

Performance Tips

A powerful story demands powerful delivery, because a tale is only as good as its teller. The most captivating words lose their power when mumbled, rushed, or spoken in monotone. Here are 10 things anyone can do to immediately improve their speaking performance, without an acting coach, Toastmasters membership, or even natural talent.

- 1) **PREP THE PAGE** - It's tough to read a full page 10pt font when you're alone in your office, never mind at the front of a crowded room. Be it notes or full script, print in LARGE font, with lots of paragraph breaks. Covering paragraphs with a blank sheet also helps.
- 2) **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE** - Read the presentation aloud, to yourself and to others, multiple times. The more you rehearse, the less you will be glued to the page.
- 3) **BREATHE** - Make a conscious effort to take slow, deep inhalations and quiet, unhurried exhalations. If needed, put an asterisk next to a sentence as a reminder to breathe.
- 4) **SLOOOOW DOOOOWN** - Nervous speakers rush. Practice with a metronome. Start at a tempo of 60 (there are apps and free online tools if you don't own one). Once you have mastered that pace, work on speeding or slowing specific lines for dramatic effect.
- 5) **STAND UP STRAIGHT** - Keep your shoulders square but relaxed, not hunched. A voice is more audible when directed at the room instead of the floor. Breathing is easier, too.
- 6) **LIFT YOUR CHIN SLIGHTLY** - This opens your throat and chest for greater vocal power.
- 7) **USE YOUR EYES** - If you are anxious, start by gazing just above viewers' heads, and slowly sweep your eyes across the back wall. As you relax, let your gaze drift to faces, pausing to make occasional eye contact (about 3 seconds). Never stare at notes or slides.
- 8) **SHARE A SMILE** - Be likeable even with a sad or scary story by starting with a slight, relaxed smile. Catch someone's eye and smile when sharing a joke, good news, or a juicy secret.
- 9) **MOVE YOUR HANDS** - Nothing says, "I hate this" like white knuckles gripping a stand. Free your hands with simple gestures: point, tap your chest, or let your fingers do the walking. No need to choreograph an *NSYNC routine, just enough to hold the viewer's eye.
- 10) **WATCH YOUR TONE** - Listen as you practice, and ask others to do the same. Do you end every sentence with an up inflection, like a question? Or with a down inflection, as if growling? Aim to vary your tone a little more between sentences. Use a recorder.