



10 Keys to Getting Up to Speak Without Needing an Ambulance Before, During, or After Your Presentation

by Heath Suddleson

10 keys in brief

- * Remember that everyone wants you to do well
- * Know what your audience wants
- * No one else has your script
- * Practice, practice, practice
- * Select a few friendly faces
- * Visualize yourself doing well
- * Relax
- * Silence is golden
- * Know when you are finished
- * Accept that you did your best

Remember that everyone in the audience wants you to do well

When was the last time you were in a meeting and as the next speaker came to the front of the room, you thought to yourself, “I really hope this person does a horrible job”? Chances are you have never thought that. Neither will those who will be in the room when you speak. They are in your corner and are cheering for you to do a good job.

Just like when you watch your favorite athlete perform, they make a few mistakes, but you always find ways to justify their performance.

You tell everyone around, “don’t worry. I know they will pull it out”. So, too, will everyone in the room when you are presenting. They will forgive your mistakes and still be pulling for you to pull it out.

In short, your audience members are your biggest cheerleaders and they are ready for you to do well. I can’t guarantee any of them will do cartwheels or drop into the splits, but you can count on at least a few thumbs pointed to the ceiling as you finish.



Know What Your Audience Wants

If the arrow misses the target, it’s not the fault of the target. Take some time to consider what your audience is after and craft your message for them. If they are managers,

simply give brief overviews and key facts, if they are technical they may want more details and statistics. The easiest way to make sure you connect with your

audience is to know who they are and what they need to hear. Telling them the first time will keep them from asking a lot of questions.



No one else has your script so exact wording is not that important

So many times we get stuck trying to remember which word was supposed to come next. This is because we have written out our script carefully and we have placed more emphasis on the words than the message.

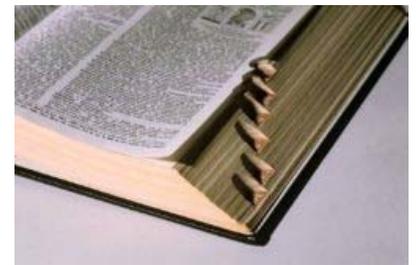
This can sometimes cause a person to simply stand in the front of a room reading the script aloud as if they are a student giving a book report. Your audience does not want to be read to. They want to be engaged by someone speaking to them and not toward them.

The best way to do this is simply speak to them about the message with nothing more than an outline in front of you. By preparing an outline with just your key points and perhaps some back up statistics, you can stay on track and just talk to your audience as if you were in a one on one conversation.

Plan to speak for 1-2 minutes for each point on your

outline. This is usually enough time to get across any key points in our message. If you have ten minutes to speak, then plan for no more than 5 points. It's almost always okay to finish early, but it's never desirable to finish late. Focusing on the message and not the words will give you the flexibility to adjust time if needed.

" Plan to speak for 1-2 minutes for each point on your outline. "



Practice, that's how you get to Carnegie Hall

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice. This joke often attributed to Jack Benny and Arthur Rubenstein and while no one is sure who said it first it sure has a lot of truth in it. The more we do something,

anything, the easier it becomes. Think if any hobby you enjoy and think back to how well you did it when you first began versus how well you do it after some amount of practice or repetition. We all know how important

practice is, yet we don't always make the time to do it. (Continued)

Here are a few tips for when you practice:

1. Use a stop watch to see how long it takes you.
2. Practice in front of a mirror or use a video camera to record yourself so that you can see how you are doing. Remember that you will be your own worst critic. Even still you might just see a habit you want to avoid, like wringing your hands or playing with jewelry.
3. If you have a phrase or series of words that keep making you tongue tied, then change the phrasing.



Practice, that's how you get to Carnegie Hall

Isn't it a bit intriguing that we seem to make the time to practice those activities that we enjoy, but we don't always make the time to practice those activities that scare us the most?

Every time you practice your presentation, you are limiting

one of the variable factors that could cause you stress. The more comfortable you are with the material you want to present the more attention you can focus on other things during your speech like eye contact or not holding onto the lectern with

a death grip that would make a wrestler jealous. If you can find time to pursue your hobbies you can find time to practice the speech that has you so worried that you are reading this booklet. You'll thank yourself later.



“Knowing I have a room full of cheerleaders does help me relax.”

Select just a few friendly faces in the audience and focus on them

You do not have to make eye contact with everyone in your audience. It's great if you can but if you are already nervous it's a much better idea to just select a few friendly faces in the audience. These might be people whom you already know or they could just be someone who smiled at you earlier before the event began. It could even be someone you

find attractive, and no this isn't the place where the old advice of picturing them nude comes in. That's likely to distract you and is not sage advice. Still, when we find someone attractive we often find that we are drawn to look at them. Use this to your advantage and gaze at them for a full minute as you give your speech. Don't look

into their eyes, but look at their face and their hair. Everyone sitting near them will think that you are looking at each of them when in fact you are looking at only one person. By selecting three or four people spread out among your audience members you will make a large portion of your audience think you are looking directly at them when in fact you were looking at only three or four people.



Visualize yourself doing the speech and doing well

This has long been a successful tool in many endeavors. Do you ever wonder what is going on in an Olympic gymnast's mind right before she does a floor exercise? Her eyes are closed, yet she's looking very intense. You can see slight twitches and body movements that are really

previews of her routine. She is visualizing her routine and she is visualizing having done it well.

A few minutes before you speak, begin going through your presentation in your mind. Imagine yourself coming up nice and relaxed with a big smile on your face. Visualize yourself connecting

with the audience and visualize their smiling faces happy that you are doing well. As you play this scenario in your mind you are continuing to practice your speech, but now you can do it anywhere.

If you can see it in your mind, you can create it for your audience.

“Remember that well timed pauses are part of a polished speaker's tool box”

Relax

I know you're thinking, “yeah, right. Like I could relax right now.”

To be honest with you, I sometimes get nervous just before a presentation. I have given thousands of presentations and still I will notice my chest getting tight and my breathing become shallow. Even as I start to speak I can tell that I am tense, and still people in the audience come up afterwards and tell me how wonderful it was and they were impressed with how relaxed I was.

I wish there was a way to tell you not to be nervous that would work instantly. What I can tell you is that taking a moment to close your eyes and focus on your breathing before you step up to speak will help. As you focus on your breathing, take in a deep breath and hold it for three seconds then let it out slowly. Do this a few more times. Keep doing this until either you are calm or it is time to speak. If it is time to speak then just get out there and begin. You can take an extra moment and breath by just

smiling at your audience while you look for those friendly faces I mentioned earlier. No one will fault you for not speaking right away as long as you are connecting with your audience non-verbally. Just be sure you don't stare too long. Anything more than five seconds starts to push boundaries

Perhaps the biggest tip is to remember that your audience is pulling for you to do well.



Silence is golden, take the time to form your thoughts then speak

Have you ever started listening to a speaker ramble on not sure where they were going with a thought? Yes? Then you know how awkward it is for your audience. Here is how to avoid doing that as a speaker.

Start by having a simple outline of what you plan to speak about before you start. Have your outline printed on a single sheet of paper in large font so that you can see it quickly and from a

reasonable distance. There is nothing wrong with using notes and outlines to keep you on track.

The next trick is to recognize when you are starting to venture into these rough waters and stop yourself from saying another word. That's right. Just stop speaking. Hit your internal reset button and continue. Depending on when you pause in your speech, you can actually make the pause look planned and thoughtful. Even if you cannot pull this off gracefully, stopping and being silent for a few seconds is better than the audible noise some people make when they find themselves tongue tied. I'm sure you have heard a speaker or two

make some "blah blah" noise by moving their tongue quickly in their mouth while still moving sound across the vocal chords. The fact is that this action does not help you reset any better than simply being silent, but it does draw your audience's attention to the fact that you were tongue tied.

If you have completely forgotten where you are or what you need to do next, and you can't see your notes from where you are, it might be a good time to ask your audience if they have any questions thus far. While

appearing to be a skilled maneuver to gauge comprehension, you are really buying time to get back to your notes and see what you should be speaking about.

Remember that well timed pauses are part of a polished speaker's tool box so the more you use silence when you get into a jam the more you will come out gracefully.

"It's hard to believe, it can be difficult to stop when you are finished"

Know when you are finished

It's hard to believe sometimes that as difficult as it can be to get up to speak in the first place that it can be difficult to stop when you are finished, but it happens. It is a little like small children when it's bath time in that it is hard to get them in the bath tub, and even harder to get them out. The difference here is that you are probably not having as much fun as the bath.

Most of the time this happens because the speaker is not sure they have said all that needs to be said. Sometimes we desire to share too much

information in an effort to be thorough. Other times we know we have said all we need to say, but are unsure how to gracefully stop the presentation. Not knowing how to stop, but feeling like they can't just be silent, they just keep speaking aimlessly until someone else rescues them. Here is how to avoid all of those issues.

Again, take some time to examine what is the right level of information you need to share. The higher level the audience in terms of management they fewer details they want. High level

managers are looking for high level briefs, the key word being brief. Their time is at a premium so the biggest favor you can do them is to be clear, be concise, and be gone. If your audience is more technical in nature, they love details backed up by stats and figures. In this case, you can prepare a handout in advance with all of that information so that you can refer them to it for more details. This will allow you to keep the level of information at the correct proportion.

When you have said what

you need to say, you can simply ask if there are any questions. Be aware of any time constraints, but asking for questions is a clear sign to your audience that you are done, and you will find out immediately if you left out any crucial information because they will ask you for it.

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Helping You Achieve Greater Success

Know when you are finished

If you are presenting to a high level management audience, you might get a few questions asking for more detail on one or two of your topics. This is a great sign that what you said piqued their interest and they want to know more.

If you have finished your presentation, and you either have no more time or there are no more questions, then you can simply turn to the person who is running that particular meeting and turn it back over to them. A simple

hand gesture to them saying, "over to you" or even saying the words, "I now turn it back over to..." is a simple yet eloquent way to finish up your presentation and exit the speaking area.

Accept that you did your best

You might have thought that knowing when you are done and leaving the speaking area would be the last key to getting up to speak without needing an ambulance before, during, or after your presentation, but this is where we keep you from needing an ambulance after the presentation.

I have given hundreds of presentations and in front of audiences from 5 people to 2500 people. There have been many times that I walked off the stage and realized that I had forgotten to make a couple of key points. I was pretty upset that I had forgotten to mention these points. That was until a few people came up to congratulate me on a job well done. I was sure it wasn't well done because I had forgotten these points, but I eventually came to learn something very important.

They did not know what I was *going* to say. They only knew what I *did* say. What they were telling me was that what I did say was enough and it was well received.

Because we are the only people who most likely know everything we planned to say we become our own worst critic in terms of how we did. Remember that no one has your script. It's okay that you didn't do a perfect job. Your goal should not be perfection. Your goal should be communication. Why do I say this? Because the perfect speech has never been given. There is always something else that could have been said, or could have been said better, or could have been done differently, or....

Your goal is simply to communicate with your

audience. If you have made a reasonable connection and your message has been received, then that is a measurable goal that can actually be achieved.

When people come up to you afterwards to tell you that you did a good, or even great job, simply smile and say "thank you". Depending on what your topic is, don't be surprised if someone approaches you after to tell you that you touch them at a personal level and that your message was just what they needed to hear. Again, just smile and say "thank you" and know that you just received the ultimate compliment as a speaker. It just doesn't get any better than that.