Description

Public speaking is a huge part of academic careers, yet most of us never receive training in this area. Public speaking seems to come naturally to some people. Whether they are presenting to undergrads, are the invited guest at a lecture series, or are presenting their material at a conference, they always seem to be able to keep their audience interested. But we've all been privy to the other type of presentation as well, when the speaker fumbles through his pages, reads straight from the page in a dry monotone voice, mumbles words and is inaudible, and goes over his time limit. These are the presentations when you notice people playing games on their phones, writing grocery lists, and most often, just straight-up sleeping.

How can you be more like the first presenter and less like the latter? Believe it or not, public speaking is a skill you can learn and improve. In order to make sure you are getting the most out of your public presentations, take a look at the tips below and note the areas where you could use improvement.

Re-Draft Written Papers For Live Audiences

Listeners process information very differently than readers do. For instance, complex sentences with multiple clauses may make perfect sense to a reader who can re-read if necessary, but they will completely lose the attention of a listener. Therefore, keep sentences short and make every attempt to start sentences with the subject (noun), immediately followed by the verb.

Use Your Paper As a Guide, Not a Script

Unless you are in a field which dictates that you read your written paper word-for-word to conference crowds, you must refrain from presenting your research in this manner. Instead, prepare notes or an outline to which you can refer throughout your presentation.

When You Have an Option, Always Stand While Presenting

When you sit, it encourages you to look down and not make contact with your audience. Further, while the people in the first row or two can see you, people sitting at the back of the room can't, and especially if there are no microphones, they may have a hard time hearing you. When you stand, you generally have the advantage of projecting your voice over the crowd.

Make Eye Contact With Your Audience

If making direct eye contact with individual audience members makes you too nervous, you can always pick three or four random spots in the crowd—my favorite is the top of one person's head or the flashy tie of another. Rotate your gaze among these spots every sentence or so.

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If Possible, Use a Podium For Your Notes

This will ensure that you are not blocking the audience's view of your face or blocking your voice from reaching the audience with your presentation notes. You may need to make the font larger on your notes to accomplish this. I print my lectures in an 18-point font so I can see them even from a few feet away.

If you follow the above tips, you won't be buried in your notes and will able to adapt and respond to your audience as necessary. For instance, do they seem skeptical? If so, add something like, "I know it seems hard to believe, but the data demonstrates…" Or maybe they seem excited about your research. In that case, throw in a something like "I'm glad to see so many of you are as thrilled about this as I am!" When you draw in your audience like this, it will make them even more determined to stay focused on your presentation.

Finally, Practice, Practice, Practice

Reviewing your notes silently and thinking "I'll do all of those things when I give the actual presentation" won't work. If a musician sat on their couch and looked over their music repeatedly, they may memorize their music, but they are not truly preparing themselves. When they get on stage, their body will not have learned how to perform the piece. So, make sure your practice is comprehensive.

You must train yourself to not only do all of these things but to be comfortable doing them. These tips will help you communicate better with live audiences and, as a result, allow more people to interact with you and your research.

Category

1. Promoting Research
2. Using Online Media

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