



# Tips for Effective Public Speaking

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It is very common to be nervous about speaking in public, but it is important not to let your discomfort keep you from participating in public conversations. Whether at a work meeting, a public forum, or a community or church committee meeting, if you have something of importance to share, then you should be willing and able to get your point across.

The following are some basic tips and strategies that can help you to communicate better:

- Prepare ahead of time. Know what the key points are that you want to share and organize your thoughts. Notes can help but avoid writing out every word of what you want to say.
- Practice your remarks first to yourself and then in front of someone that you trust to give you honest feedback.
- Make sure you have the attention of the person(s) you're speaking to. Eye contact is important. Before you begin, wait a few second until everyone is paying attention, then begin.
- Be clear and to the point. Avoid rambling; telling long stories; or getting off track. If you find yourself doing this because you're nervous then try practicing what you want to say ahead of time.

- Use "I" statements to explain what you want. For example, instead of saying "We should..." try "I would like us to..." instead.
- Likewise, avoid "you" messages-they make people angry and defensive. For example, "You make me so mad..." or "you're always late..." are statements that should be reframed before being said out loud.
- Avoid the 'set-up' trap in speaking to others. This occurs when you being a statement with an assumption about how your listener will respond. For example, "I know you don't want to hear this..." or "this is probably going to make you mad..." will program your listener to react negatively to whatever you're saying. Leaving these set-ups out will greatly improve how others respond to you.



- Avoid words that can be dismissed or misunderstood. For example, words like “should”, “could”, “might”, and “maybe” and phrases like “in a few weeks” or “later” or “some other time” leave the listener wide open to interpret what you said in a very different way than what you meant. Don’t be afraid to use strong statements like, “I want”, “I expect”, and “before the next meeting” or “I’d like to set that date now”.
- When tempers get lost-communication goes nowhere. If you’re feeling very angry or frustrated-take a break, leave the conversation. Come back when you’re able to frame what you want to say in a clear and focused way. Losing control will not help you get your message across-it will only frighten and alienate your listeners.
- Use visual props (charts, graphs, maps, photos, etc.) to help. Not only will it direct the audience’s attention away from you, well-chosen props can help clarify your point(s)

Like most things in life these tips don’t come with guarantees-sometimes communication goes wrong no matter how hard you work at it. Practice does help though-and you can work at being better at speaking, and listening, everyday in all your relations.

