A Guide to Delivering Your First Speech

Inquire: Your First Speech

Overview

It's finally time to give your first big speech! You've learned plenty about what to include, and now it's time to put it all into action. This lesson will teach you how to practice and prepare, analyze your audience, imagine success for yourself, and work through any mistakes that might happen as you go along. After that, it's time for last minute advice on preparing for your speech and making sure you're absolutely ready for your speaking day!

Big Question: What part of the preparation process do you think is the most helpful?

Watch: Getting Ready for Your First Speech

The first presentation in a speech class can be daunting. But, after all the work you've put in getting to this point, you are more than ready for the assignment ahead. This lesson will prepare you by explaining how to practice for your presentation, how to adapt to your audience, how to imagine yourself doing well, and how to give yourself some grace should you make a mistake. You will also learn how to create a presentation outline: an outline with truncated sections that help you remember your presentation while speaking.

A presentation outline can help you feel prepared to speak. It gives you the information you need for the speech in an accessible format that makes it easy to follow along. It also means you don't have to spend time digging through pages of information. You can instead have a much shorter version to find what you need. A common tip for practicing your speech is to use chunking. Split your speech into introduction, conclusion, and main body points, and practice one part each day.

Start with the introduction. On day two, practice the introduction and the conclusion to master a strong beginning and a strong ending. On day three, practice your introduction, your conclusion, and your first main point. Each day, add on one section until you’ve got it all. This is a great method of practice if you have a busy schedule and find it hard to make time to practice your presentation. It also helps you manage your speech in bite size chunks instead of psyching yourself out worrying about everything at once.

As you get closer to your presentation, there is less you can do to make large improvements. Starting early is the best way to ensure you are as prepared as you want to be. On the day of your presentation, commit to doing well, and “fake it until you make it.” Another suggestion is to avoid caffeine and sugar so you aren’t jittery and don’t have an abundant amount of nervous energy.
With the help of this lesson, you will be ready and excited for your next big presentation!

Read: Preparing for Your First Speech

Overview
Presenting your first speech for this class might be something you want to put off. But, the time has come! This lesson will walk you through everything you need to know to get ready for your first speech from practicing, adapting to your audience, imagining success, and finally, giving yourself some grace.

Practice Makes Perfect
Once you have prepared your presentation, you want to practice it. The importance of practicing your speech is reiterated so many times because it really is that important! The more you practice, the better you will feel about your presentation, and the better your presentation will be. Follow the practice strategies discussed in past lessons: practice in a mirror, practice for a friend, and record yourself.

Adapt your speech as you go based on your practice. If there is a section that always trips you up, change it. If rearranging content or visual aids makes more sense, do it. If the friend you practice in front of gives you good feedback, take that into consideration and make changes. Your presentation is never “finalized,” especially before you present it. You should always be willing to make the presentation better, and practicing is the best way to do that. Don’t keep practicing things that don’t work well; change them so that your presentation gets a little better every time you do it.

Know Your Audience
Knowing your audience is key to doing well on a presentation. One of the ways to know your audience is to know its demographics. Demographics are identifying information such as age, religion, sex, gender, ethnicity, or race. Demographics help you adapt your presentations based on who will be listening.

Another way to adapt to your audience is to remember the four listening styles. You can adapt your presentation to include information or examples that will best appeal to the listening style you expect most of your audience to have. Generally speaking, this means a people-oriented style, but demographic information can help you determine if the listening style might be different. Looking at the jobs people have can help you determine their listening styles as well.

Finally, you can poll your audience during your presentation as a way to get to know them. Asking how they feel about certain issues or examples can help you cater your presentation on the fly. This isn’t the easiest thing to do, but it becomes easier with practice and experience.

Imagine Success
One of the most important steps to a successful presentation is telling yourself you will succeed. A self-fulfilling prophecy happens when you tell yourself a certain outcome will occur, and it does. Often, this happens in a bad way; we tell ourselves we will mess up, and then we do. However, you can use this power for good if you simply tell yourself that you will do well. But, often, telling yourself you’ll do well isn’t enough. Sometimes, you need to have specific goals in mind. So, rather than imagining you’ll do well on a speech, imagine you’ll do well on a specific part. Imagine your jokes going well or your transitions being smooth. Having specific goals will ensure that your focus can be on small, specific things rather than having to focus on doing everything right.
Give Yourself Grace

During this first speech, something will probably go less than perfect. That’s okay! The key when this happens is not to let it get to you. Mistakes happen. You’re new to public speaking, and even if you aren’t, there is always room to grow. Mistakes are not something to get down about, but are rather opportunities to learn and grow. When you notice you have made a mistake, don’t beat yourself up. Instead, you should note what went wrong and how you might improve on it in the future. Once you decide on what to fix, come up with a concrete plan of action to make the fixes you think need to be made.

Finally, do your best. Be happy with doing your best. Perfection isn’t the goal, but rather doing better than you did last time. For some people, getting on their feet and speaking in front of others is their best — and that’s okay! For others, their best is giving the presentation better than they did in practice — and that’s okay too! Whatever you need to do to feel like you did your best is fine. Write it down, set it as a goal, and be happy when you get there. Mistakes happen.

Reflect Poll: Speech Preparation

Which preparation tactic has helped you the most?

- Chunking
- Practicing
- Making a preparation outline
- Making a presentation outline
- Who needs to prepare?!

Expand: Presenting Your Speech

Overview

You are almost ready to deliver your first speech. This section will review creating a presentation outline, strategies for practicing your speech, and finally, some last minute advice for delivering your speech.

Creating a Presentation Outline

This presentation requires certain steps. First, make a presentation outline. Second, present your speech. Finally, submit a recording of your speech for use in future modules.

A presentation outline is an outline with truncated sections that help you remember your presentation while speaking. It’s helpful to convert full sentences into short statements — one or two words — that remind you what you’re speaking about in each section. These notes should be understandable to you and should only include full sentences when you plan to reference a direct quotation from a source. Once you have made your presentation outline, it’s time to practice your presentation.

Strategies for Practicing Your Speech

We’ve already discussed practicing your speech, but it bears repeating. This section focuses on strategies beyond simply repeating your whole speech start to finish. If you are having trouble with your speech, or if you are stumbling over certain sections, this is for you. Start by reviewing sections of your
speech and practicing those first. You might have to adapt your speech by changing the wording or rearranging sections for better delivery.

In your speech, it is likely you will have verbal citations, so it will be important for you to memorize the citation (usually the author and year, and sometimes the name of the publication). Also, be sure you discuss the information from that citation accurately.

Practice by chunking your speech. Let's say you have an hour a day to practice your speech, and you have seven days before you deliver your speech. Additionally, you have an introduction, three main points, and a conclusion. You can practice by chunking your speech into different practice sessions. The first day, just practice your introduction. Spend your second day practicing your conclusion. This might seem odd, but you want to make sure your beginning and ending are strong. So, those are the sections you'll want to practice the most. Spend the last 10 to 15 minutes of your second day reviewing your introduction. On the third day, spend the majority of the time working on your first main point. Then, review your introduction and conclusion, and add the main point of your speech to the end of your practice section. On the fourth day, spend the majority of your time focusing on your second main point, then review all that you've worked on at the end. On the fifth day, work on the last point and review the whole speech. On the sixth day, identify the parts of the speech that give you the most trouble. Work on those parts, and then review the whole speech at the end. On the last day, you should be practicing your whole speech in its entirety over and over and over. At this point, record your speech and practice it in front of friends.

**Last Minute Tips for Delivering Your Speech**

If you’ve practiced your speech at length, memorized and rehearsed your verbal citations, and adapted or changed places in your speech that give you trouble, you are ready to deliver your speech. Remember you will deliver it exactly how you practice it. Here are some last minute tips for helping you survive your first speech.

You've heard the phrase “fake it until you make it,” and it's very true. Even the most veteran public speakers may get nervous before a speech. Try repeating positive affirmations to yourself while waiting. Go into the bathroom and say positive things while looking into a mirror. Smile. Smiling will help you channel your confidence.

Get rid of excess energy. Nervousness is nothing more than an excess of adrenaline pumping through your body. Do a couple of jumping jacks in the hallway or bathroom. It sounds crazy, but it is immensely helpful when trying to quell nerves before a speech.

**Lesson Toolbox**

**Additional Resources and Readings**

A video providing you with tips on how to engage with your audience during a presentation
- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IG-8P7refs

A video providing tips on how to present a speech that isn’t memorized
- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41ZBTgYSl0c
A video offering tips on how to improve your presentation skills
  ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3O4mbU_7SU

Lesson Glossary

demographics: identifying information such as age, religion, sex, gender, ethnicity, or race

self-fulfilling prophecy: when you tell yourself a certain outcome will happen, and it does

presentation outline: an outline with truncated sections that help you remember your presentation while speaking

Check Your Knowledge

1. You should make a presentation outline as part of the preparation process.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Chunking your speech will help you better prepare for a presentation.
   a. True
   b. False

3. You should practice your speech before presenting.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:
1. A  2. A  3. A

Citations

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