

A SPEAKER'S GUIDE TO PAINLESS AND SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SPEAKING

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More than any other fear, the fear of public speaking unites people in their common fright of walking up to the front of a room and speaking to an audience. The secret to painless and successful public speaking is to consider it as a holistic process and focus on each part in turn, from writing to speaking, technical issues to takeaways, content to style. Learn how to channel your nervousness into productive and constructive energy, engage your audience, talk to, not at them, and how to make the most of question and answer sessions. An entire section is even devoted to poster sessions, teaching the in's and out's of design, printing, shipping, and how to manage the two "i's" of presentations: interactive and interruptions. Designed especially for the undergraduate or graduate student, but applicable to all, this guide will take you from aspiration to applause, giving you the tools to become a master orator!

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INTRODUCTION

More than any other fear, the fear of public speaking unites people in their common fright of walking up to the front of a room and speaking to an audience. Communication is the hallmark of our human society, and indeed the ability to effectively communicate an idea to others is, in some ways, more important than being able to create the ideas which must be communicated. As Sir William Osler once noted, *in science the credit goes to the man who convinces the world, not to the man to whom the idea first occurs*. Why is it then that we are so afraid of speaking to others? Is it because we must thrust ourselves forward to be judged? Is it the fear of making a mistake? Or is it just that we aren't sure of the right words to use?

Public speaking is like any other skill: you may approach it with fear and apprehension at first, and have many false starts along your journey to becoming a master orator, but in the end it will be like second nature to you. The secret to painless and successful public speaking is to consider it as a holistic process and focus on each part in turn, from writing to speaking, technical issues to takeaways, content to style. Each forms an important part of the pipeline from aspiration to applause, and when you break it down to manageable parts and master each one, you relieve a lot of the apprehension of walking up to the podium. In fact, as the following pages will show you, there are a number of simple steps you can take that will have a profound effect in transforming you into a master orator.

This guide is broken into six sections, which take you through the entire public speaking process from start to finish, including a special section on poster presentations, since those are many students' first experience at public speaking. You'll find a brief description of each section below, but there is a tremendous amount of material crammed into this guide, so I would recommend that you read each section completely to get the most out of the content here. I wish everyone the very best of luck in their public speaking engagements and I hope this guide provides you with a lot of valuable advice. Just remember, the most important part of the process is to always think positive and focus on all of the great aspects of public speaking and learn to channel your nervousness into productive and constructive energy. Just remember: *they may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel*. (Carl W. Buechner)

Writing the Speech

The first step in successful public speaking is to actually *write the speech*, consolidating your thoughts into a cohesive narrative. This involves focusing your ideas, tailoring to your audience, transforming an outline into flowing prose, and developing a powerful conclusion that summarizes and draws your audience into the fold. This is the part that a lot of people struggle with, taking an unorganized assemblage of thoughts and scattered

Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light. -- Joseph Pulitzer

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ideas and pulling them together into an organized and flowing speech. Work through this section to transform your essence into eloquence and pen the killer speech.

Speech Time

Preparing the text of a speech and preparing to actually give it are two very different things. Everyone knows the part about standing in front of the podium, but what about all of the steps before and after? How do you prepare yourself to give a speech and what's the best way to conduct yourself as you wait to ascend to the stage? When the time comes, how do you proceed from your seat to the stage with style? What are tips for giving the best performance on stage, and how do you deal with those performance jitters? What should you keep in mind when you are talking and how can you ensure that you keep things on time? Finally, how do you successfully *engage* your audience, talking *to* them, not *at* them, and how do you make the most of question and answer sessions?

Improving Your Public Speaking

As with any skill, public speaking improves with practice, practice, practice, but what are the best ways to really make the most of your experiences on stage and how do you incorporate the lessons learned into improving your speaking style? *Content* and *style* form the two sides to the improvement coin, and this section walks you through some of the tricks of the trade, including how to use video recording to capture those subtle nuances that often escape our conscious attention.

Technical Considerations

Most presentations today involve a substantial reliance on technology, from PowerPoint slides to movies and interactive demonstrations. Technology, as we all know, is highly unpredictable and prone to misbehaving at the most inopportune time and Murphy's Law seems to have a bad habit of striking in full effect for presentations. What steps can you take to avoid the most common technology pitfalls and what questions should you ask organizers ahead of time to ensure that you don't arrive at the podium to find that your beloved PowerPoint animation won't play or that your interactive Internet demo doesn't have the bandwidth it needs?

Posters

Poster presentations represent a unique speaking environment that requires a highly specialized approach to successful audience engagement. Students will often find that their first presentations will be poster sessions, yet few public speaking manuals even acknowledge this type of venue. Never fear, as this guide walks you through a crash

introduction to poster presentations, touching on all of the most important issues. Poster design is covered here, ranging from image and background tips, to how to design a visually interesting layout. Large-format posters present a number of printing challenges, with an assortment of tips and tricks here to help you avoid some of the common pitfalls. Finally, the poster presentation style and the integration of handouts and *takeaways* are discussed to complete this introduction.

Checklist

Think of this as your *study guide* to remind you of the key highlights of this guidebook and keep it with you as you prepare for your next speech!

SECTION 1: WRITING THE SPEECH

Many speakers prefer to write their speech ahead of time and simply read it during the session, a practice known as *prepared remarks*, while others are more comfortable just *winging it*. Either way, you will need to spend a considerable amount of time preparing your speech, carefully considering what you wish to say and how to present it.

Focusing Your Thoughts

Every speech has to have a theme: a message you wish to convey to the audience. The very first step in any speech, before all of the grand wordsmithing, eloquence of speaking, and whipping the audience into a frenzy, is to come up with the basic idea of what you want to say. Why are you walking up to that podium? What do you want the audience to do or what are you trying to convince or inform them of? This is perhaps the most important piece of your entire speech, as it sets the tone for everything else and determines how strong your message is. David Belasco once said *if you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea*, and this is a good check of how focused your speech is. Pull out a small notecard and summarize your entire speech in one or two sentences. Ignore all of the detail and outline just the core theme. If you can't do this, then that's a good indication that you need to sit down and rethink the core tenants of your speech, picking a single core theme to rally the rest of your speech around. You may have many branches of that theme that you focus on in your speech, but every point, every word in your speech should draw forth from that central thesis and support and reinforce it.

The clarity with which you hold your idea also has a significant impact on how long it will take you to present it. A rambling speech that covers a topic from twenty peripheral areas and sort of dances around an assemblage of themes not only will confuse and disinterest your audience, but will take you hours to say what you could have

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accomplished in just one. As Dianna Booher once said, *if you can't write your message in a sentence, you can't say it in an hour*, and there is a lot of truth to that statement.

Tailoring

Always keep in mind that you are speaking *to* your audience, not *at* them, so you want to take the time to carefully tailor and customize your speech to relate to them in the greatest possible way. Ask yourself whether the audience shares your background on the topic being discussed? If you are presenting on a battle of the Civil War to a group of Civil War historians, you can likely gloss over or skip most of the background material explaining the rest of the war, while a presentation to the general public would probably need more contextual background. When presenting the same speech in multiple venues, you can often keep the same core and change only the surrounding context and examples to make it fit each audience. Some points will resonate more strongly with one audience than another, so be prepared to have different audiences react to different portions of your speech and customize how you incorporate that reaction into your speech.

Introduction / Catch

Your speech should always start off with something memorable: a phrase or *catch* designed to grab your audience's attention and make them interested in hearing more. The first ten seconds of your speech are the most critical, as that is where the audience makes the decision to keep listening, or to tune you out. Once you have lost your audience it is hard to get them back, but once you catch them, they are likely to listen through to the end. Good opening lines include famous quotes, memorable anecdotes, or surprising findings of your research.

Your introduction needs to convey very quickly to the audience why your topic is important and why people should listen to your speech. In the process, it is important to relate your topic both to the world at large and to the audience personally. Maybe you have come up with a technology for improving the efficiency of solar cells, or perhaps you are just touting the benefits of solar technology. Search online for some statistics that show how efficient current solar cells are, how much your design would improve on them, and how much money and pollution could be saved by the upgrade. Relate it to the audience by talking about how the reduced pollution will make the environment cleaner for them and how solar energy will lead to lower electricity prices.

Is your speech informational or are you asking the audience to do something or agree with a particular point of view? If you are presenting a research paper at a conference, maybe the point of your speech is just to tell people about your new technique, whereas a speech on gender diversity on a college campus would likely ask the audience to take specific steps to try and combat discrimination. Asking your audience to join you in a particular belief or action requires you to give them the information necessary to *take* those steps. *How* can they participate, *when* do they need to get involved, and *what* do

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they need to do? People are busy and will push something off to another day if it is not urgent, so part of your job is to convince your audience that this issue requires *immediate* attention and that it will otherwise only get worse each day. Eloquent emotional appeals can be of particular utility when trying to convince the audience of your viewpoint, together with allusions to famous figures and movements that have parallels to your own. Remember, *they may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.* (Carl W. Buechner)

The Body

While the introduction grabs your audience's attention and reels them in for your speech, it is the body that communicates your message and takes up the majority of your presentation time. Speeches are essentially small papers and the same tips and tricks for paper writing apply. Start off with list of the key points you want to convey to your audience, flesh things out to an outline form, and then transform each bullet into prose. For example, let's say you were giving a speech on how you are the best person to run for a particular office. Write down each of the key strengths you think would make you the best candidate and under each write down details of that strength, how you exemplify it, why it is important for this position, how you think you are uniquely representative of that skill within the field of candidates, etc. Sometimes you may add an *Assorted* heading for random thoughts and ideas that you think would be useful to integrate, but aren't sure where to put at this time. If you are arguing that solar energy is the next energy panacea, write down the key points first and *then* start thinking about the details. How would it be done? How much would each step cost? Is each suggestion even feasible? Build up your speech in successive layers until you have your core thoughts and arguments pretty well described. Finally, take this outline and transform it into flowing text. Take each bullet, rewrite it as a few sentences, and then add connecting sentences to bridge each bullet together until you finally have a first draft of your speech! If you are writing a long speech using Microsoft Word 2003 or later, a good way to manage your material is to subtitle each major section in italic or bold formatting. You can then choose *Document Map* from the *View* menu to have Word automatically skim your document, identify your section headings, and compile a rudimentary table of contents for your speech. Clicking on each section heading will jump you directly to that portion of the document, making it very easy to navigate around your speech during the editing process. Finally, the following tips can help point you to things you should aim towards or avoid for a successful speech body:

- **Humor.** Jokes and humorous sayings can be a good way to liven up a speech and make your audience more comfortable. Yet, humor is one of the most difficult parts to make work in a speech, because everyone's sense of humor is different. While we may all appreciate the beauty of a particularly eloquent saying, humor is seeped in a complex psychological response and what may be hilarious to one may offend another. Long and/or complex jokes should always be avoided, and you should carefully consider how your audience may take shorter jokes. That's

There is too much speaking in the world, and almost all of it is too long. The Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-third Psalm, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, are three great literary treasures that will last forever; no one of them is as long as 300 words. With such striking illustrations of the power of brevity it is amazing that speakers never learn to be brief. -- Bruce Barton

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- not to say humor shouldn't be a part of your speech, but just be very sensitive to how peoples' senses of humor can differ.
- **Associate with the Audience.** One of the most powerful things you can do as a speaker is to associate yourself with your audience, to become *one of them*. Then, instead of speaking as an outsider trying to convince them of something, you are speaking as one of them, reinforcing and supporting their own convictions. A classic introduction that has a strong associative effect is to begin with *all of us gathered here today share the same common goal of [insert your goal here]*.
 - **Rationality.** Infuse your speeches with a strong pragmatism and rationality to give it a base upon which the audience can relate. Even political speeches have a concrete base, such as adding jobs or improving education, upon which the grandstanding and fiery monologue builds. Indeed, as MAD Magazine's illustrious Alfred E. Neuman once said, *political speeches are like steer horns. A point here, a point there, and a lot of bull in between*. If you only speak about making the world a better place, but fail to offer any examples of how that might be done, or which particular aspects of it you think are in need of the most immediate attention, you won't stir up the passions of your audience as much as you could by giving them something to relate to. Rather than saying *this is the way things should be*, tell your audience *why* it should be that way. In short, leave the preaching to the pastor and make sure your speech has a firm foundation of examples and arguments.
 - **Examples.** In keeping with the emphasis on rationality, make sure to use plenty of examples in your speech, tying your arguments down to situations that the audience can directly internalize.
 - **Imagery.** The persuasive speaker's strongest ally is *imagery-rich* language, as words associated with images have the greatest cognitive impact on the human brain. Such words often go hand-in-hand with the energy or *activation* level of a particular concept. Think of how a news report about a student protest being broken up might be worded. The words *arrest* and *detain* could be used interchangeably in this context, but the former has a much more vivid connotation than the latter. In fact, when you read those two words, the first likely conjures up images of police arrests you have seen on TV, while the latter probably does not invoke nearly the same response. Indeed, which of these two resonates the strongest with you: *unruly students detained by police* or *repressive government agents arrest scores of peaceful demonstrators*?
 - **Use Conversational Language.** Academics love to steep their presentations in heavily technical or arcane language to try and linguistically *one-up* their peers and prove that he or she knows more than anyone else about the material being presented. While at first this might seem an attractive way to stand above your peers at a conference, in the end this will only annoy your audience and cause them to tune you out. Instead, present your material as clearly and concisely as you can, use conversational language and talk at your audience's level if you are not presenting to peers with a similar background. Explain your topic as you would to a close friend who might not be as familiar with the field as you are.
 - **Leave Precise Values to the Paper.** Numbers are very powerful and provide a baseline for your audience to measure your statements. Saying *a lot of people*

believe X is much less convincing of an argument than *more than 3/4th of Americans believe X*. Yet, exact figures can be overwhelming to an audience and detract from your overall message. If you say *92.64% of all X's are Y's*, the audience will get caught up thinking about the full resolution of the number than if you just said *more than 90% of all X's are Y's*. Remember that most people have limited short term memory and if you throw a lot of exact numbers at them, they will trip up thinking about those numbers and forgetting about the rest of what you are saying. If you are presenting a conference paper, the paper is where all of the precise numbers should be, while your speech should have rounded/shortened versions of those figures. Though, by the same token, you should still reference numbers instead of *hand waving*, such as saying *90%* instead of *most* or *a lot*. Of course, if you are responding to an audience question and aren't sure about a particular number, it may be better to say *most* instead of citing a number that could later be refuted.

- **Keep the Background Section Positive.** In a research paper it is ok to be slightly negative in your literature review, as the entire point of that section is to show the limitations of previous approaches that necessitated the method you are proposing. In an academic conference presentation, however, you want to be very careful about how you portray these other projects. Members of those projects may be in your audience and obviously know more about their project than you do, and so may react very strongly if you make particularly strong statements about their work.

The Conclusion

Many speakers need no introduction; what they need are conclusions. (Anonymous)
Your introduction is one of the most important parts of your speech, drawing your audience in to listen to the rest of your speech, but it is actually only the *second* most important section. The conclusion is the *most* important, as it is what the audience will remember when they leave. This is what summarizes the highlights of your arguments and makes sure that your audience walks out the door sold on your ideas. In fact, the most important line of your entire speech is the final sentence, the one that will stick in the audience's heads as they leave. People have notoriously bad memories and they may remember some of the key points of your speech, but it is your conclusion that offers you the opportunity to summarize *for them*, gently reminding them what you consider to be the key points they should take away from your speech and leaving them with a memorable line that they will keep going over and over in their heads as they leave.

Your conclusion should not rehash your entire speech; it should pick and choose the most important pieces that you want the audience to really remember of your arguments. It should last no more than a few minutes, meaning that it has to be concise, not verbose and rambling. The final sentence should be something catchy, powerful, and memorable, something that when you hear it, it just sticks with you. You want a phrase that is so powerful that people write it down so they can remember it and that if they were to read a transcript of your speech they would set it down and say *wow*.

SECTION 2: SPEECH TIME

Preparing the text of the speech and preparing to give it are two very different things. Few people are afraid of writing words on paper, but speaking them in front of a crowd of strangers brings a fluttering heartbeat like no other. Practicing your speech again and again can help alleviate some of their fear and nervousness by making you so comfortable with your material that presenting it is second nature.

One of the best ways to practice your speech is to try giving it in a large room roughly the size of the one that you will eventually be presenting in. It is one thing to practice in a room that holds 50 and another thing entirely to present in a room that holds 500 or even 5,000. There is something breathtaking about stepping out onto the stage of a large auditorium, and it can be nerve-wracking the first time you walk into such a large room. Practicing in an empty room of the same size can help you get over this fear and get used to standing in the front of such a large open area. If you are at a university campus, most tend to leave their lecture halls and large classrooms unlocked in the early evening, so try to find one and practice standing at the podium in front of the empty room and giving your talk. Even if the projector system is locked so that you can't have your slides up, just speaking in front of a room that size and imagining all of the people there will really help you become more comfortable in front of a crowd. Even if you can't find a large auditorium or classroom to use, try finding an empty conference room at the very least, so you can practice talking in front of a large number of chairs and picture people sitting in all of them.

Some larger conferences have a designated spare room where you can practice your talk beforehand. Known as the *speaker's prep room*, some conferences require you to reserve it, while most just allow you to pop in briefly to get a feel for what the room will look like and, most importantly, test how your laptop will work with the projection system.

Queuing / Walking to the Stage

As the old saying goes, first impressions are the most important, and you must realize that your first impression with the audience starts not with the first word of your speech, but with the moment you step foot into the auditorium. If there are several speeches before you and you are seated in the audience, remember that if you ask questions, keep them as relevant and friendly as possible, as people will remember you later when it is your turn to speak. When it is your turn to ascend the stage, get up from your seat with dignity, standing straight up. If your shirt is a little untucked, it is ok to very gently tuck it back in, but don't go overboard, people didn't line up to see you get dressed. Suit jackets should be unbuttoned to give your arms as much range of movement as possible, but if your pants/skirt does not fit as well as you would like, you may leave the jacket buttoned to lend additional cover on stage. Stride towards the stage with confidence,

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walking at a normal pace, not too fast and not too slow, standing upright, not slouching. Hold your notes in your non-dominant hand (right hander's should hold them in their left hand and vice-versa) if your laptop is already set up, or, if you are carrying your laptop, cradle it in both hands. If you have to take your laptop to the podium yourself, take it out of sleep/standby mode before you get up so that you won't run into any unfortunate surprises when you reach the stage.

If you are presenting a keynote or other high-profile speech, both men and women may benefit from an application of makeup. Stage lights to be a *warm white*, meaning they cast a yellowish tinge, and the high lighting intensity can cause your skin to take on a slightly yellow hue. Stage makeup can help with this by restoring a natural tone to your skin. Ladies should be careful with the amount and type of makeup they apply, as it can be quite warm under stage lighting and so you want a makeup that can hold up to heat. The selection and application of makeup for stage presentations is beyond the scope of this guidebook, especially for men, but there are numerous resources on the web that cover this in detail.

Most venues will have speakers seated in the front row, where each ascends to the stage for his or her speech and then returns to a seat in the audience. In this situation, the rest of the audience can only see you when you stand up and you are relatively free during the other talks. However, in some cases all speakers are seated at a table on stage from which they get up to walk over to the podium for their talk. If you speak at a venue arranged in this format, remember that you are continually being watched by the audience the entire time you are on stage. Even during other speakers' presentations, audience members will constantly glance over at the rest of the *stage party* to see their reactions to the talk. Don't check your watch, scowl, shake your head, or otherwise show anything other than positive expressions during the other speaker's presentation. It is ok to take notes or review your own speech if you are up next, but try to spend as much time as you can watching the other presentations, facing towards the speaker.

Delivering the Speech

Absolutely *everyone* gets nervous right before delivering a big speech, so don't worry, you're in the good company, as even the most hardened of veterans get a little nervous before walking out on stage. As Mark Twain once said, *There are only two types of speakers in the world: 1) The nervous and 2) Liars*, meaning that even those who say they don't get nervous before giving a speech really are, but perhaps just don't show it outwardly as much as others. The real key here is to transfer that nervous energy into effective speaking the moment you reach the podium. You can be a complete wreck while sitting in the audience, but when you stride across the stage you need to radiate confidence and comfortableness. I personally used to be completely mortified of standing in front of an audience, even my small 15-person high school speech class. Over the years I've become entirely comfortable on stage, but there are a couple of tricks that have really helped me in this progression:

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- **Practice Practice Practice.** I always practice each new speech several times after I have completed it, once or twice the night I finish it, and several times in the following days, to make sure I know how to pronounce each word (in case there is a name that I'm not sure of), and that I know the flow and even the pause structure (where short pauses are needed for key transitions). I also think about where to place particular emphasis and whether there are certain words that I should use a particular emotional state on, such as really driving home a point or showing excitement. I also practice the speed of each section, writing a little note in the margin beside key headers of how long it should take me to get to that point.
- **Prepared Remarks.** Some people are very good at stepping up to a podium and speaking in the most eloquent of terms without any prior preparation. Most of the rest of us need some degree of preparation. For me personally, if I am giving a workshop or presentation on a project where the focus is on the topic itself and I am able to be highly pragmatic, then I just need PowerPoint slides with bullets to jog my memory. On the other hand, if I have to give an impassioned speech where I need to be eloquent and poignant, I'm one of those that does better sitting down and writing many drafts to come up with the perfect speech. In these cases I will write the speech ahead of time and then deliver it at the podium. This completely relaxes all nervousness, because I don't have to worry about remembering anything, I am just reading from a sheet of paper. I read a sentence or two at a time, reading ahead as I speak so that I have the line memorized after I've said the first few words and can look up at the audience as I say the rest of the sentence. Each time I look up I focus at a different random location in the audience and move my gaze across the audience in a sweep to capture as many eyes as I can. I also tend to talk with my hands, continually vary the emotion in my voice, and periodically step from behind the podium to point out a particular issue on one of my slides, to keep the audience energized and excited and interested in what I have to say. Even if parts don't apply to everyone, the energy I convey with my presentation style alone keeps them engaged.
- **Preempt Technology Troubles.** I have a strong applied technical background, so I often find myself acting as impromptu technical support in smaller speaking venues, arriving early to help sure that the projector works properly. Yet that aside, I have given enough speeches to have a good idea of the kinds of things that can go wrong. I always bring several copies of my speech on multiple USB drives in several different file formats, and I talk to the organizers ahead of time to ensure that my files will work with their computer. I arrive early and ask to test things before my talk to ensure that when I step up to the podium I just have to push a button and everything will work. This sets my mind at rest about the technology portion of the presentation and lets me just focus my mind on my part.
- **Focus Inwardly.** Forget there is an audience out there listening to you. Make eye contact with them, but pretend they are just a bunch of mannequins or that it is all just a dream and they really aren't there. Do whatever you need to do to push the audience from your mind and just bury yourself in your speech. Once you get comfortable with this, you will reach a particular "zone" where you just forget anyone is there and just focus entirely on speaking.

- **Turn Your Cellphone Off.** This one is so frequent and happens to so many speakers that it deserves its own section in this guidebook. The first thing you should do the moment you arrive in your presentation venue is to turn off your cellphone before you forget. Don't even set it to vibrate, as a phone that suddenly starts vibrating during your speech will distract you. I cannot stress how important it is to turn off your phone before you ascend to the stage, or recount how many times I've seen speeches ruined when the presenter's phone rings in the middle of the talk. If you do forget this tip and your phone rings during the presentation, *under no circumstances should you answer it*. It seems like a very simple rule, but I've seen people in front of the podium take out their cellphone, look at the number and answer it, only to tell the caller that he or she is in the middle of a speech and will call back later. The amount of damage that you do to your presentation and your own appearance by allowing your phone to ring during a speech (not to mention if you answer it!) is considerable, as it shows a fundamental lack of respect for the audience.

Dealing with Nervousness

Nervousness is Public Enemy Number One when it comes to public speaking, as nervous energy left unchecked can wreak havoc with your onstage persona. As I mentioned earlier, absolutely everyone gets nervous when giving a presentation, but the difference is that an experienced presenter is able to channel that nervous energy into constructive and productive energy, whereas a novice speaker lets it take over. There is something about stepping up to deliver a keynote in front of an audience that fills a 1,500 seat auditorium or a crowd of a hundred that are literally just a few feet from you and surround you on all sides: you are suddenly seized with this irrational fear. Part of this stems from the question of whether they will like what you say, part of it stems from your fear of making a highly public mistake and embarrassing yourself. The real key to successful speech-giving is to force both of these from your mind when you reach the podium and realize that for good or bad, you are here to give a speech and that nothing you do at this point will change the outcome. If you focus on your nervousness, it will manifest itself and lead to a self-perpetuating situation where you make mistakes, become more nervous, and spiral downward. You have to stop this before it ever happens. Just picture yourself sitting back in a seat listening to your own speech as an audience member and forget that you are the one presenting. Think back to your days of sitting in a large lecture class and listening to the professor drone on and how you were focused on *what* he was saying, not *how* he was saying it, and that his style and minor mistakes never even caught your attention. That's exactly how your audience is right now, so focus on giving your speech, not worrying about what the audience might think as you go along.

One of the more famous recommendations for dealing with nervousness is to picture the audience in its underwear, the underlying rational being that they cease being in a position of power and judgment over you. I don't personally like this advice, because implicit in it is the notion that you should be afraid and scared and that you just need to mentally reduce the audience to the point where they no longer hold the upper hand. The

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power balance is preserved, but it is simply swung in your favor. Instead, I like to try and eliminate the notion of anyone passing judgment over anyone else by just thinking of the audience as my extended friends. Just before you walk up on stage, pause a moment and scan the audience, looking for those people that are looking right at you and smiling or with looks of anticipation and hope on their faces. Realize that this audience is here to listen to you and that they know you are going to do well, or else they wouldn't be here. I like to subconsciously convince myself as I walk up on stage that everyone in the room is an old friend of mine and they are all just happy to hear me talk no matter what I say or do, and in an instant my nervousness is gone.

As hard as it may sound, just try to forget that everyone is there in the audience, make eye contact with them, but at the same time zone them out until mentally you are speaking to an empty room with just a few of your close friends there in front of you. Conduct the speech as if you were just explaining your project to them and they are eager to hear more. Practice the speech repeatedly beforehand, including walking through it one last time an hour or so before you actually give it, just to make sure you have all of the timings, pauses, emphases, and other nuances down pat. This will also help you be much less nervous, as you will be significantly more comfortable with the material.

Perhaps one of the best tricks for reducing your nervousness and making your speech go well when you are first starting out is to write it up ahead of time so all you have to do is read it on the stage. Make sure to type it so you don't have to decipher your own handwriting on stage, and look up any words whose pronunciations you aren't certain about. Using prepared remarks allows you to sit down and spend as much time as you need coming up with the most eloquent and flowing way of saying what you want to convey to your audience. You can practice and edit it to your heart's content when there is no pressure on you, letting you perfect it before you read it from the stage. This also relieves a lot of your stress at the podium, as you only have to look at the audience for short bursts before returning to the comfort of the paper in front of you. There is no nagging fear of forgetting your lines or having your mind go blank, as everything you want to say is written down in front of you. In many ways, it is like having training wheels on your first bike: you get all of the sensations of riding, but without the danger of falling over.

Speak with confidence and put forth an atmosphere of coolness and collectedness. Even if your insides feel like jello, you must project an outward image of confidence and coolness. Remember that the audience can't see inside of you, they only know what you display on the outside. The same words spoken by two different speakers will be interpreted and remembered far more favorably by a confident speaker than one who appears extremely nervous. Once you become very comfortable with public speaking, you will find that your nervousness becomes excitement and you look forward to, rather than dread, stepping out in front of a large crowd of people.

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Things to Keep in Mind on Stage

Once you are at the podium and actually giving your speech, there are a couple of things you should keep in mind to make your speech as successful as possible. The list below recounts just a few of the key issues that you should practice and focus on when you speak.

- **Eye Contact.** Making eye contact with your audience is the most important part of a successful speech and it is critical to nail this skill down. If you are reading from notes or prepared remarks, look up at your audience as you finish each line, making sure to start in a different part of the audience and then pan your gaze towards some other random point. Try to pick your starting points so that you make eye contact with every person at least several times during your speech. Remember that you don't have to lock eyes with them, you just need to look in their general direction. Humans are very good at detecting when someone is looking at them, and we desire and demand this during a speech.
- **Steady Voice.** This takes practice and a lot of it has to do with your nervousness, but practice practice practice until you are comfortable stepping up in front of a large audience. There is nothing more painful for an audience to hear than a speaker whose voice shakes and waivers with nervousness. By the same token, don't let your voice trail off or become very quiet at the end of each sentence or paragraph. This is another sure sign of nervousness and can make it hard for the audience to understand you.
- **Speak at a Conversational Pace.** Don't talk too fast or too slow, try to talk at the speed you would when explaining your topic to an associate, using a nice steady conversational pace. It is ok to slow things down a bit, especially in areas that you want to lend particular emphasis to. A well-placed pause (combined with looking up and letting your gaze pass across the audience) can communicate far more than words. Speaking too fast, on the other hand, makes it hard for your audience to keep up and they are likely to tune you out.
- **Keep Going After Mistakes.** We all make mistakes when giving a speech, but the trick is to keep going as if that is exactly what you intended to do. If you miss a word, don't pause and go back and reread the sentence, just continue on and your audience likely won't notice or care about your mistake. On the other hand, if you draw attention to it, they will have no choice but to dwell on it. If you miss a point or two on a slide that is important to a later slide, just talk through those points when you reach the later slide as if you intended to mention them as background, and perhaps even say *the background behind these points are XYZ*. Don't say *Wait, I think I missed something back on slide 4* and waste your audience's time while you scroll back to the earlier slide, discuss the missing points, and then scroll back to the later slide and resume.
- **Avoid Silence-Fillers.** The hallmark of a beginning speaker seems to be the profuseness of *silence-fillers*, those *um*'s and *er*'s that pervade the end of every sentence or thought. They usually indicate substantial nervousness, so the more comfortable you are and the less you allow your nervousness to overcome your speech, the easier it will be to avoid these. These little noises are so ingrained in

our speech processes that we rarely consciously notice that we are using them, but they can drive an audience insane if used in great doses. Consequently, one of the best ways to rid your speaking persona of these annoying devices is to videotape yourself speaking using a digital camera and play it back, laying all to bear.

- **Ask Rhetorical Questions.** Remember that you should speak *to* your audience, not *at* them. If you simply lecture on in a strict monologue, your audience slowly slips into a passive absorbing state, rather than engaging at a higher intellectual level. Interspersing rhetorical questions forces them to think and to process your words at a higher level, giving them the opportunity to stop and think through what you have just said. In this way you *engage* your audience by making them *think*, rather than just lecturing and asking them to *absorb*.
- **Be Animated.** Successful public orators are very animated when they speak, leveraging considerable vocal and physical emotion to lend energy to their speech. Don't speak in a dull monotone, vary the pitch of your voice and let the emotion of your words come out through the way you say them. At the same time, gesture with your hands and add physical motion to your presence to reinforce the overall energy and liveliness of your persona.
- **Move Your Hands, Not Your Body.** Your hands should be your primary point of movement on stage, not your body. Don't shift your weight around, tap the heel or point of your shoes, bob up and down, or otherwise move the rest of your body. In fact, you should be relatively motionless from the waist down, with all of your energy focused in your hands and facial expressions.
- **Stand Upright, Don't Lean on the Podium.** Remember how your mother always told you to stand up straight when you were a child? Well, the same holds true for public speaking! When you are on stage, you should stand as straight as you can at all times instead of slouching. Standing upright lends you height and a sense of confidence and authority, which are subconsciously conveyed to the audience. If speaking from a podium, never lean forward over the podium and rest your arms on it. You are speaking to the audience after all, not taking a break from standing!
- **Move, Don't Pace.** Movement is good in a presentation, it lends animation and energy to your speech and keeps things visually interesting for your audience. However, some speakers take this too far and simply pace back and forth on the stage as they speak, lending motion, but the wrong *kind* of motion. It is fine and even recommended to walk around the stage as needed, but movement should have purpose connected with the speech, not the simple dissipation of nervous energy. A good way to use walking motion is to walk around the stage when you reach a particularly powerful portion of your speech, such as a stirring statement designed to bring the audience onboard your ideas. You might start at the podium and slowly walk across the stage to the other side, all the while looking out at the audience and talking directly to them. If you spend the majority of your speech at the podium and only leave it for these directed addresses, it makes those statements all the more powerful and memorable and brings you closer to each audience member when you address them almost as individuals.
- **Take Everything in Stride.** Once you start giving speeches in different venues, you will inevitably run across your fair share of troubles, from projectors that turn

off in the middle of your presentation, wireless microphone batteries that die, audience members that doze off, and the list goes on and on. It is important to never allow yourself to become flustered, and just take everything in stride. If the projector dies, continue on with your presentation from memory or your printed notes while the technical staff attempt to restore it, don't just stop your presentation and wait to see if they can fix it. Similarly, if your microphone dies, speak as loudly as you can and ask if those in the back can hear you: if they can, continue on as before.

- **Don't Apologize.** Many orators just starting off on their speaking careers will tend to start off their speeches on an apologetic or self-defacing tone, noting that they aren't very good at speeches and asking the audience to *bear with them* or *forgive them* for the quality of the speech. Whether this is done as a cheap attempt to loosen up the audience and connect with them, or as a genuine attempt to lower audience expectations, it is inappropriate and makes the audience uncomfortable. No-one cares whether you have ever presented at a conference before or whether this is the biggest crowd you have ever spoken to, they just want to hear your speech. If you make it clear to them that you are nervous about the quality of your speech, then that will be what the audience focuses on, whereas if you had just started off with your speech, no-one will be the wiser and they would evaluate you like any other speaker. Remember, *just get on with your speech!*

Brevity and Keeping on Time

One of the hardest parts of giving a speech is keeping it focused and on time, especially if you are not reading from prepared remarks. Writing your speech ahead of time and practicing it repeatedly is the best way to make sure that you stay on schedule when you deliver it for real. If I know that a particular speech has to keep tightly on schedule, I will practice the speech repeatedly beforehand to find a pace that makes it all fit and then write notes in the margins beside each section header with the time that I should reach that section. I take my watch off (or take a stopwatch with me) and set it beside my notes on the podium and as I reach each section I glance at the time and compare it against my margin notes. If I am running slightly ahead of time, I know that I am speaking too fast (easy to do when you are nervous) and need to slow things down, and if I am running behind, I know I need to pick up the pace to finish on time. *Never ever ever* look at your watch when you are on stage giving a speech, as it breaks the audience's attention, reminds them that time has passed, and encourages them to focus on how long the speech has been and how much time remains until the end. If there is not a clock that is highly visible from stage, take your watch off and set it on the podium. Similarly, if you are on a panel on stage or sitting in any other highly-visible location, resist the urge to check your watch during another's speech, as it is poor form to do so, and again raises the same issues as checking your watch during your own speech.

Another trick for keeping your speech on time is to use the automatic slide advancing feature of PowerPoint where you can set slides to automatically transition to the next one

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after a present period of time. You can set all slides to the same time, or allow some slides to remain on the screen longer than others. This allows you to practice the speech ahead of time and find the perfect timing for each slide and it frees you to walk around the stage without having to fiddle with a USB slide advancing device. It also allows you to completely forget about the time aspect of your presentation because the slides advance themselves, keeping you on schedule. If you overstay a slide you will know it because the next slide will appear. Of course, this only works if questions are held until the end, and it is very easy to become flustered and overwhelmed when using automatic advance. If you fall behind on one slide you will have to cut some material out of the next slide to catch up, or else you will only fall further and further behind.

Most public speaking venues come with a preset amount of time that you are expected to speak for. In a conference, it may be as short as 5 minutes in a student speed-presenting session, to as long as 1-3 hours for keynotes. If you are given a specific time interval for your speech, then you need to fill that time, but avoid the temptation to speak just to fill time. If you have been asked to speak for an hour, don't forget that 10 minutes of those should be devoted to questions. If your hour-long speech is only 30 minutes, you really do need to add some additional material, but if its 40-45 minutes, you're fine and this will allow more time to take questions from the audience. Don't forget that you can fill a lot of time with images and short movie clips during your speech, especially if you are presenting on a topic that lends itself naturally to such visual aids. They do a lot to draw the audience in and make your speech more interesting, and they also save the amount of time you have to speak.

In general, the shorter the speech, the better, as additional words don't necessarily yield additional insights. As Bruce Barton once said, *there is too much speaking in the world, and almost all of it is too long. The Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-third Psalm, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, are three great literary treasures that will last forever; no one of them is as long as 300 words. With such striking illustrations of the power of brevity it is amazing that speakers never learn to be brief*, while John Andrew Holmes put it perhaps more humorously: *when a sermon at length comes to an end, people rise and praise God, and they feel the same way after many other speeches*. While audiences appreciate what you have to tell them, remember that their time is valuable and they didn't come to hear you ramble on just to fill the silence. Say what you have to say, but do it as briefly and as eloquently as you can.

Many times a few short words hold far greater power than a large rambling paragraph. Indeed, I want you to pause for a moment and think about the quotes that run along the bottom margin of the pages of this guidebook. Each is just a few words long, some uttered by famous historical figures, while others have unknown authors. Yet, all are collected and disseminated through countless books and websites bringing together quotes and anecdotes to help drive home specific points in a particularly poignant way. Why is it that we place such a high value on these short sentences of a handful of words when the exact same concept is described in a myriad other places as a paragraph, a page, or even a whole book of words? In short, it is because of their eloquence, their artistry with words: their ability to take a complex and rambling topic and distill it into a few

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succinct tokens. In a way, these speakers are demonstrating a genius of words that is what separates the truly great orators from the merely good ones. We may go to hear these speakers not because we agree so strongly with what they have to say, but because it is such a pleasure to envelope ourselves in the majesty of the way they put forth their thoughts. Indeed, one of our founding fathers perhaps put it best when he said *the most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do*. (Thomas Jefferson)

Focus On And Ignore Your Audience

The most important tip for an engaging speech might seem contradictory: focus on your audience, yet ignore them at the same time. When you talk to a friend, you look him or her in the eye, and this expectation of eye contact has become ingrained in our communicative existence. If someone talks to you, but never looks you in the eye (looking out the window, down at the table, etc), you will subconsciously feel uncomfortable and believe that the person may have something to hide, is uncomfortable with what he is talking about, etc. The best way to kill an otherwise good speech is to stand at the podium and stare at your notes the entire time. People feel the need to have eye contact when being spoken to, and so they will focus on other things, such as whispering to their neighbors during such a speech. If you make eye contact with your audience, they feel engaged and like you are talking directly to them. Motivational speeches absolutely require eye contact to have the maximum persuasional effect, but all speeches will be that much more engaging with eye contact. Make sure to glance at everyone in your audience, not just the front row people in front of you. Each time you read a line, look up and focus on a different part of the audience at random, making sure to cover the entire audience in even fashion. However, by the same token, you are *looking* at your audience, not *focusing* on them.

No matter how amazing your speech, you will always encounter *troublesome* audience members. People will be checking their email on their laptops, reading other material, whispering to each other, some may even be sound asleep. People have very different facial expressions and may react to your content at a multitude of dimensions, and so you may see people smiling, some frowning, some even scowling or shaking their heads vigorously at your words. The trick is to make eye contact with these people and move right along. Don't let your mind acknowledge their behavior or give it a second thought, just make your required eye contact and look over to another section of the audience. Often during a longer speech you will notice a few audience members who are smiling or generally nodding. These are your *friendly* audience members and when you are struggling with a part of your speech or feeling a bit nervous, just look back over to them for reassurance. Friends or family in the audience can be a mixed blessing, as for some people they may be a bastion of friendliness, while for others, the thought of a family member hearing their speech may make them even more nervous than presenting in front of a crowd of total strangers, so it all depends on your personal preferences.

Questions & Answers

Most presentation opportunities come with the expectation of an interactive question and answer session at the end where the audience is able to interact with the speaker and ask questions. Only in the political realm can speakers command that questions be submitted 24 hours in advance to allow their speechwriters to craft eloquent responses. Instead, you will have to be prepared to face a very fluid dialog that can range from the friendly to the downright argumentative, and you must be prepared to handle all types of questions with poise. As a general rule, you should leave 10 minutes at the end of your presentation to take questions, so if you have been asked to give a one hour speech, you should speak for 50 minutes and leave the remaining 10 minutes for questions.

It is usually left up to the speaker whether to accept questions during the presentation or only at the end, though conference venues tend to ask that questions be held to the end of each talk in the interests of time. In my experience, more intimate talks (workshops in particular) can benefit from allowing the audience to ask questions at any time, while more formal presentations are best structured with questions at the end. Allowing questions at any time opens the door for interruptions, forcing you to switch mental gears to answer the question and then regain your train of thought, and makes it harder for the audience to fully appreciate the flow of your speech (not to mention how easy it becomes to run over time).

Depending on the venue, be prepared for combative questions, especially in academic conference forums, where attendees often feel the need to question others' work in a publicized and argumentative fashion. By the same token, you may luck out and face only friendly clarification questions. You may find the following tips useful when conducting the question-answer session of your presentation:

- **Never Lose Poise.** Unless you are speaking to an extremely friendly audience who shares your same viewpoint, you are likely to experience at least one question that may put you off a bit (especially at an academic conference). The most important thing is to never lose your poise and take every question in stride. If someone asks you how your project compares with another project or a particular theory that you aren't familiar with, just say *I can't recall the specifics of that particular project off the top of my head, but thank you for mentioning it, I will definitely take a look at it when I get back.* If the person proceeds by outlining the project and asking you again how your work compares or says that it refutes your work, simply repeat *Again, thanks for bringing that up, and I will certainly take a look at it in more detail when I get back and I'd be more than happy to talk with you offline about it* and move on to the next question. Similarly, if someone pointedly questions or attacks your methodology, answer what you can very briefly and then encourage them to continue the conversation offline. If they reply to your response with further statements, you should never argue with the person, as that looks unprofessional to the audience and you won't be able to change this person's mind that quickly, so again, simply refer the

- person to continue the conversation with you offline and move on to the next question.
- **Minimal Detail.** Remember that you only have 10 minutes to take questions from the entire audience, so you don't want to spend all of it answering a single question. Try to answer each question with the minimal possible detail, and if a question seems to require more detail than can be touched upon in a 30-second response, or if the questioner is iterating back-and-forth with you, the best response is to say *this is a good question, how about we take this offline after I'm done and I can address your question in more detail* and then pick on the next person.
 - **Encourage Questions.** If no-one raises their hands with questions, you can try to prompt questions with a line like *Boy, this sure is a quiet group here today!* or something along those lines to elicit a laugh from the audience and try to get them to open up a bit. If that doesn't work, you can also try to prompt questions on a particular topic by popping back to an earlier slide and asking something along the lines of *Back on slide 4 here, I mentioned XYZ, and I proposed it was a bit different from the classic belief, does anyone have any questions about that, or further thoughts on the way I address it?* Remember that questions are your friends, they get the audience thinking more about your work and, for a few minutes, really reviewing and synthesizing your entire talk in their minds. It is also an opportunity for you to hear opposing viewpoints and third-party opinions of your work and/or presentation style, which can help you for the future. Remember that speeches are constantly-evolving works and that feedback is an important part of refining your presentation and addressing issues to make it stronger.

SECTION 3: IMPROVING YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING

As with any skill, public speaking improves with practice, practice, practice. Yet, given that it is a mental rather than a physical skill, you can't just stand in front of a mirror to really improve your style, you sometimes need to step back and see yourself as the audience does. There are two primary ways to improve your presentations: improving your content and improving your style.

Improving Your Content

Content forms the heart of your presentation: after all, you are walking up to the podium to tell the audience *something*. Improving the content of your presentations is one of the easiest ways to improve your public speaking. Most professional speakers and public figures tend to archive the transcripts of their speeches or prepared remarks on their websites, and searching these can yield a treasure-trove of quotations and ideas of how to structure and present your own thoughts. Once you have an outline or draft of your speech completed, send it to a few close friends for feedback. Often they will suggest

small changes that can have a big impact on how your speech is received. Remember that you yourself know your message, but your speech is the vehicle through which that message must be conveyed to others. You know your message inside and out and so it can be hard sometimes to step back and assess whether your speech really communicates all of what you want to say, since you may make assumptions about how much background your audience has of the topic. Having a second pair of eyes read it over allows you to look past your own view of the topic and ensure that you put it forth in a way that will appeal to and engage others.

Improving Your Style

Your audience engages with your presentation through you and your speaking style and it is that style that will often make or break your speech. Elements such as energy, delivery stance, silence-fillers, and confidence all play crucial roles in how an audience perceives your message. As with content improvement, having a second opinion can really help, so you should practice in front of friends and family, asking them to write down any little nuances that they think you might be able to improve upon. Videotaping, however, is one of the greatest weapons in improving your presentation style. I cannot tell you how many people I've coached on their speaking style that will adamantly deny using *um*'s or *er*'s or staring at their notes during a speech, only to stand dumbfounded when they see the video of themselves speaking. Often the things we can most improve upon are the subtle ones that we don't perceive ourselves doing in the heat of the moment, but that are readily apparent when we sit down afterwards and watch a video of the speech. Most cheap point-and-shoot digital cameras these days double as simple video cameras, so it is easier than ever to videotape yourself. If you don't think it will make you even more nervous, have a friend sit in the audience and videotape each speech you give, as people often behave very differently practicing at home than they do in front of an audience of a 100. Having an archival record of your speeches over time also helps you better understand how your style has evolved and what aspects of your style you like and dislike to improve upon for the future.

With the popularity of video-sharing sites like YouTube, it is also easier than ever to review speeches given by professional speakers and public figures. Presidential candidate speeches and debate clips are available by the thousands and you can often learn a lot by watching a seasoned veteran take the stage. From the way he or she places emphasis, to her overall stature and animation on stage, professional speakers can teach us a lot about how to get an audience worked up and behind our message.

SECTION 4: TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Most presentations today involve a substantial reliance on technology, from PowerPoint slides to movies and interactive demonstrations. Technology, as we all know, is highly unpredictable and prone to misbehaving at the most inopportune time and Murphy's Law seems to have a bad habit of striking in full effect for presentations. It is important,

therefore, that you take some basic precautions to ensure that your presentation goes off without a hitch:

- **Whose Laptop?** In the early days, nearly every conference was a BYOL (Bring Your Own Laptop) affair, where the podium just had a video cable to plug into your laptop for the presentation. Unfortunately, laptops tend to be quite finicky when switching over to projector output, and invariably various technical delays ensue, causing schedules to fall behind. Some conferences are beginning to require you to use the conference's laptop and force you to send your presentation files ahead of time or upload them when you check in at the registration desk. Always make sure to find out whether you will be able to use your own laptop for your presentation or if you will be required to use the conference's computer system. If you have to use the conference's, ask if you can test your files ahead of time, as many offer a few minutes at the beginning of the session or before the conference starts in the morning to test your files. Ask the organizers ahead of time what software versions they support, as if your presentation is PowerPoint 2008 and they only have PowerPoint 2003, you could be in for trouble.
- **Where's the Laptop?** Make sure to inquire *where* the computer will be for your presentation, whether it will be right in front of you at the podium, or in the back of the room beside the projector. Nearly all conferences configure their rooms so the laptop connection is at the podium, but some smaller conferences do not always do this, and when presenting at a non-conference venue, anything is possible. The location of the laptop will have a large effect on the kind of presentation you can do, as if the laptop is at the rear of a large theater and you are at the podium in the front, an interactive demonstration will be extremely difficult. I have personally had this happen to me, when I arrived to give a keynote at a large 1500-person theater, only to find that the podium was on the stage, but the laptop connection was in the very back of the theater, and I had planned to combine a PowerPoint presentation with a live demo. I had to quickly reshuffle some content, and thankfully the projection manager volunteered to sit in the back and move through my slides as I gave my PowerPoint presentation, and he gave me a wireless mike that I then carried with me, still talking, to the back of the theater to do the live demonstration for the second half of the talk.
- **Slide Remotes.** If you are only giving a PowerPoint presentation, you may find that one of the many USB presentation remotes makes things much easier. These have a USB dongle that plugs into your laptop and a small battery-powered remote that allows you to move forward/backward through your slides and many even have volume control and the ability to switch between open applications to play a movie file, for instance, and then switch back to the slides. Most have a range of 50-100 feet, and so allow you to walk around the stage while presenting, without worrying about where the laptop is physically located. Some even have laser pointers and voice recorders or timers built in.
- **Internet Available?** Many conferences have limited wireless or wired Internet connectivity available at the podium, so if you need an Internet connection for your presentation, make sure to work with the organizers ahead of time to ensure it will be available. Even if the conference has a wireless network in place, it may

- become overloaded with too many users, or sluggish and kick you off just as you need it for the presentation.
- **DVI or VGA?** Some upper-end laptops (and most Macintosh laptops) come only with a DVI video output jack on the back of the machine. Most projectors have VGA connectors. Laptops with only a DVI plug require an adaptor to be able to connect to a projector, so make sure to check whether your computer needs an adaptor connector.
 - **Configured for Projection?** If you are using your own laptop, but have never connected it to a projector before, you would do well to find a projector and double-check how your laptop behaves back home before plugging it into the conference's projector the day of your talk. Some laptops cannot display on both the laptop screen and projector simultaneously, meaning that your laptop screen will go dark and you will have to continually turn around to see the screen behind you to present. Some podiums are placed so that you cannot see the screen directly from where you are standing, so you should always print a copy of your slides to hold in your hand in case this happens. While most laptops today operate at relatively high resolution levels, projectors tend to operate at only 1024x768 pixels, meaning that when you plug your laptop into the projector, it has to *autonegotiate* with the projector and lower its resolution down to the level of the projector. This can cause odd effects on some laptops, including an *autoscrolling* feature in which the laptop remains at its primary resolution and simply displays a 1024x768 portion of the desktop that scrolls with the mouse, and some images may appear odd when resized. Think of this like holding a magnifying glass up to a sheet of paper and having to move it around the paper to see just that small portion of it. Testing ahead of time should allow you to work out these sort of issues *before* your talk.
 - **Split Screen vs Mirroring.** Most laptops simply mirror the contents of the screen to the projector output such that what you see on your laptop is what you see on the projector. Laptops with advanced graphics cards, however, usually support split screen mode (and some default to it), in which the projector is treated as a second monitor and your desktop simply *extends* onto the projector. If you see your desktop wallpaper on the projector, but the window on your laptop screen does not appear in the projected image, try dragging a window to the right or left (or top or bottom) and see if it becomes visible in the projected image. If so, this indicates split screen mode is in effect. This can be useful in that PowerPoint will automatically display the fullscreen presentation on the projection screen while displaying the native PowerPoint window on your laptop screen, with the notes field visible. If you wish to turn this off, there is usually an option in the graphics card settings for your laptop that sets this behavior.
 - **Multiple Copies.** Bring several copies of your presentation with you, one on CD and one on a USB thumb drive. Pack one of these in your luggage and carry one with you on your carry-on luggage (or have it on your person if you are carrying on all of your luggage). Both CDs and USB flash drives can fail or become damaged during travel, so having two copies makes it likely that you will have at least one working copy. Even if the conference requires you to send them your

- presentation ahead of time, things happen, files get lost or corrupted, so its always a good idea to have a copy with you.
- **Be Wary of Video.** Many conferences are not configured to allow DVD's to be played (even if they have a laptop available at the podium, it may not have a DVD player or may not have DVD playing software installed), so video should be encoded as an AVI, MPEG, or QuickTime movie playable off a laptop. Encoding movies as digital video files also allows you to use a higher resolution, since DVDs are limited to NTSC resolution (640x480 pixels), which renders text and fine detail very hard to read. If you have to use a conference laptop instead of your own, make sure to talk with the conference organizers to ensure that your file will be playable on their computer and ask if they could test it for you ahead of time. Finally, keep in mind that not all laptop graphics cards support playing video when attached to a projector, or may only do so when dual mode (displaying on both the laptop screen and projector simultaneously) is disabled.
 - **Be Wary of Sound.** Many venues do not offer a sound connection for laptops and holding a mike to a laptop speaker usually results in fairly unintelligible sound, so make sure to check whether a sound connection is available.
 - **Is There Light?** If you have notes or prepared remarks to read, make sure the podium will have appropriate lighting during the presentation. Talk to the organizers ahead of time to ask if there is a podium light or if the spotlight can be angled to give you adequate reading light. I once presented on a stage that was wonderfully lit during the introduction, but as I stepped to the podium, they dropped the house lights and focused a single spotlight from the rear of the theater to illuminate my face, leaving my notes completely in the dark.

SECTION 5: POSTERS

Most of the public speaking situations you will find yourself in are at a podium or in the front of a classroom. In the academic sphere, however, poster sessions are quite common, especially at conferences. Presenting a poster is similar in many ways to other public speaking modalities, but it also has a number of unique aspects, including the fact that your poster becomes your primary draw and the mediator for your interactions with your audience. Designing a poster is a bit different from putting together PowerPoint slides for a podium-based presentation, so this section will walk you through the key tricks of how to put together a successful poster.

Designing the Poster

The poster is your primary advertising material, it needs to be sufficiently visually interesting to catch people's eyes and draw them in for a closer look, yet organized and structured well enough that they can understand what you are trying to say. Remember that a poster should be informative, but not exhaustive. Its job is to intrigue and draw the viewer in, making him or her interested enough to engage with you to learn more about it.

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To get some ideas of possible layouts, try searching Google Images (<http://images.google.com>) for *conference poster* and *conference poster presentation* and browse through the resulting images. You will see a mixmash of different styles and layouts, some good, some bad, but thumbing through so many varied examples should give you plenty of ideas for possible designs and layouts for your own poster.

A quick-and-dirty way of converting a conference paper to a poster is to start in PowerPoint and pick a slide template with a nice gradient or subtle background texture. Take each section header from your paper and make it a textbox on the slide, working top-down, left-right, with your abstract in the upper left and your conclusion in the lower right. Under each section header put a set of bullets that summarize the key points of that section. If you have any images in your paper, copy them over to the poster as well. Fill in text-heavy areas with some assorted clipart to liven things up and add visual interest.

There are several key design considerations to keep in mind for a successful poster:

- **Interesting Background.** White backgrounds are extremely boring and unless you have a large number of images scattered across the poster that lend color to the background, your poster will look relatively bland. A colored or textured background can lend substantial visual interest to any poster, but it is important that the background be subtle enough not to detract from the foreground content. A common trick is to use a pastel gradient wash running on a diagonal from upper-left to lower-right with black text, or a dark textured background (such as a PowerPoint template background) with white text. If text legibility is an issue, you can also break your content into white bordered boxes that are positioned in the foreground, with the gradient or texture acting as a backdrop behind the boxes. Color contrasts can look very different on a monitor and on paper, and large-format printing often looks very different from laser printing, so it is important that there is sufficient contrast to begin with such that any loss during printing does not adversely affect readability on the final printout. Backgrounds can be especially powerful when your work does not lend itself well to visual representation, such as describing a process or mathematical algorithm, where the majority of the poster content is likely to be text. In these cases, combining an interesting background with a selection of clipart can do just the trick.
- **Positioning of Elements.** Layout is one of the most important aspects of any poster and has perhaps the greatest impact on the perceived professionalism of your presentation and the volume of visitors it will attract. As a general rule of thumb, content should be placed so that it evenly covers the entire surface area of the poster, without substantial overloading any particular region. Images, in particular, should be placed such that their visual presence appears to be evenly distributed. If you have a large image in one corner, put two or three smaller ones in the opposite corner to counterbalance it. If you pile all of your images on one side of the poster, it will draw the reader's attention away from the main content, while distributing it allows their eyes to take in the complete poster. Try to follow the linear order of your paper through your poster, moving top to bottom, left to right, following the standard English reading order.

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- **Text Size.** While 12pt font looks great and is highly readable on an 8.5x11" sheet of paper held in front of your face, try taping that page to the wall and stepping 6 feet back. Text must be highly readable from about that distance, so you may find yourself using 16-20pt font on a larger poster. This will cut back on the amount of content you can fit on your poster, but that's fine, since a poster should highlight just the key points of your work, not be an exhaustive recounting of every detail.
- **Amount of Text.** Remember that your poster is a *highlights* sheet, not a reprinting of your conference paper. Posters should have enough text to adequately describe and defend the work, but very intricate levels of detail are best left for the paper. Visitors walking by are trying to see as many posters as possible and so are looking for concise descriptions of each project. If your poster consists of 40 pages of text crammed into a single sheet, you better believe that most people will keep on walking. Think of a poster like a collage of PowerPoint slides. You don't put a transcript of your speech on your presentation slides, so why should you do it on your poster? Just like your slides are a set of bulleted talking points, your poster should list the key points to prompt you to fill in the details with your speaking presentation.
- **Lots of Images.** Images are a great way to liven up a poster and add visual interest. Remember the old adage that *a picture is worth a thousand words* and keep in mind that intriguing pictures are much more likely to draw your audience in than descriptive text they won't see without stopping and moving in closer. Even if your work doesn't naturally lend itself to rich imagery, use clipart to add a whimsical touch, or convert some of your text into charts and diagrams.

Printing the Poster

Finally, when it comes time to print the poster, it is ideal if you can save the poster to a PDF file first and then print using Adobe Acrobat. Many people use PowerPoint or similar consumer design tools to develop their posters, and such tools often behave strangely when outputting designs for large-format printing. PowerPoint, in particular, often struggles with very large paper sizes and can have difficulty rendering posters with many overlapping layers. Converting to a PDF file allows you to see *exactly* how the file will output prior to printing and every printing shop accepts PDF files, meaning that you won't run into the all-to-common disaster of rushing to the local Kinkos at the last moment, only to find that your poster looks very different when opened in their particular version of ACME Layout Program. PDF files can also offer a substantial performance advantage when it comes to how fast your file prints because most large-format printers come with native PDF support. With a file format like PowerPoint, the print server has to process the file and stream a series of commands to the printer, but with a PDF file, the entire poster can be sent all at once to the printer's local harddrive and the printer can rasterize and process the file at its full native speed. For large complex poster layouts, this can yield a substantial performance improvement.

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If you don't have access to a large-format printer, or can't afford the cost, the old standby is to split your poster up into a series of 8.5x11" or 11x17" tiles that you can print individually on your desktop printer and then tape together. Some conferences do not accept these kinds of posters, but most do and provide additional thumbtacks and/or tape to assist with this. Converting your poster to a PDF file makes this easy, as Acrobat Professional actually has a built-in feature for printing large materials onto small pages. When you choose Print from the File menu, look at the "Page Handling" section of the print menu. Under *Page Scaling* you will see a *Tile all pages* option that does exactly this, taking the full-size poster and splitting it automatically into tiles of 8.5x11" pages (or whatever other paper size you choose). Acrobat will even optionally label these pages to make it easy to piece them all together.

Shipping the Poster

One often-neglected aspect of the poster presentation process is how to actually ship the poster to the conference or presentation venue. If you are in a crunch, folding the poster in squares will give it a quilt-like appearance, but is far better than trying to roll it extremely tight to cram in your bag. Tightly-rolled posters have a habit of crushing at pressure points which results in crumples and tears in the poster. In most cases, however, you should plan to ship your poster via FedEx, UPS, or equivalent carrier in a poster tube. Conferences with large poster sessions usually have a shipping address where attendees can send their posters, which will then be hung by conference personnel or at least set beside each poster stand. If you plan on reusing your poster again after the conference, make sure to make arrangements ahead of time to have it shipped back. Some conferences will coordinate the pickup with the shipper if you provide a prepaid shipping label for the poster tube, so you should make sure to inquire with organizers as to what services are available.

Presenting the Poster

Presenting a poster is about as opposite as it gets from a formal stage-based presentation. You have no fixed audience and instead are responsible for drawing each visitor in. Furthermore, if you don't keep their attention, they will wander off to the next poster, rather than being trapped in their chair. Your poster should be visually interesting enough to at least catch peoples' attention and make them pause a moment, and you should be ready to capitalize on that and quickly draw them into your work. If someone steps forward to take a look at your poster, don't stand quietly beside them (and *don't* ask the cliché *could I tell you about my project?* or *would you like to hear more about my poster?*); immediately engage with the person, explaining your work and touching on the highlights. This will lock that person in at least for a few minutes and others walking by are more likely to stop when they see a presentation in progress. The trick is to always keep a small following at your station, as if someone sees a group of people around a poster, the laws of group social structure dictate that they themselves are likely to be intrigued and join the group to hear more about that poster. If there is not someone

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currently at your poster, pass your handouts to people walking by, as this will often cause them to at least take a moment to hear more about your poster.

The two words that best describe poster presentations are *interactive* and *interruptions*. Your audience is continually in flux, with people leaving and new people joining the conversation. You will have periods of no-one visiting your poster, followed by periods of several people stopping by all at once. If you are in the middle of presenting to one person and someone else stops and begins reading your poster, a good way to keep the second person interested is to say *here, have a handout* and then continue the presentation, making sure to maintain eye contact both with the original listener and the newcomer. This will keep the first person engaged while hopefully intriguing the second person enough that he or she will stick around to hear you finish your presentation and begin again. A poster presentation should be around 5-10 minutes at most, long enough to cover the basics, but short enough that people remain interested. Remember that in a poster session, its very easy for your audience to move on to the next poster if they get bored. Think of yourself as a record on endless loop, as you will essentially repeat the same pitch continually during the presentation period. Don't worry, however, by the time your poster session is over, you'll be able to give your pitch in your sleep!

One of the hidden weapons of the poster session is electronics. Anything that is high-tech draws people, even if the only thing you have is a canned video presented on a laptop. People like movement, visual interest, and interaction, and the more you can provide them, the more popular your work is going to be. Even if all you do is take the photos from your poster and put them into a PowerPoint presentation that works on endless loop beside you, people will stop to watch it out of curiosity. Live demonstrations of any kind are also crowd-pleasers, but even if you can't offer a live demonstration, you can record a video of some demonstratable aspect of the project to be able to talk to during the poster session. Extended life batteries are available for most laptops that can power them through an entire poster session, especially if you lower the screen brightness when no-one is around at the moment and/or pack a spare battery. Of course, no matter how crowded or well-managed a poster session is, you should never leave your laptop alone, even to walk across the hall to see another poster.

Takeaway

In a formal presentation you command the entire room as your audience for the duration of your speech. All eyes are on you, but by the same token, the ability to interact with your audience is limited beyond the few questions that can be fit into the Q&A section at the end (if there is a question period). It is also much harder to facilitate handouts or other materials to give listeners something to follow up on if they are interested in your topic. Putting the URL of your website on your last slide lets those with a handy pen quickly jot it down, but it is likely to be lost amongst all of their other notes, unlike a handout, which can summarize all of the key highlights of your work.

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Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of poster presentations is that they offer a truly interactive venue in which you can actively engage with your audience. A person who stops by to hear more about your poster is likely to have a specific interest in what you have to say, and can dialogue with you directly about key points of interest. When asking questions at the podium, it is usually acceptable to provide a generalized answer, leaving the details for the person to find on your website, while in a poster session, there is a much greater expectation that you will have all of the relevant information handy. It is therefore often a good idea to print off a copy of any research whitepapers and other material that your group has prepared and have it available for consultation.

Poster sessions are also a great venue for handouts, and you should always have at least one informational sheet available on your table for people to take. Most conferences leave posters up for the duration of the conference, with authors assigned to present their posters during a particular part of the conference. Handouts serve as your spokesperson when you are not there, allowing passersby to get additional information in your absence. Even when you are manning the poster, however, handouts serve a very important purpose in allowing you to offer more information than can be fit onto your poster. A poster has to be readable and draw visitors in, and so can only accept so much information about your project. Handouts on your table allow you to draw forward the highlights from your poster with more information, and should always include your contact information and the URL of your project to allow interested persons to find more information on your project. The easiest handout is simply to print a copy of your poster on 8.5x11" paper, but you must be careful to ensure that the text is still legible at that reduction ratio. Alternatively, take the text and images from the poster and make them into a word processing document for printing using an 11pt font size. The ideal, of course, is to write custom handouts that describe your project in much greater detail. If your poster session required a one-page abstract to be submitted on the project, or if you have previously published other papers on the work, have copies of those available, along with any whitepapers or other technical documents. Ask others that have attended the conference (or the organizers) and find out how many people on average attend the poster session to make sure that you print enough handouts. Print a sufficient number of copies that you can hand them out freely instead of rationing them only to select visitors. Try to hand out copies to anyone walking by. Often, this will cause them to pause and take a closer look at your poster, but even if they do not look further at your poster, they may look at your handout later in the conference or back at home.

SECTION 6: THE CHECKLIST

Use this handy checklist to prepare for your next speech!

Writing the Speech

1. Focus your thoughts. Start off with a list of the key points you want to convey to your audience, flesh things out to an outline form, and then transform each bullet into prose.
2. Who is your audience and how can the speech be tailored to best connect with them? Humor and examples are strong candidates for tailoring.
3. Come up with a strong opening to catch your audience's interest and give them a memorable conclusion.

Preparing to Give the Speech

1. Can you use your own laptop, or do you have to use the venue's computer?
2. Make sure you pack a backup copy of your presentation files.
3. Do you need video or audio playback, Internet access, or other specialized technical capabilities? If so, check with organizers to ensure their availability.
4. Time your speech and write margin notes if necessary to ensure that you stay on time when presenting it.
5. Practice Practice Practice.

Upon Arrival

1. If you had to send your files ahead of time, confirm that they were received. If you shipped a poster, make sure it has been accounted for and is ready to be hung.
2. Ask if you will have an opportunity to test before your presentation ahead of time to make sure that your files and/or laptop work properly.

Giving the Speech

1. Cellphone turned off? Don't even set it to vibrate, as that will distract you during your speech, make sure it is completely off.
2. Is there a clock in easy view to time your speech? If not, make sure to take your watch off and place it on the podium beside your speech.
3. Make eye contact. If you are reading prepared remarks, make sure to constantly make eye contact with your audience, moving your gaze around so everyone feels included.
4. Focus inwardly. Forget there is an audience out there and just focus on giving the speech. Don't let scowls, people dozing in the front row, or other problems faze you.
5. Be Animated!

Takeaway

1. Have handouts for poster sessions and/or make arrangements for flyer distribution in a stage-based presentation.

GOOD LUCK!