

Presentation and communication skills

Lecture 7 - On stage

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Office hours (Room 5C.30)

Monday 15:15 – 16:00

Wednesday 12:30 – 13:15

Literature:

- Gallo, C. (2014). Talk like TED: the 9 public-speaking secrets of the world's top minds. St. Martin's Press.
- Anderson, C. (2016). TED talks: The official TED guide to public speaking. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

What Should I Wear?

- The last thing you need is wardrobe stress in the hours leading up to your talk, and selecting an outfit is one thing you can check off your to-do list early. In most settings all that matters is that you wear something you feel great in. At TED, we like reasonably casual clothes, giving the sense that we're all on a retreat together. Other places may expect a suit and tie.
- As you think about what you'll wear, there are a few questions worth asking, such as, Is there a dress code? How is the audience likely to be dressed? You'll probably want to dress somewhat like they do, but a little bit smarter.
- Will you be filmed? If so, avoid wearing brilliant white (it can blow out the shot) or jet black (you might look like a floating head), or anything with a small or tight pattern (it can cause a strange, shimmery, moiré effect on camera).
- Will you be using an over-the-ear microphone? Avoid dangling earrings! Also, men's beard stubble can cause scratching sounds.
- What will the stage look like? Consider wearing something bright that sets you apart from the background. Think about dressing for the people sitting in the back row.
- The audience loves bold, vibrant colors, and so does the camera. Fitted clothing tends to look better on stage than outfits that are loose and baggy. Look for something with a nice silhouette, and make sure it's the right size—not too slack, not too tight.

How Do I Control My Nerves?

- Fear triggers our ancient fight-or-flight response. Your body is coiled up chemically, ready to strike or flee. This is measurable physically by a huge rise in adrenaline coursing through your bloodstream.
- Use your fear as motivation. That's what it's there for. It will make it easier for you to truly commit to practicing your talk as many times as it takes.
- Let your body help you! There's a series of important things you can do before going on stage that really help circumvent the adrenaline rush. The single most important one is to breathe. Breathe deeply, meditation style. The oxygen infusion brings calm with it.
- Drink water. Five minutes before you go on, try to drink a third of a bottle of water. It'll help stop your mouth from getting dry. Avoid an empty stomach. Get some healthy food into your body an hour or so before you're on, and/or have a protein bar handy.
- Remember the power of vulnerability. Audiences embrace speakers who are nervous, especially if the speaker can find a way to acknowledge it.
- Find "friends" in the audience. Early on in the talk, look out for faces that seem sympathetic. If you can find three or four in different parts of the audience, give the talk to them, moving your gaze from one to the next in turn.
- Have a backup plan. If you're worried about things going wrong, plan a few backup moves, e.g. notes.
- Focus on what you're talking about. It's not about you, it's about the idea you're passionate about. Your job is to be there in service of that idea, to offer it as a gift.

Setup

- The physical setup of your talk really matters. Compare setup A: a speaker standing on a podium behind a big, bulky lectern, reading from a script to a somewhat distant audience, with setup B: a speaker standing unprotected on a small stage surrounded on three sides by an audience. Both are called public speaking, but they're actually very different activities.
- From a speaker's point of view, setup A can be very comfortable. But from the audience's point of view, there's a big loss here. If a speaker lets down his guard, so does the audience. If a speaker stays distant and safe, the audience will too.
- If you can get comfortable with setup B, it is the best approach. But what if not?
- You can use, for example:
 - place a full set of notes or even a script on a table or lectern at the side or back of the stage, along with a bottle of water.
 - slides as memory nudges.
 - hand-held not cards. However, it's still important to know your talk pretty well so you're not constantly looking down.

Voice and presence

- Here's a radical question: Why bother to give a talk? Why not instead simply email the text to every potential member of the audience?
- An 18-minute talk contains maybe 2,500 words. Many people can read 2,500 words in less than 9 minutes and retain good comprehension. So why not do that instead? Save the auditorium cost. Save everyone's travel. Save the chance that you might flub your lines and look foolish. And get your talk across in less than half the time it takes to speak it.
- Talks really can offer something more than the printed word. But it's not a given, and it's not even true in every case. That something extra has to be thought about, invested in, developed. It has to be earned. What is that something extra? It's the human overlay that turns information into inspiration.
- Here are some of the impacts that the added layer can bring:
 - Connection: I trust this person.
 - Engagement: Every sentence sounds so interesting!
 - Curiosity: I hear it in your voice and see it in your face.
 - Understanding: The emphasis on that word with that hand gesture—now I get it.
 - Empathy: I can tell how much that hurt you.
 - Excitement: Wow—that passion is infectious.
 - Conviction: Such determination in those eyes!
 - Action: I want to be on your team. Sign me up.

Speaking with meaning

- Voice coaches speak of at least six tools you can use: volume, pitch, pace, timbre, tone, and something called prosody, which is the singsong rise and fall that distinguishes, for example, a statement from a question.
- The key is simply to inject variety into the way you speak, variety based on the meaning you're trying to convey.
- The point is to start thinking of your tone of voice as giving you a whole new set of tools to get inside your listeners' heads. You want them to understand you, yes, but you also want them to feel your passion.
- And the way you do that is not by telling them to be passionate about this topic, it's by showing your own passion. It spreads automatically, as will every other emotion you authentically feel.
- One other important aspect to pay attention to: how fast you're speaking. First of all, it's great to vary your pacing according to what you're speaking about. When you're introducing key ideas or explaining something that's complex, slow down, and don't be afraid to insert pauses. During anecdotes and lighter moments, speed up.
- But overall, you should plan to speak at your natural, conversational pace. For most speakers that's somewhere in the range 130–170 words per minute.

Body language

- The simplest way to give a talk powerfully is just to stand tall, putting equal weight on both feet, which are positioned comfortably a few inches apart, and use your hands and arms to naturally amplify whatever you're saying.
- If the audience seating is curved around the stage a little, you can turn from the waist to address different parts of it. You don't have to walk around at all.
- Some speakers, though, prefer to walk the stage. It helps them think. It helps them emphasize key moments. This can work well too, provided the walking is relaxed, not forced.
- Something to avoid is nervously shifting from leg to leg or walking forward and back a couple of steps in a kind of rocking motion. Many speakers do this without realizing it. They may be feeling a little anxious, and shifting from one leg to the other eases their discomfort. But from the audience's viewpoint, it actually highlights that discomfort.
- So, move if you want to. But if you do move, move intentionally. And then, when you want to emphasize a point, stop and address your audience from a stance of quiet power.

Cool stuff to watch

- Zak Ebrahim - I am the son of a terrorist. Here's how I chose peace: https://www.ted.com/talks/zak_ebrahim_i_am_the_son_of_a_terrorist_here_s_how_i_chose_peace
- Cameron Russell - Looks aren't everything. Believe me, I'm a model. https://www.ted.com/talks/cameron_russell_looks_aren_t_everything_believe_me_i_m_a_model
- Liv Boeree - 3 lessons on decision-making from a poker champion: https://www.ted.com/talks/liv_boeree_3_lessons_on_decision_making_from_a_poker_champion

Giving effective feedback

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_98.htm

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Check Your Motives
 - Before giving feedback, remind yourself why you are doing it. The purpose of giving feedback is to improve the situation or the person's performance. You won't accomplish that by being harsh, critical or offensive.
 - You'll likely get much more from people when your approach is positive and focused on improvement. That's not to say feedback always has to be good, but it should be fair and balanced.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Be Timely
 - The closer to the event you address the issue, the better. Feedback isn't about surprising someone, so the sooner you do it, the more the person will be expecting it. Think of it this way: it's much easier to provide feedback about a single, one-hour job that hasn't been done properly than it is to do so about a whole year of failed, one-hour jobs.
 - If the situation involved is highly emotional, wait until everyone has calmed down before you engage in feedback. The recipient will more likely hear what you're saying, and you'll avoid saying something in the heat of the moment that you regret later.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Make It Regular
 - Feedback is a process that requires constant attention. When something needs to be said, say it. People then know where they stand all the time and there will be few surprises. Also, problems don't get out of hand. It's not a once-a-year or a once-every-three-month event. Though this may be the timing of formal feedback; informal, simple feedback should be given much more often than this – perhaps every week or even every day, depending on the situation.
 - With frequent, informal feedback like this, nothing said during formal feedback sessions should be unexpected, surprising or particularly difficult.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Prepare Your Comments
 - You don't want to read a script, but you do need to be clear about you are going to say. This will help you to stay on track and stick to the issues.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Be Specific
 - Tell the person exactly what he needs to improve. This ensures that you stick to facts and there is less room for ambiguity.
 - If you tell someone that she acted unprofessionally, what does that mean exactly? Was she too loud, too friendly, too casual, too flippant or too poorly dressed?
 - Remember to stick to what you know first hand: you'll quickly find yourself on shaky ground if you start giving feedback based on other people's views.
 - Try not to exaggerate to make a point. Avoid words like "never", "all," and "always" because the person will likely get defensive. Always discuss the direct impact of the behavior and don't get personal or seek to blame.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Criticize in Private
 - While public recognition is appreciated, public scrutiny is not.
 - Establish a safe place to talk where you won't be interrupted or overheard.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Use "I" Statements
 - Give feedback from your perspective . This way you avoid labeling the person.
 - Say, "I was angry and hurt when you criticized my report in front of my boss" rather than "You were insensitive yesterday."

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Limit Your Focus
 - A feedback session should discuss no more than two issues. Any more than that and you risk the person feeling attacked and demoralized.
 - You should also stick to behaviors he can actually change or influence.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Talk About Positives Too
 - A good rule is to start off with something positive. This helps put the person at ease. It will also allow her to "see" what success looks like and what steps she needs to take next time to get it right.
 - Try to end on a high note, too. Otherwise, she may be left feeling despondent and worthless.
 - Many people tend to overdo this and end up sandwiching the constructive feedback between too many positives. Then the takeaway message becomes, "Gee, I'm doing really well," instead of "I'm good at communicating with customers, but I need to bring my interpersonal skills with my co-workers up to that same level."

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Provide Specific Suggestions
 - Make sure you both know what needs to be done to improve the situation. The main message should be that you care and want to help the person grow and develop. Set goals and make plans to monitor and evaluate his progress.
 - You may not agree on everything, so it is a good idea to ask the person to give her perspective. Use phrases like, "What is your reaction to this?" or "Is this a fair representation of what happened?"
 - Listen actively to what she has to say and try to get her to offer some suggestions for improvement. This way she has an opportunity to own the solution and will be more likely to follow through with it. To avoid sounding like you're preaching, stay away from words like "good," "bad," "must," "need to," etc.

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Follow Up
 - The whole purpose of feedback is to improve performance. You need to measure whether or not that is happening and then make adjustments as you go. Be sure to document your conversations and discuss what is working and what needs to be modified.