

Tips for Delivering a **Great Business Speech**



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Great presenters aren't born with stage presence, they learn it. And so can you.

Everyone is different. Indeed, that's the most important part of great speech delivery – being yourself.

For some executives, delivering a speech is second nature. They seem to relish the idea of standing in front of an audience, “playing the room” and eliciting a response. For most, however, the idea of it is more daunting than delightful. And it's perfectly natural to think that those who make it look easy are lucky to have been born with stage presence.

But for a lot of those “naturals”, luck had nothing to do with it. They enjoy it because they've learned how to **look** like they're enjoying it. Once you've mastered that, you will too.

Having coached hundreds of corporate speakers, from CEOs to Line Managers, and from multibillion dollar global

companies to ambitious start-ups, we know that everyone is different. Indeed, that's the most important part of great speech delivery – being yourself.

But there are some universal truths about delivering speeches that can help you feel relaxed and confident – with good reason. Here are a few of those truths, distilled down to four simple tips:



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1. Own the content

As a creative agency serving a wide range of major corporate clients, we view the writing and delivery of speeches and presentations holistically. But for our purposes here, we're focusing solely on delivery, aside from the following observation:

Whether you're developing your own script or directing others to develop it based on your input, you will ultimately own it. So at a very high level, you need to make sure that:

- You believe in it, confident that every fact is true and every proposition embodies what you really feel
- You believe that everyone in the audience will be better off for having heard your speech, knowing and/or feeling something that will improve their lives in some way

For this discussion, let's assume you have that covered – that we're not covering writing techniques, presentation structure or visuals.

So now that you have a script...

Scripting Tips: Humor and Storytelling

- Use this technique sparingly, and only to make a point or emphasize your message. And make it relevant.
- Build suspense. Start the story at the beginning of your presentation and finish it at the end.
- Keep your stories short, and space them out.
- Tailor the story or humor to the audience.
- Personalize the story, and remember that self-effacing humor works best.
- Make the story semi believable.
- Don't alert the audience that a story is coming – "that reminds me of ..."

2. Practice relentlessly – out loud, and in sight

Once you are satisfied with the messaging, learn the script inside out. The point is to know it so well, you could deliver it without reading. That doesn't necessarily mean memorizing it; it generally means being able to come across as speaking authentically – with the audience, not at the audience.

How do you get to know it that well? Practice. A lot. There are no short cuts. Go through it as you will present it, over and over again. Do it in front of a mirror. Do it in front of a camera and watch it back. Then do it again. And again.

A good guideline is to practice 3-5 minutes for every minute of your speech, for at least three days. More is better; it's easy to rehearse too little, and virtually impossible to rehearse too much.

Practicing the speech out loud will give you a chance to refine the wording so it feels right – so it says what it says just as you'd say it on the fly.



Besides knowing the material, you'll derive one other benefit. Practicing the speech out loud will give you a chance to refine the wording so it feels right – so it says what it says just as you'd say it on the fly. You'll also have a good feel for where you want to pause to emphasize a point or to transition to the next part of your speech.

If you're using humor to make a point, to help to clarify a situation or to relieve tension, practice the timing to make sure you deliver it as intended. If it feels genuine, it's more likely to connect with your audience.

3. Rehearse on site, with everything and everyone

Know the room. Rehearse your speech on stage and with other presenters and AV support team, if any. If you have any visuals, rehearse with them. Get used to the clicker. If there are props or any stage action planned, rehearse them.

Rehearse your stage movements until you know them by heart so they look and feel natural. And be sure to rehearse them with the video crew so they will have a sense of how to follow you and light you properly.

If you are on IMAG (Image Magnification video on stage), your movements, facial expressions, etc. are magnified, so you may need to tone down your on-stage movements lest the audience focus on your movements rather than listening to you.

For tips on On-Stage Movements, refer to the Checklist at the end of this article.

If you're using a teleprompter or floor monitor, practice using them without staring at them. Remember, it's the audience you need to make contact with, not the device. In the case of a teleprompter, rehearse together with the teleprompter operator.

For tips on Using a Teleprompter, refer to the Checklist at the end of this article.

Have a printed copy of your notes or script with you, either to use as your primary reference or as backup in case a teleprompter or monitor you're using malfunctions. The text should be large and double-spaced.

If you're using the printed notes as your primary reference, practice looking down and reading at a glance, and then looking up to recite them. If you've prepared as we've discussed previously, this should be easy.

Along those lines, it's a good idea to memorize your opening, so you can make a strong, confident start. That confidence can help carry you through your entire presentation.

Remember, it's the audience you need to make contact with, not the devices.



4. Deliver the speech to – not at – your audience

Let's start with a universal truth: Stage fright is normal. Every speaker faces it. You can't overcome it entirely, but if you learn to control it, you can harness it to sharpen your senses and increase your energy.

If appropriate, chat with audience members where they are, not from the podium. It's easier to speak to people you know, and it will help you make and maintain connections as you speak.

Before you speak, whether you're backstage or on stage, take a few deep breaths. If you're backstage, get up and stretch. Take a sip of water.

When you begin to speak, be conversational. Be yourself. Talk directly to people in the audience. Look at the friendliest faces in the audience, and make periodic eye contact. Turn your attention from one to another every few moments. And take a small sip of water now and again, to help maintain the quality of your voice and to give yourself some comfortable pause moments.

Be animated and enthusiastic, and put some excitement into the presentation. Show a sense of passion for your topic, and for the positive impact you're hoping to have on your audience.

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Be colorful. Use the dramatic pause and change of pace to keep things interesting. Talk at different speeds, vary your pitch, change volume occasionally.

Be clear. Pronounce the words clearly. Don't talk too fast. Don't mumble or run words together.

Turn your head and body from side to side at intervals, so you appear to be speaking extemporaneously to different sections of the audience, and not reading.

If your script contains humor or stories, don't alert the audience that a story is coming (e.g., "That reminds me of ..." and don't end with "But seriously folks ...". Just let it end naturally.

Finally, the most important tip of all: BE YOURSELF. The more natural and authentic you are, the more successful you will be. The audience will read that and feel it. And when that happens, you'll feel it too.

Good luck!

Checklist: On-Stage Movements

- Stand still at the beginning of your speech.
- After the opening, move very deliberately. Don't wander around without a specific purpose.
- The larger the group, the slower and more deliberate your movements should be.
- Avoid nervous or distracting gestures like fidgeting or putting your hands in your pockets. Let your words trigger your gestures.
- Make sure your actions have a purpose. When you move, always take three steps.
- Center stage forward is the strongest position. Upstage left and right are weak positions.
- If you want to direct attention away from you, gesture toward the screen.
- If you want to make an important point, move toward the audience.



With this article, we've tried to present a high-level view of how to effectively deliver a speech or presentation. Of course, the speech itself has to be compelling in the first place. As we mentioned earlier, that's an entirely different story. If you're looking for advice or assistance in crafting a speech, delivering it or both, we'll be happy to help. Refer to our contact information and feel free to reach out at any time.

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Checklist: Using a Teleprompter

- Meet with the teleprompter operator to make sure any changes you need or have made are incorporated, and that the spacing between paragraphs is comfortable for you.
- Let the teleprompter operator know if you intend to ad-lib at different points in your script.
- Rehearse using the teleprompter on stage to the point where you don't appear to be reading your script.
- Do not look down at the teleprompter; try to "look over it."
- Remember, only you and the operator know what's in the script. If you or the operator make a mistake, move on or ad-lib until the operator catches up with you.

