



## How to Impress Your Audience

You can have the best message in the world but the person on the receiving end will always understand it through the prism of his or her own emotions, preconceptions, prejudices and pre-existing beliefs. It's not enough to be correct, reasonable or even brilliant.

Communicators need to put themselves in the mind-set of their audiences: what social status people occupy, what they've heard in the past, what their level of education is and what gender they are. All these things affect how people will receive a message, according to Dr. Frank Luntz in his book *Words That Work*.

### Organize the Content

Spend enough time to organize, develop and think through your content. In *The Power Presenter*, Jerry Weissman offers seven steps for developing a presentation.

**1. Establish the framework of your presentation:** Define your objective. What is your call to action? What does your audience need to know in order to respond to your call to action?

**2. Brainstorm:** Consider all the possibilities. Distill all your ideas into a few main themes.

**3. Create Roman columns:** Find a mnemonic device for your main themes. The classic Roman orators who spoke for hours without any notes used the marble columns of the Forum as prompts to help them remember what to say. Develop the Roman columns of your own story; about five or six in all is optimal.

**4. Structure the flow:** Provide a road map for your audience and for yourself. Give the individual components of your story a meaningful, orderly flow. Two of the

simplest and most common flow structures are chronological (track your story along a timeline) and numerical (combine all your Roman columns and assign them a number, then count down for your audience as you discuss each column).

**5. Use graphics:** Use visual aids, but give your graphics their proper role as support for your narrative.

**6. Take ownership:** Take charge of your own presentation. Become a hands-on presenter and supervise your presentation's development at pivotal points.

**7. Practice the right way:** In your rehearsals, speak the actual words of your presentation or speech aloud, just the way you will do it when you are in front of your intended audience. Verbalization crystallizes ideas.

### Pick a Hook

Before you write a word of your speech, spend time figuring out your hook. Your nervousness and the audience's anticipation are both human emotions. Therefore, the beginning of your presentation is the perfect moment to respond with a hook that sets itself right in the emotional center of the audience members' brains.

Tony Carlson's advice in *The How of Wow* for setting a *story hook* is speeches should follow a classic story-centered arc, building in interest and involvement from the opening to the climax. The tension in a story rises as complications arise, and the connection between the watcher and the watched strengthens until a resolution is achieved.

### In This Issue...

- Organize the Content
- Pick a Hook
- Tell a Good Story
- Make Your Ideas Memorable
- Put Your Best Self Forward
- Learn to Speak Body Language
- Use the Power of Your Voice
- Connect With Your Audience
- Find the Common Denominator
- Let People See the Real You



## DELIVERING AFTER DINNER SPEECHES

Called upon to make an after dinner speech? Anne Cooper Ready offers these tips in *Off the Cuff*:

- Make your speech a metaphor or personal anecdote. Give it a middle, a surprise and a laugh.
- Start with a personal, real-life story that taught a lesson or personified some truth. Make yourself the butt of the joke, never the hero or heroine.
- If you choose to write your speech out as a security blanket, write for the ear, not the eye.
- Never start a speech with, “Tonight, I’m going to talk to you about ...” Instead, build rapport from the introduction or circumstance, followed by an attention-getting story with a provocative but appropriate moral, statement or question as the main point.
- Do not jingle the change in your pocket.
- Avoid hanging onto the podium.
- Say what you believe and believe what you say.
- Twenty minutes is probably long enough.
- Be succinct.

Using a *metaphorical hook*, a good speaker can use common experience to create powerful, personalized images in the minds of an audience.

You can also use a *location hook*. There is nothing more immediate to audience members than their physical surroundings. Location is tangible. It can be an exceptionally compelling hook for a speech. Where you are is something you have in common with the audience. You must, however, make it connect with your theme — that’s the trick.

Often a great way to make the all-important connection with an audience is to bring in some historical context — an anniversary, for example. If an event celebration falls on the day you’re making your speech, this *time hook* is a legitimate way to make a quick and lasting connection, as long as it has some relevance to your theme.

But avoid clichés, Carlson warns. Presenters who pepper their remarks with clichés, consciously or not, frequently demonstrate nothing more than their grasp of the obvious and their lack of creative, original thought. If the language you use is filled with trite phrases, people may just assume your ideas are similarly unoriginal, noncreative or unmemorable.

## Tell a Good Story

*Executive Presence* author Harrison Monarth advises that cold hard facts can’t inspire people to take part in a mission of change and straightforward analysis won’t get people excited about a goal you’re trying to accomplish *unless* you express it in a vision that fires up the imagination and stirs the soul.

The way to put facts into context for people to remember is to transfer those facts through the use of a story. This works because a story is all context, all the time.

Monarth outlines five techniques to help tell a story with clarity, energy, a discernible theme and appropriate emotion:

**Technique 1: Pick a Theme.** Great stories have a central theme that transcends the story; an insight to share, a lesson to be learned, a heroic deed to emulate or a danger to avoid.

**Technique 2: Brevity Rules.** Respect the audience’s time and, more important, the audience’s tendency to tune out if you go on for too long.

**Technique 3: Understatement Packs a Punch.** Let the audience’s imagination deliver the biggest punch.

**Technique 4: Transport the Listener.** Tell your story in the present tense. Tap into the listeners’ memories and thoughts.

**Technique 5: Keep it Simple.** Avoid the use of \$10 words.

## Make Your Ideas Memorable

In his book *The Lost Art of the Great Speech*, Richard Dowis shares these proven techniques that speechwriters use:

**The Rule of Three:** called a triad, this is the expression of related thoughts or ideas in a group of three, often with the initial words or sounds the same for all three, and almost always with each element of the triad using the same grammatical form. An example is: “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.” (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) Ideas grouped in threes are more memorable; when correctly constructed, they add drama, interest and rhythm to a speech. They also emphasize important points and make them stick in the minds of listeners.

**Anaphora:** the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or sentences. An example is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech, in which he began eight sentences with “I have a dream.” Not only did the phrase echo and re-echo throughout the speech, it has continued to echo throughout history.

**Hyperbole and understatement:** exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Hyperbole is used for dramatic effect and should be an obvious exaggeration, such as “He was as big as a grizzly bear and twice as mean.” Understatement can likewise be used to great effect to make a point, such as when the late Senator Everett Dirksen said, when considering a spending bill, “A billion here, a billion there. Pretty soon it adds up to real money.”

**Transitions:** the verbal punctuation marks you can use to keep your speech from sounding choppy. Sometimes a slightly exaggerated pause or emphasis of a word or phrase can serve as a transition from one subject to another.

**Antithesis:** placing an idea next to one to which it is sharply contrasted. An example is: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” (John F. Kennedy) That call to service, powerful as it was, was made even more so by the juxtaposition of contrasting phrases in the sentence.

## Put Your Best Self Forward

A presenter transmits a set of dynamics — human dynamics — that can be summed up in three Vs:

**Verbal.** The story you tell.

**Vocal.** Your voice or how you tell your story.

**Visual.** Your body language, and what you do when you tell your story.

Corporate presentations coach Jerry Weissman points out in *The Power Presenter*

# Paradoxically, behavior that looks comfortable to your audience can make you feel exposed and uncomfortable.

that your audience is affected by these dynamics to varying degrees. Interestingly, body language has the greatest impact, the voice next, while the story has the least impact.

## Learn to Speak Body Language

Weissman suggests some methods of how to learn to speak with your body language, making the critical distinction between the way it *feels* to you as a presenter and the way it *looks* to your audience. Paradoxically, behavior that looks comfortable to your audience can make you feel exposed and uncomfortable.

- Be expressive. Raise your eyebrows, furrow your forehead and smile. These expressions stimulate positive responses to your message by projecting enthusiasm.
- As you move from person to person in your audience, nod when you connect with a new person. Nod when you make eye contact.
- Your posture or stance should be balanced. Distribute your weight evenly on both feet. The stability will make you appear poised. When your body is balanced your mind also becomes balanced.
- Move purposefully to a destination. Move to a person on one side of the room for a brief conversation, and then move to another person on the other side for another

conversation. Move to the projection screen. Move to a demonstration table.

- Presenters should use their hands and arms as they would in conversation, using gestures to illustrate.
- Mix and match your reaching out and your gestures. Sometimes reach out with your left hand, sometimes with your right hand, sometimes with both hands.
- After you make a gesture with one hand, drop it to your side for an instant. Then make another gesture with the other hand and drop it for an instant. Every time you illustrate your talking points with your hands, drop them to your sides for punctuation.

## Use the Power of Your Voice

The goal in speaking is to get people to listen, keep them listening, and motivate them to take action. The delivery of your words must create impact. Ultimately, your personal style comes down to phrasing — to the way the elements combine. Both the sound of your voice and the way you deliver your words are instrumental in creating variety and surprise. To make your speech as compelling, dynamic and meaningful as possible, Renee Grant-Williams suggests in *Voice Power* that you learn to adjust your volume, pitch and rhythm to create your own style.

**Volume.** There are times when varying the volume can be used. Dropping your voice commands attention almost as much as if you suddenly begin to shout. Unrelenting volume can make an audience feel cornered if you assault them for too long. Try using tension and release instead. Lower your volume suddenly and it suggests something different is about to happen. Be careful, also, not to let your sentences drop off into a silent abyss as they near their conclusion.

**Pitch.** When you want to convey wisdom and authority, lower your pitch — but stay within the limits of your natural range. When you want to exude energy and excitement, raise the pitch of your voice. Raising the pitch before a pause suspends the audience during the pause. Let your voice rise on the last word before the pause to create a feeling of suspense. Pause, and then start the word after the pause on the same high note. If you let the pitch drop, it sounds like you've finished. Lifting your voice at the end of a sentence signals that you are expecting a response, but don't overdo this — there are only a limited number of times that your listeners want to be prompted by what seems to be a question, but isn't.

**Rhythm.** Words have a natural rhythmic flow and our ears become lulled into expecting the flow to continue at the same pace. When the pattern is broken, the flow is interrupted

## Maxwell on Connecting With Others

[An excerpt from an interview with John C. Maxwell, author of *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*]

Soundview Senior Editor Andrew Clancy recently interviewed author John C. Maxwell. Here is a piece of the interview that relates to the challenge of connecting with people:

AC: You make a point in the book that connecting is really all about others. Why is this such a difficult point for people to understand?

Maxwell: First of all, we're selfish. I'm selfish! I think the natural tendency is for all of us to say, "What's in it for me?" ... We're just inclined to be selfish. That's who we are. I'm not saying that's bad or anything like that. That's just who we are as people. Now, that's why I think connecting has to be intentional, because connecting is not about me. It's about others. As a young communicator in my middle twenties, it dawned on me that for a period of time as young leader, I was trying to get people to connect with me and catch my vision. One day I realized, I've got to turn this around. I've got to get in their world. I've got to think about them and what they're thinking about and what they need and how to help them.

... In fact the practice I've had for 25 years is that every morning I ask myself two questions: Who can I add value to today and how can I do it? And every evening I ask myself: Did I add value to someone today and how did I do it? I think it has to be intentional, and I think the reason most people do not connect is they do not understand the focus and the intentionality that is required to connect with others. I've watched other people that connect well, regardless of profession, and I can tell you that this is 100 percent fact. It's not a principle that *usually* works. It does work. Everybody I know that connects with people, they do so because they're thinking of others first and they place that as a very high value.



# Notice what causes people to listen to others and begin working on cultivating those characteristics.

and the sudden shock refocuses our attention. Use a pause to interrupt the flow. Pauses separate words into digestible units of information and draw focus to the main points of the message. Varying the speed (or tempo) of your speaking can also affect the rhythmic pattern. To set your listeners up for something important, pick up the tempo before you make a point — pause — and then slow down to deliver it.

Become familiar with your natural speaking pattern. Don't overuse one pace or pattern because listeners will become bored and may tune out. Vary the length of your phrases and definitely avoid a strict monotone voice.

## Connect With Your Audience

According to leadership expert John C. Maxwell in *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*, connecting is the ability to identify with people and relate to them in a way that increases your influence with them. It is a skill anyone can learn.

Maxwell's suggestion is to study effective and ineffective speakers, observing what works and what doesn't. Notice what causes people to listen to others and begin working on cultivating those characteristics. To start the connection process, do the following:

Show interest in your audience. When possible, meet and greet audience members before you speak. While speaking, let people know that you understand that each person is unique and special.

Place value on each person by letting them know you spent a lot of time preparing your talk because you value them, their purpose and their time.

Put the people first by letting them know you are there to serve them by being

willing to answer questions and making yourself available to interact with people after a speech.

Express gratitude and thank the audience for their time.

## Find the Common Denominator

It doesn't matter how relevant you think the subject matter is, you must still try to put it in a context to which the audience can relate. In *Bridging the Culture Gap*, authors Penny Carte and Chris Fox advise that because every audience is different, you're going to have to change the context to suit each one.

What if you don't know the people to whom you're presenting? Ask yourself what you know about them as a group — are they all engineers, do they all come from one country and are they the same age? Keep asking questions until you find some common denominator.

But what if the audience does different jobs, comes from different countries and is comprised of people of all different ages? The most important thing they have in common is that they are all human beings with certain needs and aims in common. It's just a question of finding which of their needs and aims you could most effectively appeal to in this presentation.

What people expect from a presentation varies from culture to culture. Some people think the best presentations are thorough and detailed with plenty of supporting facts and documentation. Others will only listen to you if you're brief and selective. Some audiences are impressed by a logical structure; others by a creative one. Carte and Fox write that knowing yourself is the

first and most important step toward bridging the culture gap. The second is to acknowledge that the way you and your compatriots look at the world is not universal. The third is to find out as much as you can about what other cultures value and what lies behind their beliefs.

## Let People See the Real You

You must be willing to be you, to be real and to humbly expose your own heart if you want the people in the audience to open theirs, according to Nancy Duarte in *Resonate*. You must be transparent.

Being transparent moves your natural tendency of personal promotion out of the way so there's more room for your idea to be noticed. The audience can see past you and see the idea.

Duarte offers three keys to being transparent:

**Be honest.** Give the audience the authentic you. Openly sharing moments of pain or pleasure endears you to the audience through transparency.

**Be unique.** No two people have experienced the exact same trials and triumphs. Though we often tend to conceal our differences in an effort to fit in and be accepted, our unique perspective is what brings new insights to a topic.

**Don't compromise.** If you really believe in what you're communicating, speak confidently about it and don't back down.

Duarte shares this insight: "... there will be a moment in your life when making an idea clear will play a significant role in shaping who you will become — and the legacy you leave behind ... if you can communicate an idea well, you have, within you, the power to change the world." ♦

## HOW TO FACE ENDING QUESTIONS (from *Off the Cuff* by Anne Cooper Ready)

One of the most terrifying moments of any speech is when you ask if there are any questions and there are none. You've probably left one-third to one-half of your time for questions and no one speaks up. You may have just answered all of the questions in a really complete speech or the audience members may be shy or intimidated by their peers. But it gives the impression that no one is, or was, really interested.

Solution: Bring three or four really good questions (ones you have answers for) with you, along with extra information that hasn't been covered in the prepared remarks. Next, pose them to the audience with, "You might be asking yourself ..." or "You may be wondering ..." then answer the questions. This may serve to get the audience started asking their own questions or may simply finish your presentation smoothly.

