

PREPARING FOR AN ORAL PRESENTATION

Giving an exemplary oral presentation comes down to two factors: the information in the presentation and the act of presenting the information. Although intimidating, the act of presenting can be simplified with the mentality that 90% of the actual presentation can be finished before your final speech. This means that only 10% needs to be completed when you give your presentation! Using these tools, the 90% can be broken down and perfected before presenting.

Tool #1: Memorization

No, this does not mean prepare an entire speech and memorize it verbatim. Unless you are an actor, this can make your presentation sound robotic and uninteresting, losing the interest of your audience. The audience is key. You want to sound informed yet spontaneous in order to keep their attention. Accomplish this by following these steps:

- Write out all that you are going to say as if it were a speech.
Example: “Hello everyone. My presentation is about the grammarians of the French language. Before I begin, I would like to provide the historical and political background of the 17th century.”
- Determine where shifts in ideas exist and highlight them in different colors to make them visually different in your mind.
Example: “This century was dominated by the absolute monarchs Louis XIII and Louis XIV. They implemented regimes to create political structure through the unification of the French language, which existed in many dialects. Here you can see three grammarians: Malherbe, Ménage, and Vaugelas. Each of them studied court proceedings to form rules for literature and oral speaking.”
- Read it aloud.
- Practice, practice, practice.

Tool #2: Warming Up

Without vocal preparation, an oral presentation can fall apart, simply because you don’t sound your best or can’t pronounce words properly. Your voice is your strongest asset for giving a solid performance. In fact, your voice is your most important tool! You can’t just wake up and expect to sound amazing, just like you can’t start your car in the freezing winter and expect it to work properly. Both need to be warmed-up to work. Here are some easy breathing and vocal exercises to get you ready to go:

Breathing Exercises:

- Put your left hand on your left-side ribcage; make your right hand into a fist and put it right at the spot where your chest gets soft, right at the top of the abdominal muscles; inhale until you can’t breathe in anymore; as you inhale, you should feel both your hands move outward (this is completely normal and exactly what you want!); hold your breath for five seconds; release your breath slowly, keeping your left hand (and ribcage) in the extended position and allowing your right hand (and belly) to slowly sink in; repeat as many times as you like.
- Grab a large book (dictionary, textbook, two George R. R. Martin novels); lay flat on the floor on your back; put the book right at the top of your abdominal muscles; breathe in as much as you can; hold your breath for five seconds; release your breath slowly; repeat as you like. Over time, more books can be added for more breath support.

Vocal Exercises:

- Hum lightly on any pitch; slowly change into an “oo” vowel (as in *soon*) then to an “ee” vowel (as in *bee*); gradually increase the speed of vowel change.
Example: “ooooo-eeee-ooo-eee-oo-ee-oo-ee”
- Repeat the consonants *p* (like *pay*), *k* (like *kiss*), *d* (like *day*), *b* (like *boy*), *s* (like *sigh*), and *t* (like *ton*); enunciate clearly.
Example: “p-p-p-p” “s-s-s-s” “k-k-k-k”

Tool #3: Stretching

This tool for presenting is similar to the last. It is impossible to roll out of bed and expect to feel and look comfortable presenting. If your muscles are tight, it will come across in every aspect of your presentation and the audience will perceive your tenseness. You must stretch! By relaxing your muscles and releasing tension beforehand, you will feel like a new person ready to perform amazingly.

Additional Resources:

Memorization: “Memorize this: How stage actors learn all their lines.” By Nina Metz. *Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 2014.

Warming Up (Vocal): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLLJ1r0x9PA-t=324>

Warming Up (Breathing): <http://www.copdfoundation.org/What-is-COPD/Living-with-COPD/Breathing-Techniques.aspx>

Stretching (Head and neck): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHaUI2Uj5io>

Stretching (Shoulder and arms): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IRmIla1nfA>

Works Cited

“Breathing Techniques.” COPD Foundation. COPD Foundation, 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.copdfoundation.org/What-is-COPD/Living-with-COPD/Breathing-Techniques.aspx>>.

HarvardArts. Renée Fleming. Youtube. N.p., 11 Feb. 2010. Web. 1 Oct. 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLLJ1r0x9PA#t=324>>.

Metz, Nina. “Memorize this: How stage actors learn all their lines.” Editorial. *Chicago Tribune*. N.p., 21 June 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2014.

SHAR Music. Alexander Masterclass - Head and Neck Stretches. Youtube. N.p., 30 Mar. 2010. Web. 1 Oct. 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHaUI2Uj5io>>.

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