

Speeches

Presentations and speeches are similar but not the same. Here are some key differences along with public speaking performance tips.

1. Aim to Entertain

This is not the time to educate or persuade and debate. Aim, instead, to entertain. That doesn't exclude serious purpose any more than entertainment excludes serious drama. As one does on stage and screen, provide an experience the audience shares. Create a world, draw the audience into it and take them along for a ride. You want the audience captivated, not sitting back assessing your point of view.

2. Analyse the Audience Before Choosing a Topic

What does my audience want to hear? Serious comment on world events, spicy bits of celebrity quip, self-mockery, a tall tale with a moral? All depends on the audience and the event. You can write a good speech that doesn't succeed with the audience. So set aside 'What do I want to tell them'? And profile the audience as you would any target customer group, making sure the gap isn't too wide.

3. Choose a Subject You Love

Choose a subject you know like the back of your hand, believe in as you do your self-worth and about which you care - at least enough to share with an audience but preferably about which you feel passionately. This is important on many fronts. It's the fastest way to move past the hurdle of nerves and on to the design of what you'll say, the choice of words and decisions about performance technique. And it's the easiest way to enjoy yourself while you're at it.

4. Write Your Own Speech

Attention wanders unless you sound authentic, so write your own draft. After all, you're the only one who knows how you feel, what images communicate your ideas, what you find funny or moving; you're the only one who can capture your way of ordering thoughts, making conversation and expressing feelings. Better to call in the professionals to create an orderly outline if you need one, or for editing.

5. Keep it Conversational

Plan to be talking with people rather than to them. Think conversation, neighbours over the fence, buddies in the pub, coffee mornings, talk at the water cooler, or a good old political chin wag with anyone who happens to be nearby. And reveal your feelings; it often carries the day.

6. Keep Technique Behind the Scenes

Of course speaking is only part art but keep the technique secrets to yourself. Let the audience see the swan gliding serenely but never the ever-moving feet that power the peaceful scene. Leave hand-held notes, cue cards, flip charts, white boards, slide shows or PowerPoint to the business side of the family.

7. Spice with Variety

To support your points – and hold the audience – vary your examples, images and language. Invoke quotes, anecdotes, vignettes, statistics, reports, surprise, and imagination, and more. Appeal to the senses: paint pictures of sights and sounds - and smells, taste and touch if it fits. Use similes,

metaphors, comparisons and contrasts. Use adjectives and adverbs freely to create strong feeling, alter mood, and keep the audience on the edge of their collective seat.

8. Aim for Natural

Video your speech and watch it critically. Do you gesture where you'd gesture when talking to a friend? Do you walk around, pause to consider, look up or down, purse your lips or move your hands in a way that feels part of talking? Keep a lookout for anything that smacks of ill-at-ease or discomfort. Is there material you included because it seemed necessary but not right? Cut it. Did presentation training prescribe stances that don't seem to work here? Probably they never will so forget them in this instance. Loosen up and aim for natural.

9. Watch the Time

Fit the speech to the time available. Talking faster or adding fillers never works. Weave a web in the first ten seconds. If you follow a sumptuous dinner and fine wine, keep it lighter and shorter as counterpoint. Weighty words are easier to digest at lunch.

10. Study Great Speeches

See the artists at work. Read and parse fine essays and speeches. Among my favourites is David Hare's *Holding Forth* (see books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1529269,00.html). When writing this Guardian newspaper piece on public speaking, Mr. Hare clearly took all his own advice. I couldn't improve on his prescriptions which feature advice like write your own strong feelings and insights into your speech and deliberately provoke/evoke thoughts, feelings and deep response on the part of the audience.