



## Public Speaking Doesn't Have to be Scary How to Effectively Communicate with Your Colleagues and Residents

This continuing education article and accompanying self-assessment is worth 2.0 elective credits as part of MTA's Township Governance Academy. See page 26 for details.

### OBJECTIVES

- Offers tips and suggestions for preparing for, and delivering, a public address
- Describes how to achieve your goals through public speaking
- Discusses how appearances and mannerisms impact peoples' perceptions of you as a leader



### CORE COMPETENCIES

- Possesses persuasive/influential abilities
- Motivates others to achieve desired outcomes

*"According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."*

—Comedian Jerry Seinfeld

Does that observation sum it up for you? Are you one of those individuals who believes it would be better to be in the casket instead of giving a eulogy?

Like it or not, as elected officials, public speaking is part of the job. So how do you overcome your fear? And if you are one of the lucky few who actually *enjoys* public speaking, how do you ensure that you are effectively communicating your message to the intended audience?

From the time we are children, we are asked to give public addresses. We might not think of them as such, but they are

a form of public speaking. In preschool, we are asked to say our name, how old we are or if we have a pet. *That's an informational speech.*

Fast-forward to adulthood.

A resident asks you a question about a tax issue in your township and you answer it. *That's an impromptu public speech.*

You are in a township board meeting, trying to convince others that a motion needs to be approved. *That's a persuasive speech.*

You are at the local Rotary luncheon, explaining the township's new park project. *That's an informative speech.*

Your child or grandchild needs help making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and as you make one, you describe what you are doing. *That's a demonstrative speech.*

After dinner with a group of friends, you offer a funny story to make everyone laugh and provide an easy transition from the dinner table. *That's an entertaining speech.*

Persuasive, informational, impromptu, demonstrative and entertaining speeches are just technical terms for the things you do each and every day. You are already giving public speeches; you just might not recognize them as such. Public speaking, in its simplest form, is just a conversation with other people—only this time you are doing most of the talking.

According to our trusted *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, public speaking is “the act or process of making speeches in public; the art of effective oral communication with an audience.” Pretty simple, right?

The answer is YES! Remember, public speaking is just a conversation, except you're doing most of the talking.

So let's dive in and learn how to become a more effective public speaker.

## IDENTIFYING THE GOAL

The most fundamental component in preparing and delivering a speech is to identify your goal. Ask yourself, “*What do I want to accomplish?*” The answer lays the foundation for the type of speech you will deliver—be it informational, persuasive, demonstrative, etc.

The second most important question is, “*Who is your audience?*” Traditionally, audiences are divided into three groups: immediate, target and secondary. The immediate audience is the group of people in the room with you. The secondary audience is comprised of individuals who could be affected by what you say. The target audience is the group you most want to reach—it could either be the immediate or secondary audience. The immediate audience isn't necessarily your target audience.

Here's an example. Each year, the Michigan governor provides a State of the State address to members of the Legislature and the general public. Who is the target audience? That depends on the content within the speech. It could be the Legislature, and it could be you and me listening or watching from our living rooms, or reading about it online or in the newspaper the next day. Either way, the governor's remarks *will* be influenced by the audience.

Once you identify your target audience and know what you want to accomplish with your speech, it is important to learn about your audience. Who will be in the audience? What are they expecting from you? The more you learn about the audience *before* you give your speech, the more comfortable you will feel about giving your speech.

## WRITING A SPEECH

Once your goal is established and the audience is identified, it's time to put your speech together. The easiest way to prepare a speech is to follow a simple outline formula with an introduction, body and summary. (*For more information, see “A Good Outline Helps You Prepare” on page 24.*)

Before you get into your official introduction, start with a “zinger” or an “ice-breaker”—something that will allow the audience to connect with you, laugh, etc. (This is also referred to as the “attention-grabber,” “the hook” or “tease.”) It can be a personal anecdote, joke, question, gimmick or story. Whatever it is, this is your way to gauge the audience and what their interaction might be, as well as to let them see a more human side of you.

The introduction is where you give the audience an overview of the journey you will take them on. It prepares them for what's coming. This is where you let them know *why* they should care and then help them understand what they might gain by listening to you.

The heart of the speech is also known as the “body.” Ask yourself: “*What are the things I want the audience to remember?*” This list lays the groundwork for the body of your speech.

As the main portion of your speech, this is where you provide the facts and elements you hope to convey. Just like when you use an outline, you make a declarative statement and then offer supporting data and/or examples to support the statement, and then repeat the process.

## THE VALUE OF A GOOD STORY

Stories are a great way to make a point, because people can relate to them. President Abraham Lincoln, in the book “*Lincoln on Leadership*,” is quoted as saying: “They say I tell a great many stories. I reckon I do; but I have learned from long experience that plain people, take them as they run, are more easily





## Tips to Calm Your Fears

If you are one of the many township officials who would rather do practically *anything* than give a speech, here are some tips that can help ease your fears.

**Preview the venue before the program starts.** Become familiar with the hall, stage, podium and microphone. If you know what the room looks like ahead of time, some anxiety of the “unknown” will be eliminated.

**Greet people as they arrive.** Force yourself to be outgoing. Circulate around the room, smile at people, laugh and get energized. Why? When you walk up to give your speech, you will no longer be looking at a room of strangers, but a room of newly familiar faces who just might smile back at you.

**Relax.** As the speaker, you set the tone. It is important for you to appear as relaxed as possible. Remember, they came to hear you, so approach the audience with confidence in who you are and your knowledge on the issue.

**Get out there and give a speech.** Actually giving speeches is the best way to get over your fear. There was something as a child that made you afraid—such as falling off your bicycle when you were learning to ride. You didn’t let your fear of falling off stop you from learning to ride the bike. It’s the same thing with public speaking: You have to do it in order to conquer it.

**Practice.** The biggest key to overcoming a fear of public speaking is to practice, practice and practice some more. The more familiar you are with the material, the more confidence you will have.

influenced through the medium of a broad and humorous illustration than in any other way.”

As the presenter, it is important to find a way to engage with and connect your audience to what you are saying. Stories—personal or historical—can provide an avenue in which to draw the audience in and make a point.

### CONCLUDE WITH A BANG

Once you have gone through all of your content, you come to the summary, or conclusion, of your presentation. This is a great opportunity to leave a lasting impression, and help the audience reflect and remember what you’ve discussed. The conclusion provides an opportunity for you to offer final thoughts, stress a point or offer encouragement to the audience.

When considering what should go into the conclusion, ask yourself again: *“What are the three things I want the audience to remember?”* This will help keep you focused and not ramble.

In developing a speech, use the following as a guide: Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you just told them.

### DELIVERING THE SPEECH

There are many components that make up successful speech delivery—everything from what you wear to body language

to the tone of your voice. (For more on body language, see “What is Your Body Saying” at right.)

Speed and tone can positively and/or negatively impact how your message comes across. If you have no inflection in your voice, people can easily tune you out. If you talk too fast, once again, people might stop listening because they are frustrated that they can’t keep up with you and feel like they are missing something. Your volume—and the rate at which you speak—can impact how people perceive what you are saying. It is important to offer variations in how you speak in order to re-engage the audience and stress a point.

If you speak loudly, people often interpret that you are angry or showing outrage. If you speak in a soft voice, people tend to think you are showing compassion or sympathy. People connect talking fast with excitement and enthusiasm; speaking slowly with calmness and understanding.

Where you put the emphasis impacts the meaning of what you say. Think of a parent calling his or her child:

*JOSH, come over here right now.*

*Josh, COME over here right now.*

*Josh, come over HERE right now,*

*Josh, come over here RIGHT NOW.*



## What is Your Body Saying?

Did you know that 93 percent of how we are judged has nothing to do with the actual words that we say? When speaking with or to the public, a majority of your audience will make up their mind about whether or not they like you within the first few seconds.

Here are some tips to ensure your visual communication is helping everyone feel more comfortable:

**Smile.** It is the simplest of things—and the *most* important. If you are smiling, it shows that you are relaxed, confident and in control, and puts the audience at ease as well.

**Maintain eye contact.** This is critical. The audience needs to know that you are connecting *with* them, not talking at them. Those who excel at eye contact tend to gain the trust of the audience and are perceived as credible, honest and sincere.

**Dress appropriately.** It’s always good to ensure that what you are wearing doesn’t distract the audience from what you are saying. Try to avoid bright, shiny clothing or jewelry that could be distracting.

**Use good posture.** It is extremely important when you are delivering a speech that your posture is good so that you will be able to breathe properly. If you are speaking from behind a standing podium, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, making sure that you shift your weight from time to time to prevent your knees from locking. Breathe deeply, to allow yourself to speak for an extended period of time.

**Use open gestures.** Crossing your arms means that you are closed off from the audience, as if you are attempting to separate yourself from them. Try to keep your arms in a relaxed position either at your side or resting on a podium.

**Never point at the audience.** Pointing at the audience can come across as scolding.

Implementing these tips will help you feel more confident when you present your next speech.

## A Good Outline Helps You Prepare

A good outline can help you prepare for an excellent written or oral presentation. Here's an example of how an outline for this article could be converted to a speech:

- I. ZINGER: Jerry Seinfeld quote on fear of public speaking
- II. Overview
  - a. Help overcome fear
  - b. Help recognize that public speaking is a part of everyday life
    - i. Define types of speeches
    - ii. Define speech according to dictionary
- III. Body
  - a. Identifying the goal
    - i. What do I want to accomplish?
    - ii. Who is the audience?
  - b. Writing the speech
    - i. Define introduction
      1. Discuss the zinger
      2. Discuss why the overview is needed
    - ii. Define the body
      1. Discuss the content of the speech
      2. What are the things I want the audience to remember?
      3. Make the statement and then offer supporting data
      4. Discuss the use of stories
    - iii. Discuss the summary
      1. Explain the purpose
      2. Identify the three things you want the audience to remember
  - c. Delivering the speech
    - i. Discuss volume, rate and tone
    - ii. Discuss the use of pauses
    - iii. Discuss the need for personal cadence
  - d. Conclusion
    - i. Cato the Elder quote
    - ii. Preparing for the speech
    - iii. Reminders
      1. What do you want to accomplish?
      2. Who is the audience?
      3. What do you want the audience to remember?
      4. Practice
    - iv. Believe in yourself

The sentence is the same, but each has different meaning based on which word the emphasis is placed. The key in speech delivery is to use a combination of all of these styles—soft, loud, fast, slow, emphatic—to make your speech come alive and leave a lasting impression.

### OTHER TECHNIQUES

Don't be afraid to pause for a second or two to collect your thoughts or make a point. A powerfully placed pause can draw an audience back into what you are saying. A pause can also help prevent you from saying "and" or "um" too often.

It is important that you find your personal cadence—the way you talk, the rhythm and the tone of your voice. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln were both gifted orators who found their personal cadence. They used their distinctive cadence to deliver some of the most memorable speeches that still impact us today.

Another way to establish a good pace is to keep the context of your speech conversational, and stay upbeat. As the presenter, it is your responsibility to set the tone for the speech. Be open and smile. Have confidence in what you are doing. Remember, they came to hear and learn from *you*. If you are upbeat, the audience will stay with you. If you are drab or boring, you'll lose them.

## JUST A CONVERSATION

As Roman statesman Cato the Elder said, “Grasp the subject, the words will follow.”

All township officials have the ability and tools to be effective public speakers. If you take time to prepare and become familiar with the subject, the delivery will be a breeze. Remember, public speaking is just a conversation, except you are doing most of the talking.

The hardest part of public speaking is preparing for the speech. It’s the anticipation. Making a point or sharing knowledge that you have on a subject can be very rewarding. But thinking of everything that *could* go wrong will drive you crazy.

Before you deliver your speech, don’t forget to practice. Take time to review your material so that you are comfortable with it. If you know your content well, you’ll be more likely to provide a lot of eye contact, rather than reading from a piece of paper or note card. It’s been said that the eyes are the window to the soul, so use your eyes to connect with your audience, showing your confidence and passion for the subject at hand.

And the most important thing?

Have fun with public speaking. This is your time to shine. You were elected into office because of your experience, your opinions and your knowledge. Don’t be afraid to share these things with your colleagues and your constituents.

You *can* be a great public speaker—and can do so with grace and confidence. ■

*Turn to page 26 for a Township Governance Academy Continuing Education Self-Assessment.*

**Jennifer L. Hoff**  
MTA Public Affairs Liaison



*For more on public speaking, attend one of MTA’s upcoming professional development programs that addresses this topic.*

## Continuing Education Self-Assessment



Participants enrolled in the Township Governance Academy (TGA), a credentialing program offered through MTA, may obtain 2.0 elective credits for successful completion of this quiz. To obtain credit, participants must answer the following 10 multiple-choice questions by circling the correct answer and receive a minimum passing score of 70 percent. The questions are based on content from the article "Public Speaking Doesn't Have to be Scary," beginning on page 20.

There is no charge to take the quiz or to obtain TGA credit. Completed quizzes should be sent to: MTA Education Center, 512 Westshire Drive, Lansing, MI 48917, or faxed to (517) 321-8908. MTA will notify you of your results within three weeks after receiving your quiz. *IMPORTANT: Please keep a copy of your completed quiz in your TGA binder.*

Township officials interested in enrolling in TGA may call Shelley Tucker, MTA education specialist, at (517) 321-6467, ext. 251, or for more information, visit [www.michigantownships.org/tga.asp](http://www.michigantownships.org/tga.asp).

### TGA Continuing Education—June 2008 "Public Speaking Doesn't Have to be Scary" 2.0 Elective Credits

(To receive credit, this quiz must be completed by June 1, 2012.)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ TOWNSHIP & COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY/STATE/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

1. **Answering a question about tax issues in your township is an example of:**
  - a. An informative speech
  - b. A persuasive speech
  - c. An impromptu speech
  - d. A demonstrative speech
2. **Which of the following is MOST likely to help you feel more comfortable about public speaking?**
  - a. Learning more about your audience
  - b. Practicing in front of a mirror
  - c. Limiting attendance to only those whom you consider friends
  - d. Having your speech prepared by an expert
3. **When developing your speech, identifying the things you want the audience to remember is the MOST important part of:**
  - a. The introduction of your speech
  - b. The body of your speech
  - c. The summary or conclusion of your speech
  - d. Both b and c
4. **Pausing when delivering your speech is MOST likely to result in which of the following?**
  - a. Give the audience the impression you lost your train of thought
  - b. Regain the attention of your audience
  - c. Make you say "and" or "um" more often
  - d. Make you lose your breath
5. **The MOST difficult part of public speaking is:**
  - a. Preparing the speech
  - b. Having a large audience
  - c. Knowing you are being recorded
  - d. Deciding what to wear
6. **What are the recommended elements of a simple outline?**
  - a. Zinger, body and summary
  - b. Teaser, introduction and body
  - c. Introduction, body and summary
  - d. Introduction, conclusion and summary
7. **Which of the following is an important element of visual communication to help your audience feel more comfortable?**
  - a. Wearing bright clothing
  - b. Maintaining eye contact
  - c. Using good posture with your arms crossed
  - d. Pointing at the audience to emphasize your point
8. **Which of the following techniques is MOST recommended to help ease your fear of public speaking:**
  - a. Reviewing your outline and notes right before speaking
  - b. Talking with the audience and introducing yourself to someone new
  - c. Becoming familiar with the venue
  - d. Practicing, practicing, practicing
9. **Which of the classifications below describe the MOST important members of your audience?**
  - a. The immediate audience
  - b. The secondary audience
  - c. The target audience
  - d. The general audience
10. **The MOST fundamental component in preparing and delivering a speech is:**
  - a. Identifying your goal
  - b. Developing a good outline
  - c. Using good body language
  - d. Identifying your audience