, and the exciting soundtrack. Your friend might say that the historical parts of the movie are inaccurate and there are other movies with better acting and more interesting soundtracks. She might add that the violent content cancels out any enjoyment of the acting and soundtrack. You have presented the pros of the movie's worthiness, while your friend has presented the cons.

Scholastic Debating: Formalized Discussions

In school, you may be asked to take part in debates or formalized discussion of topics. These kinds of debates have been around for many years, and a certain set of rules has developed around them. While there are special procedures to follow in a scholastic debate, the basic premise is the same as any other kind of debate: the participants in the debate are either supporting or attacking a position.

Following are some terms that are used in formal debates:

proposition—a proposition is an assertion much like a thesis sentence that states a belief about a topic, usually proposing a change in policy or procedure

affirmative—the position that favors the proposition

negative—the position that opposes the proposition

case—a series of carefully constructed arguments for either side

brief—a detailed outline listing all the arguments for both sides

constructive speech—the presentation of each side's case

rebuttal—the response that each side makes refuting the case of the other side

In a formal debate, the two teams, which usually consist of two people for each team, are given one proposition. For instance, “All schools should go to a year-round plan.” Notice how the proposition includes the word “should,” the same as the thesis sentence often does in an argumentative paper. Note also that the proposition is very narrow and only deals with one particular topic. More than one topic or a poorly defined topic only confuses the issue. The proposition is also arguable. That is, a definite argument could be made either in favor of or in opposition to the assertion.

To prepare for a debate, you should examine both sides of a given issue. That way you will be prepared for the rebuttal made by the opposition, and you can also prepare your own rebuttal. Assemble all your supporting evidence, such as statistics, examples, and the opinions of experts, just as you would if you were preparing to write an argumentative essay. Make sure your evidence is accurate and up-to-date.



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Debating promotes cooperation. You will need to consult closely with your team member on your case and the rebuttal you will make against the opposing team. Write down your key points on note cards. You might use different colored pens or some sort of code to separate your assertions from your rebuttal cards.

Following are some guidelines for participating in a debate:

- **Organize your material in a coherent manner.**

To make sure your material is organized in a coherent manner, be sure to make your point or assertion; support the assertion with facts, expert testimony, and /or examples, and then move on to your next point. Don't forget to conclude your remarks with a powerful restatement of your original assertion.

- **Make sure your evidence is convincing.**

Use reliable and up-to-date sources for your evidence. Don't distort the facts. Do not assume that the assertion you intend to make is, in fact, true. For instance, don't assume that a yearlong schedule is better because some schools already have one. You, the debater, need to prove why it is better.

- **Make sure your arguments are sound.**

To make sure your arguments are sound, avoid personal attacks, inflammatory language, and either /or simplifications when making your argument. Be sure to address the arguments of the other side.

- **Remember the opposing side has a valid point, too.**

During your rebuttal period, acknowledge the points the opposing team has made and then show why those points are incorrect or not as important as the points that your team has made.

- **Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard.**

When you are speaking, it is important to remain calm and in control of your emotions. Be polite when the other side is making its presentation. Speak clearly and concisely. In other words, make your point in as few words as possible so that you will have time to make other points. Make sure that your words can be heard by everyone in the debate and in the audience if there is one. Study your notes well enough so that you can look up when you're speaking.

Interviewing: Make a Good First Impression

We all know how important first impressions can be, and when it comes to applying for a job, the first impression may be the only impression you have a chance to give.

The key areas in making a good first impression are as follows:

- **appearance**
- **body language**
- **facial expressions**
- **listening and speaking**

Appearance: Looking Good

Your appearance is of utmost importance. In fact, if you don't dress right, you might not even get in the door. If you don't take the time to look professional, the interviewer may decide not to spend his or her valuable time with you.

Make sure your clothes are neat, clean, and appropriate for the position for which you are applying. You wouldn't wear jeans and a sweatshirt to apply for an office job, nor would you wear a suit to apply for construction work. The general rule is to dress conservatively. Don't wear flashy jewelry or excessive makeup. Be comfortable but not too casual. For office or technical positions, wear sensible, professional outfits that don't call attention to themselves. You want them to remember you—not your clothing.



Hair should also be neat and clean. There are so many styles today that it would be unrealistic to dictate the style you should wear to a job interview. However, you should make sure that bangs don't cover your eyes. In fact, studies have shown that people trust other people more when they can see their eyes—and even their eyebrows. The general rule for hair is to keep it out of your face. On men, facial hair should be neatly trimmed.

Body Language: Walking the Walk

The first thing a prospective employer will notice about you after your clothes is your posture. Whether you are sitting or standing, your posture tells a lot about your attitude. If you sit slouched or stand hunched over, you may look as though you don't really want the job or as if you don't have confidence in yourself. Stand up straight with your shoulders relaxed and your chin up.

When sitting, don't allow yourself to collapse into the chair. Sitting up with your hands in your lap will indicate that you're paying attention to your interviewer. This doesn't mean you have to sit on the edge of the seat, but do make sure your back is straight and that your arms are not crossed. Crossed arms indicate a closed attitude. You want to reflect an open and alert attitude.

Another aspect of good body language is a firm handshake. Handshaking was once a way for strangers to show each other they were unarmed. Now a handshake indicates confidence and friendliness; it is the foundation for most business relations. Nearly every business meeting begins and often ends with handshakes. So make sure your hands are



clean and dry before you meet your prospective employer. A good handshake is one that is firm but not too tight. It usually involves a quick, but pronounced, clasp of hands and then a release. Practicing shaking hands with an adult is a good way to get a firm grip on handshakes.

Facial Expressions: A Smile Lights Up Your Face

Be sure to smile when you meet the interviewer and before you leave. It also won't hurt to smile when talking about how much you are looking forward to working for this person or company. A smile shows that you

are friendly and excited about the opportunity for employment. People tend to hire people with whom it will be easy to work. A smile shows that you're just that kind of person.

Look your prospective employer in the eye. Don't stare down at the floor or gaze out the window. You don't need to stare at your interviewer, but regular eye contact will let him or her know you are listening and interested.

Listening and Speaking: Receive and Give the Right Messages

Some people may think that saying the right things in an interview is the only way to get a job, but listening well may be even more important. By listening carefully, you can often learn what it is that your interviewer is really looking for in an employee. Bring a note pad and pencil in a small briefcase or folder just in case your interviewer has some specific information to give you.

When it's your turn to speak, your interviewer will be listening for how you speak as well as what you say. Be sure to enunciate clearly. Stay away from using slang or improper grammar. However, do try to speak naturally. It's important to accent your positive features whenever you can during the interview. This isn't bragging or being conceited. The interviewer wants to know about your qualifications, and it's up to you to honestly state those qualifications. Use words such as "hard-working," "reliable," "dependable," or other positive attributes to describe yourself. If the interviewer asks you a question for which you don't know the answer or wants to know about a skill that you don't have, be honest, but also indicate your willingness and eagerness to learn new skills that may help you in the job.



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Always be positive when speaking to a prospective employee. Let them know what you can contribute to the company. Never speak negatively about a former employer or about yourself. Be assertive. Let your prospective employer know that you want the job, and you're ready to start to work right away.

Preparing for the Interview: What to Do—and Know—Beforehand

Find out as much as you can about the job and the company before your interview. If there is a personnel office, ask for any brochures or other literature they have about the company or the particular position. If you know anyone who works at the company, have them tell you what they know about the company overall and that job in particular. You can also go to the library and look up information on many companies, organizations, and institutions. In addition, many employers have web pages, so be sure to check out the Internet for more information.

Prepare questions that you will ask the interviewer. Although you are mainly there to answer questions, it is expected that you will also have some questions to ask. These questions should be related to the duties and responsibilities of the job. The questions you ask can also reflect your initiative. For instance, if you were applying for a job at a day-care center you might ask about developing special games or events for the children. Formulating questions will help you discover hidden potential for growth and learning in the job.

The next preparation for your interview should be a “mock interview.” Write down questions that you think an interviewer might ask you. Ask other people who have had job interviews what sort of questions they were asked. Also ask parents and teachers what questions they think might be asked of you. After you have compiled a list of potential questions, give your list to a friend, classmate, or parent and have that person pretend to interview you. Practice your mock interview a few times and feel free to vary the circumstances and questions slightly. As you answer the questions, try to insert as many positive facts about yourself as you can. Let your enthusiasm show!



Now there are just a few final preparations for your job interview. The first of these is to have a good night's sleep the night before and to eat a light meal ahead of time. If you are yawning from lack of sleep or faint with hunger, you won't be able to present yourself in the best possible light. (Don't try drinking your coffee or orange juice in the car or bus on the way to interview.) Make sure you have good directions to the place where the

interview will be held and arrive five to 10 minutes early. Be sure to have pen or pencil and note pad handy. It's a good idea not to drink or eat anything during the interview even if it's offered.

Lastly, remember to smile. It will make you feel less nervous.

Below are some sample interview questions which may help you feel more prepared for your interview.

1. What is your experience?
2. What kind of skills do you have?
3. How can your particular skills help this company?
4. Do you like to work with people (machines, animals, etc.)?
5. What about this job appeals to you?
6. Are there aspects of your personality that make you feel that you are the right person for the job?
7. What are your best qualities?
8. What are your worst? (Always try to turn this question into a positive answer. For instance, your worst quality might be that you are a perfectionist.)
9. Would you be willing to get additional training if necessary?
10. What are some of your short-range goals?
11. What are your long-range goals?
12. Discuss a time when you faced a challenge either on the job or in school. How did you handle the challenge?
13. Are you a problem solver? Give some examples.

After the Interview: The Follow-Up

After your interview, you should write a follow-up letter, thanking your interviewer for the time he or she spent with you. Be sure to put the day of the interview in the letter, and mention any specifics of the interview that may help your interviewer to remember you. The letter should be written in a business style with your address and the date on the right-hand side, the company's name and address on the left, and two short body paragraphs.

Below is an example of a follow-up letter:

1111 Red Road
South Miami, FL 33333
March 20, 1998

Ms. Rhetta Jones
Personnel Director
XYZ Company
2222 Dixie Highway
South Miami, FL 33333

Dear Ms. Jones,

Thank you so much for the chance to discuss clerical opportunities at XYZ last Tuesday. I enjoyed learning more about the company and the new branches that you are opening. I am excited about the possibility of applying my training and experience to the receptionist position we discussed.

Please contact me if I can provide you with further information.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

Jane Smith