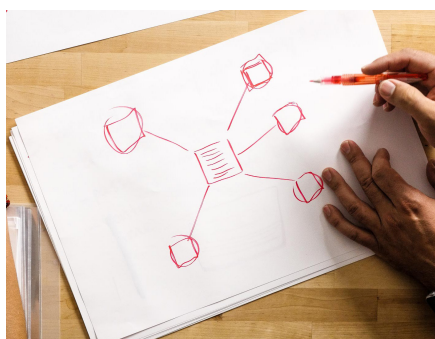


HOW DO I WORK ON MY PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS TO COMMUNICATE MY RESEARCH?

Public speaking in your capacity as a teacher and scholar can be daunting for many reasons, whether you are uncomfortable standing in front of a group or challenged by how to convey the essence of complex academic content to others. Use this guide to work on building your confidence to communicate your research effectively.

► How do I prepare?



Before you plan what you want to say, think about who the audience is, what they may or may not know about your topic, and the specific goals you have for your talk.

What you want the audience to be thinking about when you finish your talk? Consider questions like how much time you have, what the space looks like, where you should stand, and what type of visual support would be most appropriate.

Plan ahead, and plan your time. Practice. Ask a friend to listen to your talk, and ask how much and what they understood of it. Are you achieving your goals for the talk? It's normal to feel nervous before you speak—channel those nerves into energy and enthusiasm. Smile, take a deep breath, and go for it!

► What do I say?

Be intentional about crafting your message. Word choice can have a dramatic impact on how your topic comes across to your audience. Consider what terminology you will use and how different strategies you could use to explain the topic change the way it sounds to others.

Think about the structure you will use to organize the talk, as well as the underlying narrative. There is only so much an audience can understand and remember in a given amount of time, so try to keep your focus, limit how many details you share, and consider your use of jargon.

When we write we tend to opt for long sentences with many clauses. Short, direct sentences work better for speaking. Confidence in a well-crafted talk will help you get your message across clearly.

► How do I say it?

You likely want to seem clear, confident and engaging. Once you have a well-crafted message, think about how you want to deliver it.

Make sure to practice what you are going to say before you present. Practicing aloud is the “editing” of public speaking—it’s the time when you discover awkward phrases and figure out how to smooth them out, just as you do when editing a paper.

Ideally a talk is a conversation between you and the group. As any voice coach would tell you, it is important to stand up straight on two feet, face forward, make eye contact, and consider your volume and speed. Vary your tone. Make sure the main points of your sentences get extra emphasis. Pause at transitional points or to underline key issues.



► How do I capture—and keep—my audience's attention?

A good introduction has a hook to get the audience's attention, and sets the stage for where you are going. Your listeners want to know: what's in it for me? Why does this topic matter, what will I learn, and how is it relevant?

Throughout the talk, remind the audience of where you are and why it matters. Use organizing language, repeat main points for emphasis, and make sure to connect back to your purpose to keep the audience with you.

Stay connected with authentic eye contact. Imagine you are having a conversation with your listeners. Remember, your enthusiasm and energy will invigorate the audience!



► How do I continue to improve?



Practice, practice, practice. As with any other skill, your public speaking won't improve unless you do it regularly and reflect on how you're doing.

Record yourself speaking, and watch the video, either by yourself or with a consultant. Focus on the areas you want to improve to continue to refine your skills. As you talk through your work you are always refining and learning more about it.

Find a communication mentor, whether a professor in your field you think communicates well, or someone else whom you admire. Pay attention to what you find appealing or effective about the way they speak, and see if you can incorporate any of those features into how you plan and deliver your own talks.

Additional Resources

- Take a [Bok Seminar](#) in Communication & Language to practice these skills and become more reflective about your own style.
- Watch Nancy Houfek, former director of Harvard's American Repertory Theater, on [The Act of Teaching: Theater Techniques for Classrooms and Presentations](#).
- Consider questions related to the structure of your talk, and get different narrative ideas from Nancy Duarte's TED talk, [The Secret Structure of Great Talks](#).
- Patsy Rodenburg writes about the power of voice and how to harness it. To focus more on voice and delivery aspects of speaking, check out her book: [The Right to Speak: Working with the Voice](#).

