

SPEAKING SKILLS

INTRODUCING SPEAKERS

If you host a special event, you may be required to introduce speakers. Try these quick tips for delivering thoughtful speaker introductions:

- Don't steal the show by making the introduction too long (60 seconds or less is sufficient), or by speaking on a topic that is in no way related to the speaker.
- Grab the audience's attention with a great opening. This can be an inspiring quote, a humorous anecdote, or an impressive milestone the speaker has achieved.
- Briefly mention the topic the speaker is addressing, but don't reveal too much about his or her speech.
- Establish the speaker's authority and expertise. This information will help solidify with the audience the speaker's credibility as a subject matter expert.

PREPARING A SPEECH

Preparing for a speech is one of the best ways to ensure you give an effective presentation. Try these tips to help you properly prepare:

- Organize your speech in a logical sequence: opening, main points, summary.
- Practice and rehearse a speech frequently prior to delivering it. Ask friends to be your audience, or practice in front of a mirror. Be sure to use a timer to help you pace your speech.
- Become familiar with the stage or the setting where the speech will take place. Get a sense of the size of the stage, where any steps or obstacles might be, and where to enter and exit.
- Choose comfortable clothes to wear, but always maintain a professional appearance.
- Visual aids should fit a speech, whether they are funny, serious or technical. The main goal of visual aids is to help the audience understand what is being said, and reinforce the points of a speech in unique and interesting ways.

SPEAKING TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Giving a speech or presentation to an audience of people who speak various languages or have differing cultural backgrounds requires special tact on the part of the speaker. Here are some tips and techniques on how to effectively engage a diverse audience:

- Enunciate clearly. If possible, try to speak with a neutral accent to better include all audience members.
- Don't speak too fast. Remember that the normal pace of speech in one language might become incomprehensible for people relatively new to that language.
- Be careful with metaphors. Some metaphors that are appropriate in one culture can be offensive to another. A good example is references to sports not popular or practiced in a certain country, or phrases that are comical in one culture yet offensive in another.
- Know the meanings of words outside your native language. Unless you are absolutely sure of the meaning and pronunciation of a word you are using in a given language, do not use it. In some languages, slight variations of a vowel will completely alter the meaning of a word.

- Avoid slang, jargon and idiomatic expressions. Diverse audiences may not understand slang from a given country. English phrases such as "that dog don't hunt" or "cool as a cucumber" might be colourful, but the meaning could be lost on a large part of the audience.
- Be mindful of body language, eye contact and personal space. Posture, mannerisms and eye contact speak volumes and what is taken for granted in one culture might be considered offensive in another.

SUCCESSFUL SPEECHES

Whether you're talking to a small group of people or speaking to a large audience, you want to be sure your speech is memorable and enjoyable. Follow these five easy tips to help ensure your speech delivers:

- Be prepared. Your audience is giving you their time and consideration, so rehearse enough to be confident you'll leave a good impression.
- Start strong. Begin your speech with a powerful opening that will grab your audience's attention, such as a startling fact or statistic, an interesting story or a funny joke.
- Be conversational. Avoid reading your speech word for word. Instead, refer to notes or points from an outline to help your speech have a more free-flowing, conversational tone.
- Speak with passion. If you're truly invested in what you're saying, you'll be better able to keep your audience's attention.
- Be patient. It's easy to get frustrated if you make a mistake. But remember that public speaking is not easy and it takes time to hone your skills. Keep practicing and you will reach your goals.

VISUAL AIDS AND PROPS

Visual aids and props are an effective way of supporting and supplementing any speech or presentation. Visual aids and props should be colourful and unique, but not so dazzling that they detract from the speaker's presence. Never use visual aids and props as a way of avoiding eye contact or interaction with an audience, such as reading directly from slides. Here is a list of common visual aids and props, and quick tips for using them effectively:

- Diagrams, graphs and charts should always coincide with what is being said in the speech. Always stand to the side of a diagram, graph or chart while facing the audience.
- Maps should be simple and easy to understand, with key places or points clearly plotted or marked.
- PowerPoint slides should present main points as short sentences and bullet points and should never be read verbatim by the speaker or presenter.
- Lists should be kept to a minimum. Five or six listed items are usually enough.
- Handouts should be passed out to an audience before or after a presentation to avoid wasting time and causing a distraction.
- Photographs or sketches can be powerful visual aids as long as a speaker maintains consistency between what is being said and what is being shown.
- Physical objects and props should not be too large or too small, nor too few or too many. They should always be relevant to the presentation or speech and should always be checked prior to taking the stage to make sure they are working properly.