

Stand Up and Stand Out

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As we know, good communication not only depends on what we say, but also on how we say it and how we look when we say it. You're more likely to persuade an audience when you appear credible and believable, but also likeable. Here are some ways to perform your best in front of an audience.

Dress the part

People begin to judge your credibility before you even open your mouth. If you look sloppy, they assume that your thinking and your work are also sloppy. You should dress at least a half step above your audience to maintain credibility, and check your grooming (hair, make-up, five o'clock shadow, spinach on your teeth, etc.) in front of the mirror before you speak.

Don't read, talk

Most people struggle when trying to read a speech. They aren't natural or conversational. They lose eye contact with the audience, speak in a monotone, and talk too fast without pausing. Unless they spend a lot of time learning how to read a speech effectively, presenters are much more successful when they use bullet points and talk naturally.

Use the microphone correctly

If possible, use a lavalier microphone that clips to your clothing. You'll have more freedom to move your head and body. If you're stuck with a stick mike attached to the lectern, adjust it for your height so you don't have to lean down to talk into it.

Use good eye contact

Make regular eye contact with each audience member. Don't dart from person to person, but spend three to five seconds with each one. Try to avoid speaking when you're looking down at your notes.

Relax and stand tall

Plant both feet comfortably and evenly on the floor. Avoid swaying or leaning from side to side. Don't clutch the lectern, but instead use your gestures naturally. That will make you feel more relaxed and look

more relaxed. We aren't as likely to trust people who are stiff and uncomfortable.

Have an open face

If it's appropriate to smile when talking, do so. However, much of the time you'll be delivering more serious information. Even so, avoid frowning, which comes across as mean, unfriendly and closed. You can still be serious with an open face, meaning your eyebrows are up instead of closed and knitted.

Pause

The pause is one of the most effective tools we have as speakers, and one of the most ignored. Stopping in between thoughts or sentences helps the information sink in, and lets the audience catch up with you.

Let your energy and passion come through

I once got a greeting card that said "We all become poets when we speak from the heart." Show in your delivery that you really care about and believe in what you're saying. Your attitude may be contagious.

Media Expert Kathy Kerchner's depth of experience includes 15 years as an award-winning news anchor and reporter and more than 15 years as a media advisor to international corporations, associations, government agencies, banking institutions, and other organizations. She has coached CEOs of Fortune 500 companies to perform better during analyst calls and media interviews, has helped executives win new business using masterful presentations, and has trained managers at global companies to talk to their employees about sensitive issues.

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