



# The **77** most common public speaking mistakes

# Attitude, approach

- Acting superior.  
The audience sees you as nonchalant.
- Not thinking things through.  
Results in a faulty speech structure, weak logic and hard-to-follow reasoning.
- Not targeting the presentation at the audience.  
Lack of concrete examples to make the audience feel recognition and connection.
- Not rehearsing.  
The audience feels that this is the first time you've held the presentation. You search for words, stammer, repeat yourself.
- Being restrained, discreet and impersonal.  
It is hard to get a feel for who you are and where you're coming from. The audience has to guess who you are.
- Reading directly from notes.  
You need to understand the difference between simply reading and conveying an idea.
- Trying to be someone you're not; being unnatural.  
The audience will sense if you're playing a character that is not a part of your own personality.
- Being too private.  
Good speakers understand the difference between being private and personal.
- Relying on humor to curry favor with the audience.  
Not appealing to people's intelligence.
- Thinking that people will listen just because you're you.  
An inflated self-image can be off-putting.
- Addressing the wrong crowd.  
You do not know who the audience is, or do the same presentation for all audiences.
- Attributing characteristics to the listeners that do not apply.  
Not knowing your audience is fatal.
- Acting apologetic.  
Taking back what you say before even finishing your speech - just to be on the safe side.
- Inappropriate dress.  
A sign of nonchalance or not understanding the importance of proper attire.

## Interaction with the group

- Not making eye contact.  
Gazing into space, reading from the script.
- Addressing a single person.  
Shutting out others, showing that others don't need to listen.
- Not showing that the listeners are important.  
Doing your own thing without considering who the audience is.
- Making blanket statements about the listeners.  
Misunderstanding who the listeners are.

## Structure

- Not knowing whether the speech is meant to inform or sell.  
The difference between informing about and promoting an idea is crucial.
- Using uninteresting language.  
The language is the key to understanding the content.
- Using logic that is only clear to the speaker.  
Inability to understand the way others think.
- Not tying off loose ends.  
This means that you have not thought the presentation through, assuming that it will work out.
- Using imagery that the group does not understand.  
Creates incomprehension and even confusion.
- Being long-winded and not getting to the point.  
KISS—Keep It Short and Sweet.
- Delivering information instead of content.  
Rattling off data instead of putting it into context.

# Questions

- Not knowing where you're going with a question.  
The audience will know you only learned the question for the presentation.
- Not accepting the consequences of the question.  
Not taking up issues that naturally follow the question.
- Not hearing whether or not the question was really answered.  
This may be because you don't really understand why you asked the question or because you have already moved on in your thoughts.
- Letting yourself be sidetracked from your topic.
- The question is simply a test, not a search for understanding.  
The question aims to force specific answers.
- The question is banal in the context.  
The answers to the question are too simple and obvious.
- The person asked does not know how to respond.  
The background to the question is unclear and creates uncertainty.

# Argumentation

- Not creating a relationship with the listeners.  
Doing so makes the audience listen better.
- Only listening to arguments that support your own.  
The focus should be on finding a solution, not simply being right.
- Always trying to find faults in others' arguments.  
Arguing a case does not mean crushing the opponent.
- Making the wrong demands of the discussion.  
There may be other reasons for the discussion than providing a solution.
- Expecting too much from the discussion.  
This means you do not understand the level of the discussion.
- Starting conflicts by listening to the wrong things.
- Telling the other person what he or she thinks is a good way to start a conflict.

# Voice

- Speaking in a steady loud voice.  
Creates tension and irritation in the listeners.
- Unnatural intonation.  
Hard to follow in the long run.
- Putting equal emphasis on every word.  
Creates monotony, making the speech hard to follow.
- Speaking without emphasis.  
Also creates monotony.
- Not pausing.  
This does not give the listener time to reflect and embellish with his or her own thoughts.
- Fading out. Letting your voice fade at the end of a sentence.  
Listeners miss content.
- Poor articulation.  
Mumbling.

# Visual aids

- Too many pictures for the content.  
Sometimes a few words are worth a thousand pictures.
- Too many slides for the allotted time.  
More visual aids does not necessarily equal better content.
- Using graphics to structure your presentation.  
Remember, visual aids are to help the audience, not the speaker!
- Using two visual aids at once.  
Text and image that do not go together.
- A PowerPoint presentation that is a show all its own.  
This detracts from the content.
- Using the same visual aid for all parts of the presentation.  
Makes the presentation boring.
- Too much explanatory text.  
Let the image speak for itself.