

# Better Public Speaking

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/videos/better-public-speaking-transcript.htm>

We all have to speak in front of an audience occasionally. We might be training co-workers, giving a presentation to customers or speaking at a conference. How well we perform affects people's opinion of us, so we can feel afraid that we'll fail. But public speaking is a learnable skill just like any other. Follow our tips and you, too, can become a confident and compelling speaker.

First and foremost, engage your audience members. Hook them from the outset by starting with an interesting fact, a challenging question, or an intriguing statement. Encourage your audience to participate by asking a question that gets people thinking and that's hard not to respond to. For example, one that begins: "How many of you...?" may get your audience members nodding or even raising their hands.

It can be tempting to read your notes word for word, to be sure of covering everything correctly. But this will cut you off from your audience. Instead, list important points on cue cards and only refer to them if you have to. Your audience will also more likely warm to you if you talk naturally, as if you're addressing one person, not a crowd. But this takes practice.

Rehearse plenty of times so that you can talk fluently. Then do a practice run in front of a small, supportive audience and ask for feedback. And record or film your sessions so you can see your strengths and weaknesses for yourself, and hone your skills.

Before you deliver your speech, get yourself into the right mindset by thinking positively. Banish any negative self-talk by using affirmations. Visualize yourself giving a successful speech.

A natural reaction to the fear of public speaking is the flight, fight or freeze response. But you can lessen its hold on you. Focus on what your audience is going to gain from your talk, rather than on how you're feeling. And take slow, deep breaths before you begin. Be aware that nerves might make you talk too quickly, so force yourself to slow down.

Don't be afraid to pause and gather your thoughts. You'll appear more relaxed and confident by not charging on in a panic. You'll look particularly confident if you're standing up straight, looking people in the eye, and smiling!

The more you speak in front of others, the better you'll be at it, so be sure to take up opportunities to deliver presentations or address meetings rather than avoiding them. If you do, you'll likely enhance your reputation, and you could even earn yourself recognition or a promotion!

## Becoming a Confident, Compelling Speaker

<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/PublicSpeaking.htm>

Whether we're talking in a team meeting or presenting in front of an audience, we all have to speak in public from time to time. We can do this well or we can do this badly, and the outcome strongly affects the way that people think about us. This is why public speaking causes so much anxiety and concern. The good news is that, with thorough preparation and practice, you can overcome your nervousness and perform exceptionally well.

# The Importance of Public Speaking

Even if you don't need to make regular presentations in front of a group, there are plenty of situations where good public speaking skills can help you advance your career and create opportunities.

For example, you might have to talk about your organization at a conference, make a speech after accepting an award, or teach a class to new recruits. Speaking to an audience also includes online presentations or talks; for instance, when training a virtual team, or when speaking to a group of customers in an online meeting.

Good public speaking skills are important in other areas of your life, as well. You might be asked to make a speech at a friend's wedding, give a eulogy for a loved one, or inspire a group of volunteers at a charity event.

In short, being a good public speaker can enhance your reputation, boost your self-confidence, and open up countless opportunities.

However, while good skills can open doors, poor ones can close them. For example, your boss might decide against promoting you after sitting through a badly-delivered presentation. You might lose a valuable new contract by failing to connect with a prospect during a sales pitch. Or you could make a poor impression with your new team, because you trip over your words and don't look people in the eye.

Make sure that you learn how to speak well!

## Strategies for Becoming a Better Speaker

The good news is that speaking in public is a learnable skill. As such, you can use the following strategies to become a better speaker and presenter.

### Plan Appropriately

First, make sure that you plan your communication appropriately. Use tools like the Rhetorical Triangle, Monroe's Motivated Sequence, and the 7Cs of Communication to think about how you'll structure what you're going to say.

When you do this, think about how important a book's first paragraph is; if it doesn't grab you, you're likely going to put it down. The same principle goes for your speech: from the beginning, you need to intrigue your audience.

For example, you could start with an interesting statistic, headline, or fact that pertains to what you're talking about and resonates with your audience. You can also use story telling as a powerful opener; our Expert Interviews with Annette Simmons and Paul Smith offer some useful tips on doing this.

Planning also helps you to think on your feet. This is especially important for unpredictable question and answer sessions or last-minute communications.

**Tip:** Remember that not all occasions when you need to speak in public will be scheduled. You can make good impromptu speeches by having ideas and mini-speeches pre-prepared. It also helps to have a good, thorough understanding of what's going on in your organization and industry.

## Practice

There's a good reason that we say, "Practice makes perfect!" You simply cannot be a confident, compelling speaker without practice. To get practice, seek opportunities to speak in front of others. For example, Toastmasters is a club geared specifically towards aspiring speakers, and you can get plenty of practice at Toastmasters sessions. You could also put yourself in situations that require public speaking, such as by cross-training a group from another department, or by volunteering to speak at team meetings.

## The Rhetorical Triangle

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/RhetoricalTriangle.htm>

### Making Your Writing Credible, Appealing and Logical

Create a strong message by addressing the three points of the triangle.

Does your heart sink a little when you are asked to prepare a written document or present information to an audience?

If so, you're not alone! Many people struggle with putting their ideas and thoughts on paper and delivering a message. It's a skill that needs to be learned and practiced. And unless you're fresh out of school, your writing skills may be a little rusty.

Yet with the increase of email and working with people in remote places, delivering clear and persuasive communication is becoming more and more important. The trend is away from direct, one-on-one communication because people do not have to be face to face any more when they work together.

Perhaps the biggest problem with this is that when you write, you often don't get a second chance to make your point in a different way. You get one shot, and if you lose your reader, it is difficult to get them back. This is why you need to pick and choose your words carefully, and present your points in a style, manner and sequence that best suits the message that you are sending.

The Rhetorical Triangle is a useful way of formulating your thoughts and presenting your position. Here we look at how you can use it to improve your writing.

### Understanding the Tool: Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the ancient art of using language to persuade. If you use it well, your audience will easily understand what you're saying, and will be influenced by your message.

By taking the time to understand how rhetorical arguments are structured and presented, you can vastly improve your own writing, and make your points clearly, efficiently and effectively.

**Note:** The term "rhetoric" in modern language has been used to refer to arguments that are designed to obscure the truth. The word has therefore taken on a negative connotation ("All that politician does is spew rhetoric.") But, this is not how we advise using the Rhetorical Triangle.

Applying the principles of rhetoric helps you to structure an argument so the truth becomes immediately apparent to your audience. With the Rhetorical Triangle approach, we focus on the three things that have the greatest impact on an argument:

- The writer.
- The audience.
- The context.

These three elements form the points of the Rhetorical Triangle:

According to this approach, these three factors determine the persuasiveness of your argument. Your writing – and any other form of communication – needs to take all three into consideration.

Figure 1: The Rhetorical Triangle



## The Writer

Whether consciously or subconsciously, your audience wants to know what your motives are for your communication. If you don't make it clear why you are presenting information, some people will assume that you are not being totally candid, or that you are hiding something. Members of your audience may ask themselves:

- Are you providing information?
- Are you trying to educate?
- Are you making a call for action?
- Are you attempting to persuade others to change a perspective or a firmly held belief?
- Are you presenting ideas for problem solving or analysis?
- Are you just trying to entertain?

The way in which the identity of the writer (or speaker) affects the argument is known as **ethos**. The audience wants to know who they are dealing with. So make sure you clarify:

- Who you are.
- Why you are competent to speak on the issue.
- Where your authority comes from.

Your audience will also be trying to figure out what your motives are and what you believe, value, and assume. This information helps them determine your credibility and decide whether you are being sincere.

## The Audience

When you communicate, in writing or verbally, you need to understand your audience. Knowing who you're speaking to helps you to avoid using technical terms when speaking to lay people, or "dumbing down" the content if your message is intended for professionals. Things to consider here include:

- What are the audience's expectations?
- How will they use the information you provide?
- What is the audience hoping to take away after reading/listening?
- Why are you communicating to this audience in the first place?

This part of the triangle is concerned with appealing to the emotions of the audience, which is known as **pathos**. The audience needs to be moved by what you are saying.

Ask yourself:

- What emotion do you want to evoke? Fear, trust, loyalty...?
- Do you have shared values you want to draw on?
- How do your audience's beliefs fit with your message?

Connecting with your audience through pathos (for instance, connecting with them on an emotional level or through their values or interests) is a particularly strong means of gaining support.

## The Context

Finally, your audience will analyze your message by putting it into context. They'll likely do this by considering the following:

- What events preceded the communication?
- What types of arguments are used?
- Are they logical and well thought out?
- How are they delivered?
- Where is the document or speech delivered?
- Is this communication necessary?

Here the emphasis is on logic and reason, or **logos** (pronounced log-oss). Your audience needs to be able to follow what you are saying for it to be believable. Ask yourself:

- Have I presented a logical, well-constructed argument?
- How do I support my claims?
- What evidence do I have?
- What are the counterarguments?

**Note:** The three points on the Rhetorical Triangle relate directly to the three classic appeals you should consider when communicating.

- **Ethos** – building trust by establishing your credibility and authority (Writer).
- **Pathos** – appealing to emotion by connecting with your audience through their values and interests (Audience).
- **Logos** – appeal to your audience's intelligence with well-constructed and clearly argued ideas (Context).

To be fully effective and persuasive, your communication must appeal to all three of the elements of the Rhetorical Triangle. An argument that is purely based on emotion won't last for very long. Likewise, if all you do is present facts and figures, you will lose your audience's interest and they won't be able to relate to what you are saying.

Finally, you can be the most credible person going, but if you don't make sense, or your arguments aren't logical, you won't be considered credible for very long.

## Using the Rhetorical Triangle

When preparing a written document, speech or presentation you should first consider the three elements required for effective persuasion. If your communication is lacking in any of the three areas, then you'll decrease the overall impact your message will have on your audience.

## Step One: Establish Your Credibility

Fully consider the impact your credibility has on the message. Failing to do so risks leaving your audience unconvinced. Answer the audience's question, "Is the source credible?"

- What is the purpose of your communication?
  - A call for action?
  - To provide information?
  - To educate?
  - To persuade or change a perspective?
  - To present ideas?
  - To entertain?
- Who are you as a person?
  - Establish who you are and reveal your biases, beliefs, values, and assumptions as appropriate.
  - Explain where your expertise comes from.
  - Use expert testimony.
  - Show why you should be considered an authority.

## Step Two: Appeal to the Audience's Emotions

Fully consider your audience; otherwise they may feel disconnected and the message will be lost. Appeal to their emotions where this is appropriate and honest. And answer the audience's hidden question, "Is this person trying to manipulate me?"

- Who are the members of my audience?
  - What are their expectations?
  - Why are they reading/listening?
  - How will they use this document?
  - What do I want them to take away?
- How can I connect emotionally?
  - What emotions do I want to evoke?
  - Do I use anecdotes or personal stories?

## Step Three: Consider the Context

Fully consider the context of your message. And make sure you deliver it with a solid appeal to reason. Answer the audience's question, "Is the presentation logical?"

- How will I present the information?
  - What type of reasoning will I use?
  - How will I support my position? With statistics? Observations?
  - What tone will I use? Formal or informal?
  - How will I deliver the communication?
- What events are surrounding this communication?
  - What background information do I need to supply?
  - What do I need to present to make sure my points are clear?
  - Are there counterarguments I should bring up and then dismiss?
  - Does the method or location of my communication fit with its message?