



Top Tip & Talking Point #4: What makes a successful presentation?

There are, of course, no models for the perfect speech. What I or your teacher personally like is **not** the only, let alone the best, way to make a public speech. Below are just a few observations for you to discuss with your teachers and some possible techniques to try out in the preparation phase. It is worth trying something new because “if you always do what you’ve always done, then you always get what you’ve always got”.

- **Humour** can be a powerful tool to engage and entertain the audience; even the most serious of topics have scope for humorous moments. Not everyone is comfortable being funny, so don’t worry if you do not want to use humour, yet do make sure to provide entertainment and variety in some other way, though.
- **Passionate, emotive delivery** often sways an audience towards your beliefs and adds impact to your arguments. Beware, however, of coming across as inauthentic and false or as acting a part, as this can have the opposite effect to the one you intend.
- **Engaging with more than one side of an argument** shows you have given the topic plenty of thought. Some audience members might think ‘but there’s another side to all this’ and demonstrating that you have considered and engaged with that perspective is very persuasive.
- **Movement** can be every effective at drawing attention to points that you are making, but avoid walking about or moving too much. Your movement and your gestures can make a great impact, but too many can make that impact a distracting one. Less is often more. Do engage with your audience; don’t hide behind the table! Equally, do not block the view of the student Chair whose job it is to run the meeting.
- **Eye contact** is crucial to hold attention and to convince an audience of your sincerity. As long as you are not stuck to your notes, it is worth trying to look at every person individually in the audience at some point, particularly if there is tiered seating. Don’t be nervous about this; everyone will be wishing you well and the audience is not as scary as it may seem!
- Should you **target your audience**? It is sensible to ensure that what you saying is applicable to those listening, but do be careful not to write a speech aimed to please a particular demographic or group in particular. You run the risk of alienating others or of coming over as a cynical manipulator!
- **Enjoy the questions** from the Questioner and members of the audience as these are a real opportunity to show what you know. One final tip: think before you start to answer - you are allowed time to think and it is better to pause and give a good answer than rush into a bad one. Ensure that you are directly addressing the point made and are able to answer the question asked.

Remember that Sir Winston Churchill believed that speeches should entertain, instruct, persuade and inspire. That is extremely good advice.

Best wishes.

Matthew Christmas
Lead Organiser: ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition
matthew.christmas@esu.org / 0207 529 1587 (direct dial)