

Public Speaking Tips: Maximizing Practice Time

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You've thought about the delivery style that will best convey the message, now you need to work on the physical act of presenting the speech. Practice is the number one tool to minimize anxiety and increase confidence. Make sure to give yourself plenty of time to run through your presentation several times to achieve maximum comfort level with your material.

1. Practicing successfully means practicing with speaking notes.

Remember, the audience *needs* you to connect with them and speaking from a manuscript makes this incredibly difficult. Not only does a manuscript create a physical barrier between you and your audience, studies have shown that using a word-for-word manuscript increases a speaker's anxiety, reduces speaker spontaneity and inhibits a speaker's ability to be flexible in his/her response to audience feedback. Speaking notes, on the other hand, are key words or brief phrases that function as “reminders” for the speaker, allowing the speaker to focus on communicating *ideas* rather than reciting the script.

2. Practicing successfully means finding several ways to say the same thing.

If the majority of the audience appears confused after an explanation, you need to rephrase the information to help them comprehend. Finding several different ways to say the same information not only prepares you for this moment, it also increases your own understanding and comfort level with the material. (You can see how speaking and practicing from a manuscript could make this very difficult!)

3. Practicing successfully means practicing OUT LOUD and consciously saying the material differently each time.

Mentally practicing is helpful in retaining the material but should never be substituted for the physical act of saying the material out loud. What sounds good in your head may not transfer as well to the “real world.” In order to maintain your flexibility, you'll want to practice the speech several different ways so you're able to stay open to audience feedback. As we all know, things do not always go as planned and giving yourself several different experiences with the same material will help you to stay composed should something go awry during the presentation.

4. Practicing successfully means delivering your speech in front of a practice audience.

Your goal as a speaker is to connect with the audience and help them understand the

information, so it's important to practice in front of a live audience to provide you with an opportunity to work on your audience adaptation techniques. This audience could consist of family members, friends, coworkers, or just about anyone who's willing to listen and to offer constructive criticism on your speech. Speaking in front of these people may feel awkward at first, but they will provide you with the kind of environment you'll be facing for the "real deal," not to mention some great suggestions for making your speech the best it can be!