

# How to Prepare for Speaking in Public



While we can never truly eliminate the fear of public speaking, we can take some basic steps to reduce that feeling of total helplessness and channel nervous energy into our presentation.

### **The key is preparation**

Abraham Lincoln once said, "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six sharpening my axe." Hold on to this thought.



## Feedback

Take advantage of having time before that next speaking engagement. Start by creating a simple two or three main point presentation, and do it in front of a video camera. Then watch yourself. Pay attention to what both looks and sounds good, figure out how it can be made better, then try again. If you can, present it in front of friends or family, and then ask them what worked and what didn't. Often what we think looks or sounds a certain way is far different from the perspective of an audience member. This kind of feedback is invaluable.



## Watch Your Voice

When you are watching yourself, pay attention to your voice. Don't let a weak voice betray your nervousness. A soft voice sounds apprehensive. Speak louder than you would one-to-one, but without shouting. Shouting rarely works on stage, but a strong voice draws instant attention and gives you credibility.



## Watch Your Eyes

Use your eyes. Don't stare at the ceiling or the floor, and don't try to imagine everyone in their underwear--that doesn't work. Instead, look random people in the eye and hold them for 3 to 5 seconds each. This can take practice. Again, use your family and friends. This technique alone will make you look like a professional speaker.



## Don't Be Afraid to Pause

A nervous speaker tends to rush. This not only gives away a speaker's anxiety, but it can ruin wonderful opportunities to make an audience think about a point that was just made. If your mind goes blank, just pause and collect your thoughts. But stay with them; stay engaged. Your audience will watch with wonder and anticipation.



## Learn How to Utilize Notes

Prepare your notes using just key or "trigger" words. You should be speaking on content that you are familiar with - so it's enough to just talk about what you already know. The key words simply guide you to the next thought. Never write a speech out word for word and try to memorize it. A speech written out is a train ready to get derailed. Fear and anxiety will cause you to forget a word or sentence and then your brain loses the pattern. It never works. Instead, use the key words to remind you of what to say and then just speak from your heart. Your audience does not know your speech and won't know you made a mistake unless you tell them.

