

Wolverhampton Speakers Club

Top Ten Tips For Speakers

Tip 1 - Preparation, Preparation, Preparation

It is surprising how many people just don't prepare fully when asked to give a speech or don't even know how to prepare – maybe a few points jotted down and then they start to write the speech. This is a recipe for disaster – do learn how to prepare your speeches in detail – you can't deliver a good speech if you are not prepared.

You have something important to say and you should arrange it in a logical and consistent way so that your audience can easily follow your argument or message. Your structure holds everything together.

Make sure that you know what you are supposed to be speaking about, who your target audience is and what you want them to take away from your speech. Once you know that you can decide what sort of speech will be suitable and you can then structure your speech around a logical framework of 'Beginning', 'Middle' and 'End' so as to make your speech easy for your audience to follow.

Now you can decide the main points you are going to include and research them if necessary. Only then should you actually begin to write your speech.

Tip 2 - Practise, Practise, Practise

The best speech you've ever written will go awry if you don't practise it first.

The aim is to get to KNOW your speech well so that you don't have to refer to your notes very often and it comes over sounding natural – but DON'T learn it word for word, if you do it will probably sound stilted and you won't have room to ad-lib.

Practise everything you are going to include: the text itself; the breathing; your gestures; your delivery. Practise everything a few times until it is second nature to you and try out alternatives until you've chosen the best one.

Finally think and reflect: would I want to listen to this speech?

Tip 3 - An Open and Shut Case: Beginnings and Endings

A good beginning is vitally important – this is where you pique your audience's attention and set the scene for your message. It is also where the audience is at its most receptive, so grab them and make them like you and want to continue listening to you. Convert their initial attention into interest.

Lose your audience now and you have lost them for the whole speech – give them a punchy, powerful and succinct opening.

Make an impact and indicate your purpose. You can make that impact with what you say and especially how you say it. Answer their unspoken question: 'why should I pay attention to you?'

The end is just as important as the beginning – go out with a bang! Again this should be a powerful statement that summarises the message and inspire your audience. This is the climax of your speech, use it to reinforce your message and call your audience to action.

Your audience must remember your key message and short sharp sentences are effective and your last sentence should be strong and final – finish on an up-beat.

All of this means that you should learn your opening and closing statements and deliver them strongly without looking at your notes.

Tip 4 - Mind Your Language! - Pronunciation and Pitch

Your speech is neither a written paper that you are reading nor a conversation, but it is the spoken word. Don't make your text too stilted but don't make it too 'chatty' either. This is something that gets easier with experience.

Bear in mind that with the written word the reader can go at their own pace and can go back and re-read anything that is not clear: with the spoken word the audience can't do that - they rely on your clarity.

Choose the right words for the occasion and make sure that your audience can hear them and relate to them.

This means first of all that your pronunciation should be clear. Try to sound the first and last letters of each word, without sounding too stilted. Consonants should be crisp and clear and vowels provide the resonance and stress.

Don't kill your speech with monotony – vary the pitch, volume and stress of your voice to suit the context. Open your mouth wide enough for your voice to come out clearly and to carry to the back of the room.

Tip 5 - Slow Down George! - Pacing Yourself

Nothing kills a speech like a speaker speaking too fast!

Pace is important, so vary it and control it. Pace adds one more level of variety to your speech as you speed up and slow down – in the appropriate places, of course, so decide where you are going to vary your pace when you write and practise your speech.

Many speakers speak far too quickly and at the same pace throughout (especially when

nervous). If you find that this is happening take a deep breath, pause, and consciously try to slow down. One very good way to slow down the pace of your speaking is to open your mouth wider as you speak - this automatically slows you down and also helps with your pronunciation.

Remember also that the larger the audience and the larger the venue the slower you need to speak.

Tip 6 - Silence is Golden! - The Pause is Your Best Friend

Pauses are so important even though you can't hear them – because you can't hear them! Silence is not only golden it is powerful. Pauses allow breathing space for you and your audience. They allow you to pause for emphasis, effect or timing, or to give your audience chance to react to something you've said - and you can also take a quick look at your notes!

Pauses are like the white space on a page – imagine all the pages in a book as just one block of text - the meaning would be very difficult to follow, if not incomprehensible, and you would soon give up.

Practise your pauses – mark them in your notes if that helps – you might think your pauses are too long, but the audience won't!

Tip 7 - Smile Please! Use Humour in Your Speech

Do consider using humour at some point in your speech – somewhere in the early stages of your speech is often a good place to use humour because it can help break down barriers with your audience and bring them together too. It also shows that you appear to be comfortable in front of the audience. However

it must be said that humour is a very individual thing and you have to be very careful.

Humour can bind an audience to you and to each other, but humour wrongly conceived can offend or upset some people and you can create barriers if it does that. You will also fail if your

humour is flat and doesn't raise any laugh (or even smile) at all.

You can find that appropriate humour can be effective in contrasting with a serious point and in doing so underline the basic message. Humour doesn't have to be just telling jokes: in

fact jokes are some of the most dangerous things to include.

Make your humour relevant to your speech, but ... if you don't have a sense of humour, don't try it!

Tip 8 - I Can See You! - Eye Contact

Eye contact with your audience is vital.

It is important that you keep as much eye contact with your audience as you can – you are speaking to them, not avoiding them!

Eye contact keeps you in communication with your audience and it also makes you appear approachable and confident – it builds rapport with the audience.

Scan your eyes across everyone in the room and keep doing it whenever you are not looking

at your notes – move your head positively to show that you are doing it.

Don't pick one person out and don't look at anyone for more than a second or two at a time.

This sort of scanning is a great help to you too because if you are nervous just looking at one person at a time makes the audience seem like individuals rather than an intimidating mass.

Tip 9 - Can You See Me? - Body Language

You are the focal point of the event so make sure that you use your body to enhance your speech. Your appearance is important because it is the first thing that your audience sees as you step up to speak – dress appropriately for the event.

You need to consider how you stand and move, both for the non-verbal impression you make and for your own comfort. For comfort, and to make a good impression, stand as relaxed as you can with your weight evenly balanced on both feet, toes and heels on the ground and legs shoulder-width apart (don't rock backwards and forwards, it's very distracting).

Try to relax your shoulders so that you don't hunch and tighten up - it can also help with your breathing.

What do you do with your hands? Our hands are wonderful speaking tools but they can

sometimes have a mind of their own and let us down badly, especially when we are nervous and inexperienced.

When you stand up to begin your speech keep your hands relaxed and still - you can hold your hands at your sides or hold your hands loosely together in front of you at waist level, not lower. Don't, at any time, put your hand(s) in your pocket(s) and don't wring your hands – it looks as if you are washing them and your audience will think you are nervous.

Gestures are hand, arm and body movements that purposely add meaning and emphasis to your speech. Gestures heighten the spoken word. Used properly, they are an asset to your speaking and can enliven and add point to your speech, used wrongly they can be very distracting.

Tip 10 - Make Your Speech a Performance

You might not realise it but your speech is actually a performance that you do from your own convictions to inspire and win over your audience.

Just knowing your material is insufficient. It is the combination of your knowledge, your enthusiasm and your inspiring delivery that makes the whole thing 'tick'.