

How to make your voice count & have impact

From [Reality Checks With Staci-Lee Sherwood](#)
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One of the most important things to remember is to have confidence. Only speak about things you are passionate about. You can always look up the technical or scientific detail but passion and sincerity can't be faked. If you don't care no one else will. This is key when you are speaking to people you know do not share your point of view.



When I was in high school I hated giving oral reports. This was the dark ages for technology, as in we didn't have any. Giving oral reports in school was a dreary prospect under the best circumstances. My freshman year in college I was told that public speaking was a required course and yes that meant I would have to give a 5 minute speech. I tried many excuses but my professor wouldn't budge so I settled into the horror of writing a speech.

The day finally came and I was a hit, well the speech was since it was about sex education. The class was silent and focused. I learned that day the power of public speaking and never looked back. After that I loved the idea of talking to a crowd wherever and whoever they were, but to make an impact there was a learning curve.

Over the years I've given many speeches, dozens of interviews and spoken at hundreds of hearings. I met many people who hated public speaking. I helped many overcome their fear and learn to write succinct talking points to help them make a clear statement. Being concise in your point is key. Years ago one was given 5 minutes to speak at public hearings, now it's 2-3 minutes which is barely enough time to get detailed information out. Do your research on what you want to say because no one sounds good giving a statement on the fly.

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I've listened to countless talks where the speaker just droned on and on I could barely stay awake. Other times they overused visual aides to where the screen kept changing and staying focused was impossible. I've also listened to people use up their 2 minutes at public hearings without getting to their main issues. Other got flustered by mistakes, background noise or hecklers and gave up. So here are some key points

to help you make a memorable speech, concise statement when time is limited or an interesting interview that engages the audience.

“You never know the effect you have on people. You are there to plant seeds of change. Sometimes you see the change right away, most times you never know. Changing the world is a marathon not sprint. It pays to remember that most change happens slowly and to keep at it. Those who give up never change anything.”



Public speaking

Whether you're giving a short **speech** or a long TED talk what you say is as important as **how** you say it. Many wonderful talks are lost on people tuning out because the speaker is boring. Long sentences, monotone voice and lack of body language puts people to sleep. Subject matter brings them in but **presentation** is key to getting them to listen.

In a **live speech** you can:

- Make eye contact with the audience
- Engage with the audience when you see them showing emotion. Nod in agreement, raise your hand in frustration. Let your body language reflect the tone of your speech and acknowledge how the audience responds
- Use your voice like a musical instrument. Raise it, lower it, even whisper whenever you want to draw emphasis to a point you're making
- Visual aids like photos and videos, even audio recording add texture and help round out the message in ways words alone can't.
- Ask your audience for feedback while you are speaking. During your speech say things like 'Don't you agree?', 'Doesn't that sound insane?', 'Who wouldn't want that?'. So few speakers do this but it's very effective. It wakes up the audience and makes them feel like you are **only speaking to them**. They will pay attention for the next question. I once gave a speech at a rally and asked the crowd to chant with me and they did.
- Laugh at your own mistakes
- Remember nobody likes a know it all. They are there to learn not be talked down to. (too many speakers forget this)
- If there is a Q & A and someone has proven you wrong be gracious and thank them for the information. No one is truly an 'expert' there is always something new to learn. People hate egotists but relish honesty because it's so rare.
- Before people leave make sure you give them a way to contact you. Keeping the dialogue open is key to changing people's minds.

- If the speech is in person have business cards, pamphlets even pre recorded speeches available. If someone can take something home it helps to remind them of what you spoke about.

If you're giving a speech on zoom you can pretty much follow the same guidelines. The most important thing to remember is: if you were listening would you be bored or would you hang on every word? If the speech sounds interesting to you it will come across as interesting to your audience.

If you're speaking at a **hearing** you're probably standing at the podium. The clock starts with the first word so make them count. Many people waste precious time thanking everyone for the opportunity to speak and giving long intros. You have only a few minutes don't waste them. Remember, the government works for you no need to waste your time thanking them. Before speaking write out the 5-10 points you want to make, then cross off the least important ones. At best 2-3 minutes affords you enough time to mention 3-4 points or 1 in great detail. Learn to talk in shorthand. Write out the key points you want to make as bullet talking points not long paragraphs.

Do your research about the people on the panel/commission/hearing. If they are public figures you can look up their background. Where they went to school, marital status, where they live, what their hobbies are, if they have pets, if they volunteer, all give you an idea what kind of people they are. If speaking to a group just focus on the chair and/or the person who represents your area. Find some common ground if not politically or professionally than personally and speak to that person. You don't need to convince everyone just 1 or 2 key people might be enough depending on the issue.

Giving a **statement** at public hearing you can:

- Practice your speech out loud so you know how long it takes.
- Best to have your points printed, not hand written.
- Print it out as double spaced which is easier to read.
- If there is a group speaking coordinate so each person focuses on just 1 key point.
- Don't panic or get flustered if you mispronounce a word or lose your place. Everyone, even the pros, mess up so you're in good company.
- Speak clearly and loudly you want the whole room to hear.
- Don't rush, garbled words fall on deaf ears.
- Skip the emotion; tears and rants get you nowhere stick to facts you're passionate about.
- If someone heckles you or even cheers you on just ignore and keep going. If they persist hold out your hand in a **stop** display as though they were a child. If they are that rude they are acting like a child.
- Call out one of them (on the panel/commission) by name and mention how your points relate to them or their voting record. This will get everyone's attention.
- Depending on the issue bring a visual aid. I once brought a plastic bottle filled with polluted water and dared the commission to drink it.
- Quote them. Nothing gets people's attention more than hearing their own words against them.
- Bring up past hearings or correspondence (phone/email) and remind them of previous promises or statements.
- Don't be afraid to state how their work shades their support/vote because it always does. Same is true for campaign donors.
- Focus on economical and political sides of the issue. Specifically how the commissioners will either gain or lose. Animal abuse, environmental destruction and human health issues alone won't sway anyone. If people **really** cared about them they wouldn't be the massive problems they are. Money runs the world. Find a way your points fit in that space and you will get their attention. Those other issues are the icing but not the cake for 90% of people.



There are two types of interviews, the live or zoom video and the audio only on radio. Both have advantages but the same principals apply to interviews as they do for speeches. Be interested in what you're saying and engage the listener. The audience will be more likely to stay tuned if the interview sounds like a casual conversation between friends or colleagues as opposed to a rant or monolog.

Call the interviewer by their first name, after all you want them as excited about the issues as you are. List some key points you want cover. Some interviewers want you to send them questions/issues you want covered, others might send you the questions beforehand. If that doesn't happen remember this is *your* interview and you are there to discuss what *you* care about.

During an *interview* you can:

- Smile at key points, people always relax and respond to smiles when they are genuine.
- Offer some hope. All doom and gloom regardless of subject will turn off listeners.
- Converse with the interviewer as though they were a friend. Your interview will be more interesting and more likely to be remembered if your listeners feel like they're eavesdropping on a friendly conversation. The standard Q & A is boring and hard for most listeners to focus on.
- Control the narrative if it goes off track by saying 'Sally that is a great point/question but not germane to the issues at hand so as I was saying' and just get back to *your* talking points.
- Don't argue, this is *your* interview where *your* points are the star, this isn't Crossfire.
- Relax and think before answering, no need to rush you're not running a race.
- If asked something you don't have the answer to admit it. Everyone can google and will know if you're faking it. Use the opportunity to your advantage by saying you don't have the full answer but will find out and get back to them. This helps to keep the door open for another interview. You can also direct the audience to your website where you will post the answer.
- Try to introduce a new topic or side issue by saying 'Perhaps we can discuss this another time' or 'Maybe I can come back and expand on that point you brought up', The bigger point is to keep the dialogue going and get the audience thinking and questioning on their own.
- Be gracious and thank them at the end
- Acknowledge your gratitude to the audience for tuning in, they didn't have to.
- Final thought should include contact information.

I hope this helps those who want to change things and will endeavor to any way they can. Never let anyone take your voice away it's the best tool you have.