The Importance of Strong Public Speaking Skills

In both college and your career, strong public speaking skills will set you apart, make you feel more confident, and give you the ability to take on leadership roles.

Public speaking offers one of the most effective ways to get your point across, demonstrate your knowledge, and influence others. It can even [help you stay organized](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/tips-to-stay-organized-in-college/) and improve your writing and interpersonal communication.

Many people who appear completely comfortable in front of crowds started out with a significant fear of public speaking. By overcoming this fear, practicing, and gaining confidence, you can give yourself big advantages in life.

How to Become a Better Public Speaker

By incorporating several public speaking tips into your daily life, you can steadily improve your skills and become more comfortable giving presentations and speeches. These best practices include watching your body language, studying what works well for talented public speakers, practicing breath control, and preparing well in advance of your presentation.

user icon Study Great Public Speakers

Watching and learning from exceptional speakers offers one of the best ways to improve your own public speaking skills. To start, search for examples of great public speakers on YouTube.

When you watch these individuals, take note of their body language. You'll find that it tends to remain open and inviting. They use their arms and hands in ways that accentuate their key points. They also avoid unnecessary fidgeting and wisely use the space provided to them to capture the audience's attention.

Pay particular attention to how speakers pace themselves. They tend to take their time and deliver their words intentionally. Additionally, they use pauses to keep the audience engaged and do not rush themselves. They may use humor or anecdotes in appropriate and effective ways.

To start your search, check out some of the [TED Talks](https://www.youtube.com/user/TEDtalksDirector) available online. Toastmasters International also provides examples of some of the [best public speakers](https://www.youtube.com/user/Toastmasters) in the world.

heart icon Relax Your Body Language

A fear of public speaking can make you feel tense, which negatively affects your body language. The best public speakers maintain proper posture, make eye contact with the audience, and move in ways that look natural.

Good body language improves your performance and helps the audience take in and remember what you say. Avoid putting your hands in your pockets or crossing your arms. Instead, start with your arms at your side and use purposeful hand gestures as you make your points.

Look out into the audience. Don't stare down at the ground or at your notes for long periods of time. As you build confidence, you may even start to make eye contact with individual people watching your presentation.

speakerphone icon Practice Voice and Breath Control

For many people, public speaking can warp their sense of time, making them speak faster than they normally would. Be aware of this phenomenon and keep a steady pace while presenting. It will help calm your nerves and allow the audience to better understand what you say.

Breath control can help you do this. Practice using your stomach to push air in and out of your lungs. Before you begin public speaking, take 10 slow, deep breaths.

chat icon Prepare Talking Points

Before you give a speech, prepare a series of talking points that contain the key messages you want your audience to know, feel, and understand by the time you have finished speaking. Start with 3-5 broad messages, then outline several underlying points that support each message.

Organize your talking points in chronological order, starting with the message you want to cover first. Having an outline of your [messages on hand](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/online-presentation-tips/) helps prevent you from getting off track in your presentation and ensures you do not forget to cover any important points.

user icon Know Your Audience

Before you give a presentation, take the time to understand your audience so that you can tailor your speech to them. Think about what is important to them and what they are most likely to find useful.

The type of event where you'll be speaking will also affect your approach. A formal gala, for example, may require a different type of presentation than a group of your fellow students in a classroom setting.

share icon Add a Visual Aid

A visual aid, such as a PowerPoint presentation, can help you make your key points while better engaging the audience. Your visual aid should support your presentation but not distract from it.

Avoid text-heavy PowerPoints or reading verbatim from your slides. Create slides that feature graphs and images that reflect your points. If you need to include text, make it just a few short bullet points.

microphone icon Rehearse

One of the best ways to improve your public speaking skills is simply to practice. Through repetition, you can iron out your messaging and find better ways to phrase certain parts of your presentation. Once you have rehearsed your speech multiple times, you will naturally feel more comfortable giving it in front of an audience.

device-mobile icon Record Your Speeches

Record your public speaking performances on camera so you can go back and watch yourself. Examine your body language, how your voice sounds, and your pacing. Even the best speakers do this on a regular basis and often find ways they can improve their public speaking skills.

chat icon Phone a Friend

Bring a friend you trust to watch you present. Let them know that you're looking for constructive feedback and that they can be completely honest with you. Give them a few pointers about what to watch out for so they notice if you still need to work on your pacing, your fidgeting, or your delivery in a particular section.

library icon Take a Public Speaking Class

By taking public speaking classes, students gain critical skills that rapidly improve their ability to speak and present to audiences. They also gain confidence as they learn from experts and rely on their peers for support. If you have a fear of public speaking, you can connect with fellow students dealing with the same challenge.

If you wish to improve your public speaking skills when giving virtual presentations, consider an online public speaking course. If you want to learn how to talk in front of a live audience, an in-person class may be the better option. You may also be able to find student clubs that can help you practice your public speaking skills.

Taking public speaking classes in college, especially early on, can help you succeed in the rest of your time in school and give you an advantage when it's time to start your career.

Here are a few helpful resources to boost your public speaking skills:

* [**Inc. Magazine: 20 Tips for Mastering the Art of Public Speaking**](https://www.inc.com/brent-gleeson/20-tips-for-mastering-art-of-public-speaking.html)
* [**TED's Secret to Great Public Speaking**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FOCpMAww28)
* [**Resources From Toastmasters**](https://www.toastmasters.org/resources/)
* What are the 7 P's of public speaking?
* The 7P's are **pronunciation, pace, pause, punch, power, passion, and posture**.

The next four P's are the keys to effective and compelling oral delivery: **Projection, Pace, Pitch, and Pauses**.

According to Forbes Magazine, few skills will bring more opportunity into your life than the ability to speak well in public. Below are 12 tips that can make the difference between those speakers who leave a powerful, positive impression and those that are quickly forgotten.

1. **Speak with an intent to move people to action**. Know what you want your audience to do immediately after hearing your speech. If nobody does anything different than they would have done before you spoke – the value of your speech is zero.
2. **Start strong with a “grabber”**. A personal story, a quote from an expert or a shocking statistic – something that takes a hold of your audience and gets them hooked and opens their mind to your message. Give the audience a chance to see your personal connection to the topic.
3. **Structure your material in three sections**– grabber, middle, close. Know your material. Get really interested in the topic. Find good stories.
4. **Practice. Practice.**Rehearse out loud with all equipment you plan on using. Work to control filler words; Practice, pause and breathe. Use a clock to check your timings and allow time for the unexpected.

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1. **Know the audience.** Try to speak to one or two people in the audience as they arrive – they will be your allies in the audience – it is easier to speak to friends than to strangers.
2. **Know the setup.** Arrive in good time to check out the speaking area and get practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
3. **Relax.** Begin with a well-prepared grabber. A relevant personal story is a great start.  It establishes your credibility.  It connects you to the audience and creates the right emotional atmosphere (and calms your nerves).
4. **Visualize yourself successful.** See yourself at the end of the speech surrounded by people asking questions, visualize the applause.
5. **Pauses.** Include 3-8 second pauses at key moments – just before key statements or just after a story – this really brings the audience into the speech.
6. **Don’t apologize**– the audience probably never noticed it.
7. **Smile.** Look like the content matters to you – if the audience don’t feel that it is important to you, it will be really hard for them to feel that it should be important for them.
8. **Get experience.** Take every opportunity you can get to speak (and listen to other speakers). Prepare well ahead of time. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking.