

“More people list public speaking as their number one fear than dying. Think about it; at a funeral, more people would rather be in the coffin than delivering the eulogy.”

Jerry Seinfeld

Well frankly Jerry, that’s a shame. The request for an oral presentation is usually met with groans from students, but public speaking is a skill everyone could help develop in their lives. These noble skill allows you to make friends, embarrass enemies, get out of parking fines... the uses are endless! So let’s learn this ancient, awesome art of articulation. Read on...

Start off with a great opening line. “Friends, Romans, Countrymen- lend me your ears!” really grabs people’s attention, much more than saying “Good Morning Ladies and Gentleman, my name is Marc Antony and today I will be talking about Julius Caesar...” Come up with something original, forceful and dynamic to kick off a speech with to improve your ranking. It’s always good to “name-drop a famous name or organisation in your opening. For instance, the concept of a justified war is something that both I, and Winston Churchill have thought deeply on.”

One of the characteristics of a good speech is a “sound byte” It’s a sentence that everyone remembers from your speech. It should say in one powerful sentence everything you have argued in the speech. It’s a fairly modern term, but the concept is as old as time. For instance:

“We have nothing to fear, but fear itself.” A great line, but few people realise it was part of a speech on economic reform.

“I have nothing to offer but Blood, Sweat, Toil and Tears” sounds fantastic, but it was actually part of a fairly dry political acceptance speech.

“Government cannot solve the problem. Government is the problem!” paraphrased Ronald Reagen’s argument about reducing the level of public service jobs.

The best soundbytes always use rhyming, alliteration or humor, such as “If it don’t fit, you must acquit!”

Apart from the soundbyte, the best way to get people to remember your main arguments is to repeat them three times in different ways. Three seems to be the magic number to get people to remember.

A great speech involves passion. So often, students look like they would be rather be anywhere than here giving a speech in a classroom, and hey stick to the dry, safe, note reading to help get them through it. That’s a shame- if you’re not passionate about the issue, how can your audience be?

One of the mistakes with public speaking is its title; it should actually be called a public conversation. You have an audience, so don’t do all the work yourself. Use

them. Get them on your side. For instance, pick one of the audience members that looks the most skeptical and say, “I’m sure you must have looked at the statistics with skepticism.” They didn’t of course, until you subtly ticked them into thinking they had, or should have. And even better, the other members of the audience will think they have to agree, because they don’t want to appear ignorant.

Another way to get the audience involved is eye contact. Always look at each member of your audience squarely in the eyes at least once. It makes them pay attention and feel special, as if you’re talking just to them.

Don’t use language that the audience wouldn’t ordinarily use. For instance, you’re not going to use street talk when talking to a bunch of teachers, so why use formal academic language when talking to a bunch of students?

While we’re on the subject of an audience, don’t be afraid to actually go to them. One of the best ways to engage an audience is to move among them and to walk slowly from place to place in front of them. This slow but constant movement is much better than standing in front of them, as it signals that you’re comfortable with the audience. If there is a podium, gain attention by making it a point to push it out of the way before you talk. This shows outrageous levels of confidence, even cockiness. All to the better, as it makes the audience think, “They must know something we don’t!” Similar ploys include loosening a tie, sitting on a desk, leaning on a rail. They worked for Atticus Finch¹, so why not you?

In terms of voice control, a lower pitched voice always commands more respect. You also need to make sure you can project your voice to the back of the room. You need to say the words at a moderate pace and clearly. And you need to make sure your pronunciation is correct. The trick to all of these is to image you’re holding a peach stone in front of your teeth, holding it in place with your lips. Don’t laugh! The English language pronunciation relies on speakers using the front of the mouth. Try it when no one is around and “Hey presto!” You sound like a news presenter!

As for body language, 70 percent of communication is non-verbal. Use different facial expressions, look down and up at your audience and make sure you use your hands, either by fist waving, pointing into your hand, or whatever works for you. Remember to always start your speech by holding your hands halfway between your chin and your navel, palms facing your audience. That way, you’re unconsciously forced to start moving your hands.

Don’t try and memorise your speech word for word- instead try and memorize you topic. Carry only on palm card with you on the day (not a sheet of paper, but business card sized) with no more than ten topic words for you to remember. It is even better if you can remember those ten words in order and look at them throughout your speech in your minds eye.

Speak with your personality. If you’re the class clown, use humour. If you’re the serious type, avoid it. Remember, its you giving the speech, not anyone else!

¹ OK, he didn’t win the case, but it was a *moral* victory...

However, don't confuse humour with random jokes- you must always make he laughs come back to the subject you're talking about.

And the absolute pet hate of teachers- don't think a *Powerpoint* show replaces a speech! They're should be no more then ten words on a slide and only 1 slide a minute maximum: preferably fewer.

Advanced tricks from the pros:

The worst has come to the worst. Your opponent has come up with an absolute gem of a speech and now its your turn to argue the opposite side. You can't win by logic- they seem to know heaps more then you about the subject!... Fear not- you can give a great speech defending the most unpopular standpoint if you use the following sneaky tricks:

- Use an analogy. An analogy is comparing something you're talking about to something else. For instance: Giving extra powers to the police is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.
- Humanise the topic: "My opponent states that statistics prove that 9/10 case studies have shown police have not abused this power. But say that to my defendant, Loui Smith. When he rots in a gaol cell without being able to give his daughter away at a wedding, can *you* look him straight in the eye and say" Sorry, but hey, nine out of ten times it works."
- Tell a story: "I remember when my teacher said I was cheating on a maths test in year one. I tried to tell her that it was actually Billy who sat next to me, but the teacher liked Billy and she said I had to write lines "because she said so". I couldn't do anything, even though I was innocent, because the teacher had all the power. These new laws will give all the powers to the police- the innocent will have to be convicted "because the police said so".
- You're opponent only has twenty arguments- you've only got two. The answer: a Dramatic Pause. One of the mistakes speakers often make is they try and speak too fast, or think they will beat the time limit by cramming as much information in as possible. In reality, people will take more notice if you condense you're standpoint into one sentence and then stop, looking each member of your audience for ten seconds. They'll certainly pay attention. Beware- you can only use this trick effectively once a minute.
- Seem to agree with the arguments your opponent has made, but have a quiet dig. For instance" I can certainly understand why my opponent believes that, coming from their position. However, based on my experience as a student who has studies Sociology, I find the opposite to be true."
- Use "Wedge Politics" to force the argument to take sides (hopefully your own." This is most often done by phrasing something a particular way. For instance, if someone says that a new law is part of the "War on Terror", its very hard to argue

against it without seeming like you're soft, or against the audience. "With us or against us- works every time..."

- Take your opponents arguments to ultimate conclusions and thus, back them into corners. My learned colleague argues that all people who kill another person should be hung. So they must argue that every soldier who kills a terrorist should be hung, every police officer who kills a criminal should be hung! The reality is, each case of taking another's life has different motivations and markedly different circumstances. So too, every punishment must be different in its severity. "If the crime ain't the same, why should the blame?"
- Define the topic. It's a great trick, but most people misunderstand how to apply it. Its meant to make the audience play the game by *you're* rules, not by fair rules. For instance, most people would start off by saying "The Macquarie dictionary defines Democracy as a political system of universal suffrage. I call it the majority bullying the few!"
- You're opponent might try the swift trick of saying "What's next- this is just the thin edge of the wedge." Don't fall for it! Simply reply- "We are talking about *one specific* policy here. It's not a case of "when do we stop". We can stop whenever we like." Check-mate!
- Look at the oral assignment question carefully. What do you have to do to win? If the question says "All war is unjustified", you only have to find one war that is to win the argument. If the question is "This new government policy is unjust" and it is hard to prove that it isn't, just sow the seeds of doubt in the audience's mind; that is, you only have to raise doubt, (not totally disprove the statement), in order to win. Raise hypothetical scenarios, tell stories, use humor to cast a slightly ridiculous air on the question... anything that puts that little crack in the statement. The question might be in black or white, but as long as you can make the audience see a shade of grey, you've boosted your chance of winning.

If you're really serious about prancing your oratory, make sure to borrow a book of historic, legal or political speeches to see the previous techniques in practice. But the best way to improve you're public speaking is of course, to practice. To practice your speech. Practice makes perfect.

I said it three times so you'd remember!