How to Make a Public Presentation

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Introduction

The basic process of making a public presentation (also called a public speech) somewhat resembles that of packing a suitcase. As an overview, you need to decide what "stuff" to put into the case based on where you're going and what you're going to do. Next, you need to decide how to organize this selected content. Finally, you need to carry or deliver the case to its desired destination. If you meet these needs, you are on the right track to achieving a decent public speech. This tutorial explains the five basic steps of making a public speech: (1) audience analysis to get off on the best foot, (2) identification of desired outcomes, (3) preparation of the right "stuff" or supporting materials, (4) organization of the speech, and (5) its delivery.

Step 1: Audience Analysis

Continuing with the selection analogy, imagine you've grown up playing a 5-string American guitar. Then you're given a 20-string Indian sitar and someone asks you to play it. The likelihood of success is very low. In this analogy, the musician is the speaker and the instrument is the audience. You may be a very good musician (or speaker) for a certain instrument (or audience); but, if you

assume you can play the same way on all instruments (or with all audiences) and get excellent results, you're in for a big surprise.

So, it pays to think about the audience to whom you're going to speak. In a way, it's like taking a census of demographic factors. Can you estimate the prevalent age, gender makeup, educational background, income level, marital status, occupation, religious preference, average family size, political leanings, and so on? Some groups may be highly heterogeneous, but many audiences can be helpfully described by some common characteristics. The better feel you have for your audience, the more carefully you can hone your speech (while staying true to your own core principles) to resonate with their attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Step 2: Identification of Desired Outcomes

With your audience in mind, what is it you want them to think (the cognitive outcome) and/or do (the behavioral outcome)? These outcomes should be clear and doable. Your goal at the end of the speech should be an ability to select an audience member at random and ask him to paraphrase your key point/s; in response, and depending on the complexity of the topic, the person would be able at minimum to state the gist correctly.

As for behavior, the action sought should be accomplishable for the average audience member. If you want the individual to vote in an election, state that opinion clearly and provide details, as appropriate. If you want a change in national gun policy, be clear about the sought change (the cognitive claim) and what you want each individual to do about it (the behavioral counterpart).

Step 3: Preparation of Appropriate Supporting Materials

Supporting materials for a public speech generally consist of the following types of rational and dramatic evidence: statistics, stories and examples, testimonies, and analogies. These different types of supporting materials serve different purposes and you need to know how and when to use each type.

Statistics. Statistics are so important in contemporary society that in general perception they seem to equate to facts. However, we must heed the phrase popularized by Mark Twain---"Lies, damned lies, and statistics"---and the quotation popularly attributed to Albert Einstein: "What can be counted does not always count; what counts is not always countable." Ill-used statistics can lie insidiously, but well-used statistics furnish powerful proof. The purpose of statistics generally is to establish the scope of a problem or the developmental trajectory of an issue.

Follow these guidelines when using statistics. *One, cite the source of the statistics.* If the source is obscure, cite the relevant qualifications of the source as well. *Two, draw logical, not illogical, conclusions from statistics.* For instance, you may say that Franklin Roosevelt made $75,000 in 1942, Richard Nixon $200,000 in 1972, and George W. Bush $400,000 in 2002. However, you may not draw the conclusion that the U.S. presidential salary has been improving consistently, because inflation was not factored into the equation. *Three, do not leave the audience guessing the meaning of ambiguous statistics.* For instance, you may say: "According to the National Safety Council, 80 children aged 0 - 14 were killed in gun accidents in 2010 in the United States." Different listeners may draw different conclusions from these statistics. One conclusion may be: "That's

no big deal. Children of the same age group killed in car accidents in that year numbered 2,400." Since this conclusion may oppose your intended conclusion, you need to say why 80 annual child gun accident victims is unacceptable. _Four, offer further explanation for statistics that may appear incredible to the audience_. A student speaker once said, "Do you know that 20% of kindergarteners chew tobacco?" This statistic probably doesn't conform to everyday experiences. The speaker not only needs to cite the statistical source, but also to explain how the data were collected.

Testimonies. Often used in the court of law, testimonies refer to words by a witness about an incident or experience. Depending on the source, testimonies may be classified as expert, celebrity, or lay testimony.

It's best to use the following guidelines when employing testimonies. _One, understand which type of testimony to use_. Expert testimony is generally used for technical issues. Lay testimony is used for everyday experiences of ordinary people. Celebrity testimony is used for its popularity appeal, but be cautious with its credibility. _Two, use unbiased testimony_. If the testifier has a vested interest in an issue, resultant testimony is biased. The following testimony may not lend much support to the speaker's claim: "According to my mom, I'm the most handsome boy in the block." Reluctant biased testimony, however, may work. Reluctant testimony refers to testimony provided under the pressure of facts or law, such as when Bill Clinton finally admitted that he had a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky. _Three, be sure to cite the source and the relevant qualifications of the source of the testimony_. These obligations may seem obvious, but they often are omitted from a speech. _Four, direct quotes, when possible, may afford better credibility than paraphrased quotes_. Even if you're

tempted to enhance the meaning of what was said, the actual utterances usually are most effective.

Stories and Examples. If statistics establish the scope of an issue, stories and examples establish the depth and richness of a human experience. Use the following guidelines for stories and examples. *One, use stories and examples to which the audience can relate*. Different audiences have different life experiences. What works for one audience may not work for another. *Two, use details in your stories and examples.* Details help create the necessary mental images and emotional appeal in stories and examples. Details also help your audience better remember them. *Three, stories and examples can be real or hypothetical.* When possible, use real ones for better credibility. Use hypothetical ones to incite unique perspectives or for experiences difficult to find in everyday life.

Analogies. Some human experiences are inevitably sharper than others. For instance, our sensations with concrete visual images (such as a dark desolate valley or a sunlit path) are more vivid than our understandings of abstract concepts (such as segregation or racial justice). Analogies enable the speaker to borrow vivid human experiences to help others understand abstract concepts. For this reason, Martin Luther King, Jr. used analogical language repeatedly in his renowned "I Have a Dream" speech. Consider this example: "Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice." The language of analogy is the language of poetry and Shakespeare. Use it in your speaking for conceptual clarity. In addition, use other rhetorical devices such as alliteration, antithesis, parallelism, and repetition to add eloquence and impact to your speech.

Ancient Greeks gave us three instruments of influence: pathos (emotion), which includes the use of stories and analogies; logos (logic), which includes the use of statistics and facts; and ethos (credibility), which includes the use of testimony. As different types of supporting materials serve different purposes, it is recommendable that speakers use as many types of supporting materials as possible to achieve maximum strength for their speeches.

Step 4: Organization

An important way the human brain comprehends the world is by organizing it. Through clear organization, the speaker helps the audience better understand the content of the speech. In addition, a clearly organized speech helps the audience get a better perception of the speaker. This section explains the basic organization patterns for a speech and how to begin and end a speech effectively.

Basic Organization Patterns. Different types of speeches serve different purposes. Some are to entertain, such as after-dinner speeches. Some are to commemorate, such as eulogies and commencement speeches. Some are to inform, such as a technical presentation. Some are to persuade, such as a political candidate's pitch or a sales presentation. Depending on the type of speech you're making, you may choose one of the following organization patterns.

(1) **Topical order.** Using a topical order means you are organizing your speech in a sequence of major topics covered. For instance, this tutorial on how to make a public speech is organized in a topical order comprising five major points. When you use the topical order, be sure that the different topics are collectively comprehensive and mutually exclusive. That is, the topics together should offer a full coverage of the desired content for your speech. On the other hand, the topics should be distinct from each other and should not repeat any section's content. The topical order is often suitable for informative speaking.

(2) **Chronological order.** The chronological order refers to the sequence of time. It follows the natural progression of time---yesterday, today, tomorrow. Many noted speeches in history are organized chronologically, such as Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. The Gettysburg Address begins with "Four score and seven years ago…," which represents the historical yesterday. It moves on to say, "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, …" which addresses today. It concludes by saying, "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." The conclusion represents Lincoln's hope for the union's future. One hundred years later, when Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he followed a similar organizational pattern: "Five score years ago…. One hundred later…. I still have a dream that one day…." The chronological order is often suitable for commemorative speaking.

(3) **Spatial order.** Chronology is linear and one-dimensional; space is three-dimensional. The spatial order follows space in a predetermined direction such as upward, downward, circularly, from-center-to-periphery,

and so on. Please refer to Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech where he says, "Let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from…." The locations from which King hopes freedom would ring follow a spatial contour that encircles the nation, from the northeast down to the south and then westward to California. By following the spatial order, King creates a grand vista in the audience's mind where "freedom rings from every hill and molehill, from every mountainside" in the United States. An everyday example of spatial order is the geographical sequencing that the "weatherman" uses during informational news broadcasts about the day's elements.

(4) **Problem-causes-solution.** In the "problem-causes-solution" order, sometimes also known as "stock issues," a speaker first introduces a problem, then addresses its causes, and concludes by offering a solution. In a variant form, the speaker can omit the "causes" step if the audience is known to be familiar with the sources of the problem. This organization pattern is often used for persuading the audience to adopt a solution or policy. It is used widely by the U.S. judicial system.

(5) **Monroe's motivated sequence.** Alan Monroe developed his self-named motivated sequence. It is a five-step process that inspires an audience to take action to help resolve a problem. As the first step, a speaker needs to arouse an audience's attention. Second, the speaker needs to establish the existence of a need or problem. Third, the speaker needs to propose a solution that satisfies the need or resolves the problem. Fourth, the speaker visualizes the wonderful reality after the need is met and the problem resolved. Finally, the speaker calls the audience to engage in specific actions. This organization can be carried out in a commercial lasting only 30 seconds.

(6) N-A-R. This acronym stands for narration/argumentation/refutation, and is often used in a debate. In this organization pattern, the speaker first offers a narration or story for the purpose of arousing audience attention and sympathy. Second, the speaker presents his or her side of the arguments. Finally, the speaker refutes opponent arguments. Candidates vying for office often use this structure or a variation of it.

How to Begin and End a Speech. The beginning and ending are important junctures during a speech and have important functions to fulfill. Generally speaking, a good _speech beginning_ should do the following: get attention, establish speaker credibility, motivate the audience to listen, and preview purpose and key points.

(1) **Getting attention.** Attention has become a scarce commodity given our device-overloaded world. Use the following techniques to get the audience's attention: humor, anecdotes, startling statistics, suspense, question, and quotation.

(2) **Establishing speaker credibility.** Unless you are famous in a field of human endeavor, say something that indicates your credibility on a topic, such as your experience, credentials, and research.

(3) **Motivating the audience.** In your speech beginning, explain to the audience why they need to listen to you---what benefit they will gain by listening to your speech.

(4) **Previewing purpose and key points.** By previewing the purpose and key points of the speech, the speaker prepares the audience for the upcoming speech and gives the speech, itself, a structure to follow.

The *speech ending*, generally and minimally, should accomplish a natural sense of closure for the speech by reviewing the purpose and key points of the speech. Better yet, the beginning and ending together could accomplish a bookends effect. That is, the ending should somewhat echo the beginning. For instance, if the beginning posed a question, the ending could resolve that question; if the beginning adopted a quotation, the ending could use another quotation to reinforce the same central idea; if the beginning offered a scenario with a sad result due to a bad policy, the ending could use the same scenario but with a happy result due to a good policy. Articles, like speeches, often use this kind of book-ending to great effect. In 1960, during a period of intense debate on freedom of the press vs. censorship of pornography fueled by Richard Nixon's appointed investigative committee, William Randolph Hearst, Jr., Editor-in-Chief of the Hearst Newspapers, entitled a persuasive pitch "A Disservice to Our Democracy" and closed his op-ed with "The commission's report was, indeed, a disservice to our democracy." Learn from good music, which both begins and ends on the keynote.

Step 5: Delivery

Every speech has at least two different lives: the private life and the public life. If the privately constructed speech is not delivered effectively, it may not have a public life. The successful delivery of a speech depends on the speaker's use of the following: voice, eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, posture/movement, and appearance. When we read the printed word, various mechanisms are used to facilitate the reader's comprehension including punctuations, paragraphing, boldfacing, and italicizing. When we listen to a public speech, these mechanisms are absent. The speaker must now utilize

effective delivery, especially voice, to facilitate the audience's comprehension and reception of the speech.

Voice. First, the speaker's voice must be clear. Vocal clarity poses several requirements: adequate and sustained volume, lucid enunciation, and a slow but natural pace. Listening to some speakers is like reading a printout from a printer running out of ink. Practice your breathing and enunciation so that your vocal printer remains clear and crisp. Second, the speaker's voice must be vital and vivid. A monotonous voice puts the audience to sleep. The piano is expressive because of its 88 notes. Be sure your voice has an adequate keyboard in it. Inflect and modulate your voice to make it expressive. Third, give your voice a rhythm. Slow down. Pace it. Neither rush nor drag. Use pauses rather than filler words such as "um," "like," "you know," "and," "what not," etc. Remember that no word gets attention better than a well-timed pause.

Eye Contact & Facial Expressions. Like your voice, your eyes and face are capable of expressing complex messages. Don't lose this capability as a public speaker. Bad advice is sometimes given to beginning speakers who are nervous: Pick something on the wall as a focal point. In addition, intuitively you may choose to avoid looking at audience members whose attention may be straying. But you need to act counter-intuitively here. Compose yourself and look at the members of the audience. Then, you will have a much better chance of holding their attention. Scan all sections of the audience as an inclusive behavior. Look with sincerity, confidence, and conviction (which you should try to possess, of course). Just as a monotonous voice kills a speech, a monotonous face may do the same (unless perhaps justified by deadpan humor).

Posture & Movements. When you speak publicly, your whole body is often presented before the audience. Let your body speak for rather than against your voice. A good posture should be relaxed but alert, poised and erect, on two feet and parallel legs. A good posture also facilitates the circulation of your voice. When you move, which will help you relax and give visual variety to the audience, be deliberate and confident in your movements rather than pacing like a caged lion. Take your notes with you when you walk around. Otherwise, you will be make unnecessary trips to the podium to retrieve them.

Gestures. Ideally, your hands naturally follow and reinforce your vocal message. Unless you're very nervous, your mind will send appropriate movement signals to your hands. If you cannot accomplish this coordination, find a way to prevent your hands from being distracting. You can place your hands on the edge of the podium, for instance, which is much better than placing them in your pockets to play with car keys or loose change.

Appearance. Like your posture, your appearance cannot escape the audience's attention. In general, the best advice is to dress appropriately for the occasion to reinforce rather than to detract from your message. Remember, you're trying to resonate with your audience, not alienate it. As a side note, when appearing on an electronic venue, avoid using a color that is the same as the backdrop color of the stage. For instance, if you wear a tie of the backdrop color, the viewers may see a hole in your chest shaped like a tie.

Conclusion

As you can appreciate, public speaking is a complex form of art that may require lifelong learning. Nevertheless, its basic process is comprised of five steps: (1) audience analysis, (2) identification of desired outcomes, (3) preparation of supporting materials, (4) organization of the speech, and (5) speech delivery. It may be obvious that this process is geared to "normal" audiences. You will be able to compose and deliver an effective public presentation for such an audience by following the guidelines presented in this tutorial.