



PERFORMANCE TIPS

For Becoming a Great Speaker

WEAVE Community Training Series

We tend to think a speech is about the words we say, but a great speech is also a performance. How you deliver your words, your energy, your body language, how you move on stage, all matter – and can turn a good speech into a great one. Great speakers practice to keep a speech moving and engaging. Below, we offer a recap of the tips and tools for performing at your best.

Confidence is Key

Confidence comes from three things:

1. You feel prepared - you know your story, the audience, and your message. You have practiced. You have notes, if you need them.
2. You envision your success - imagine yourself at your most captivating, funny, and warm self
3. You let yourself be your natural, authentic self. If you like jokes, tell one. If you are emotional, that's okay. Bring your best self.

Energy

Your energy sets the tone for the entire presentation, inspiring and engaging the audience, making them more receptive to the message. This includes:

- **Enthusiasm:** If the speaker isn't excited or invested in their own content, the audience won't be either. In a room where attention spans are limited, high energy acts as a magnet for the audience's attention.
- **Authenticity:** Bring your best self to create a connection with the audience. When you present with energy, it often reflects your conviction in the material. It shows that you believe in what you are saying,
- **Emotion:** A passionate delivery evokes emotions. . For example, if you're sharing a success story, a high energy level can help convey excitement and pride. On the other hand, a measured and focused energy can help in conveying solemnity or seriousness when discussing a critical issue.
- **Confidence:** Confident speakers are viewed as more accurate, competent, credible, intelligent, knowledgeable, likable, and believable.

Timing & Pacing

Mastery of timing and pace ensures your message is conveyed succinctly and effectively, without overwhelming – or worse, boring – the audience.

- **Time budget:** Know how much time you have. Practice your talk beforehand to make sure it fits your time.
 - Make sure you can see a clock or timer (or put your phone on silent and use the stopwatch).
 - Break your talk into “chapters” - each with its own rhythm and point. This will give you a natural story arc and ensure you don’t try to cram in too much or get too complicated.
- **Slow it down:** Keep it slower than you would imagine. Most speakers talk too fast - people need time to follow you. Let important points sink in. You can even repeat a phrase for effect.
- **Change it up:** Vary your pacing. Tell a funny story more quickly than a sad one. Quickly run through a set of facts that support your point, but slow down when you land your key point, for example. Use pauses to emphasize a point, create suspense, or give the audience time to absorb information.

Voice

The quality of your voice can greatly influence how your message is received. A clear and confident voice exudes authority and helps in holding the audience's attention.

- **Conversational tone:** Adopting a conversational tone makes your speech more relatable and less formal. It helps in building rapport with the audience. Speaking as though you are having a conversation with a friend makes your words more accessible and inviting. Ensure your tone aligns with the message you are conveying.
- **Pitch:** when we speak naturally, we give all sorts of verbal cues. For example, most of us have our voices rise when we ask a question. Most of us lower our voice to make a point or state a fact.
- **Breath:** Proper breathing is essential for voice control. Breathing from the belly allows for stronger and more sustained vocal delivery. It also helps in managing nervousness by steadying your pace and calming your nerves.
- **Volume:** Be loud and soft for effect. Adjust your volume according to the size of the room and the acoustics, ensuring it feels natural.
 - **Mics:** If people can’t hear you, they can’t follow you, so use a mic when available. And when you have a mic, you don’t have to shout or project, which can make your voice sound strained or forced. Even with a mic, vary your volume: get a little louder to make an important point or softer to share a

secret or a vulnerability. If you want to be intimate in your story, speak softly and have the mic close, to make people lean in and listen.

- Position your mouth to the microphone, wherever it may be.
 - For podium or stand mic: don't talk straight into it, have it below and off to the side to avoid plosives – that bassy, popping, distorted sound from your breath hitting the mic.
 - Remember you when you turn your head to a different side, you have to move to maintain your mic position and distance – otherwise you get the Doppler effect like the sound of a passing motorcycle.
 - Handheld mic: like a podium mic, you have it below and off to the side to avoid plosives. Unlike a podium mic, you have to position it. Don't let the mic move away from your mouth as you speak. Be aware of its position.
 - Headset : this gives you freedom. Set it and forget it, because it will be in position however you move. If you have a lot of hair, tie it or use hair spray so hair doesn't hit your mic as you turn your head.

Face

Facial expressions provide non-verbal cues that can reinforce the spoken message and build human connection with the audience.

- **Expression:** A warm smile can put the audience at ease, but of course not every topic is sunshine and rainbows. Your facial expressions should be an extension of your emotions; forcing them may make you appear inauthentic. Be genuine in your emotions, and your face will naturally follow.
- **Eye contact:** Maintaining eye contact with your audience is essential to establish a connection and command attention. It makes the audience feel involved and acknowledged. When you look people in the eye, it gives them a sense of importance, that you are speaking to them personally. It also helps you gauge the audience's reaction to your speech, allowing you to adapt as necessary. Don't focus on just one section of the audience. Make sure to make eye contact with different people across the room, including those in the back.

Body

We all talk with our bodies naturally. If you want to feel confident and natural, you have to embody it!

- **Physicality:** Get comfortable in your body.

- If you need to jump around to get your blood flowing and your energy up, do it before you head to the stage. If you need to quiet and clear your head for 5 minutes, give yourself the space to do that. Don't be studying notes up to the moment you are introduced; become present.
- If coffee or soda makes you energetic and confident, drink it. If coffee makes you agitated and fidgety, don't drink it. If you have to go to the bathroom when nervous, stop drinking anything an hour ahead and take that bio break before you are set to start.
- If your mouth gets dry on stage, bring a bottle of water with you. No chewing gum or breath mints; you want to speak without hindrance.
- **Attire:** Wear what makes you feel confident!
 - If you know your audience, try to wear something that will be seen as respectful of who they are. This is tricky, since you want to be authentic and you also don't want your clothing to distract from your message. For example, for a religious audience, you may want to wear non-revealing clothing, as a sign of respect for their values.
 - Dress without distraction. You want the audience to listen to you, not hear the clink of large earrings or watch you adjust your loose glasses every few minutes. Generally, don't wear a hat or sunglasses. People need to see your eyes and expressions, which are an important part of your body language.
- **Posture:** Body language informs perception. Standing tall with your shoulders back and head held high makes you appear more commanding. Conversely, slouching or having a closed posture can make you seem less confident or uninterested. Use standing energy even if seated; sit at the front edge of the seat, which will lean you forward.
- **Movement:** Maybe just move your hands and head if you are at a podium, maybe you have a headset and can walk a little or throw your head back to laugh. Your natural self moves and laughs, don't stop that when you are a speaker. If you are telling a story, act out a part of it if that feels natural (slap your forehead or hang your head). Gestures can be powerful in emphasizing points and conveying emotions. Using your hands can help describe an idea or show enthusiasm. But keep it purposeful, not fidgety.
- **Positioning:** Position yourself deliberately on the stage to spark engagement. Moving toward the audience might indicate that you are sharing something personal or important, while moving back might indicate transitioning to a new point. Don't pace like a caged lion, but do use movement intentionally to complement your message.

Your Props

Supports are great to lean on, but for the love of heaven, please don't read your speech or your slides!

- **Notes:** If notes feel like a security blanket and you worry about losing your place or forgetting something, bring up some notes. But if notes make you want to read your speech, then skip them so you can speak naturally from the heart and not from the page.
- **Slides:** It's a question of whether to use slides, not an assumption that you always will. Treat them as a backdrop.
 - If you want your audience to see something very visual - you as a child, your community, a graph of global warming, the place you want to preserve, a brilliant quote from someone,- then slides are great. Don't use slides for your points and ideas, those should come from you.
 - If you are someone who wants to support your talk with details or data, be especially careful not to overburden your slides with information. Detailed notes slides can be tucked away at the end of the deck - you never have to use them in your talk, but they can augment your deck to deliver more detailed information, supporting citations, etc.
 - If you use slides, you must check and double check them. Get to the venue an hour early and work with the tech to make sure the slides will appear correctly on the screen. Bring a thumb drive with a copy of your slides or send slides ahead to the organizer. Then test everything.
 - If using slides, it's important to interact with them effectively. This means not turning your back to the audience to read the slides, but rather using them as a supplement to your speech. Ensure your focus remains on engaging with the audience.
 - Before presenting, get accustomed to the tools you will use, like a clicker or laser pointer, or mic'd podium so that interaction is smooth. If you are advancing the slides, try to have a monitor, so you don't have to look at the screen behind you. Get to know the control ahead of time, so you are comfortable with it. If someone else is advancing the slides, give them notes to know when you want them shown.
- **Video:** Like slides, any video you might use should support you, not outshine you.