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Three Tips to Improve Your Public Speaking Skills



Comedian Jerry Seinfeld performs during the Robin Hood Benefit Concert on Monday, May 14, 2013 in New York.

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Students in American schools learn from an early age to give presentations as part of their regular classroom activities. Children as young as five years old often give brief talks about objects they bring in to school - called "show and tell," this training is a basis for later public speaking.

Even so, many native English-speaking adults are afraid to speak or give presentations in front of a large group. There is a large industry of **consultants** who train professionals in public speaking.

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld said the most common fear people have is public speaking. The second most common fear is death. He made a joke about this. He said,

"I saw a thing, actually a study that said: speaking in front of a crowd is considered the number one fear of the average person. I found that amazing.

Number two, was death. Death is number two? This means, to the average person, if you have to be at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy."



Speaking English in public meetings is necessary for many students and employees. The best way to improve is to **practice** public speaking in a friendly environment. Learners need to receive **feedback** about what they are doing well and about their mistakes. One group that gives members the chance to practice is Toastmasters.

Toastmasters is an international organization that holds weekly meetings. At the meetings, members each give a speech and give others advice about their speeches and speaking style.

Charles LeBeau is a public speaking professor and consultant. He began his career in Japan in 1982. Currently, he teaches at two universities and at the Toshiba International Training Center. He has also written books on the subject.

English language learners around the world use his book *Speaking of Speech*.

Mr. LeBeau says that students in other cultures may not have the chance to practice public speaking as young children. When they reach the college level, or enter their career, they need to present well in English. Many careers require public speaking skills.

"In Japan now, most students need to do presentations in many of their classes. The other area is professionally. Whatever profession those students are in, or are going to be in, presentations are going to be an important part of it. So for example, if they're going to be in sales, presentation is an important part of sales. If they are going to be a teacher, it's an important part of being a teacher. If they are going to be in the tourism industry, it's an important part of that. Practically, in almost all kinds of work there's some **opportunity** to do a presentation."

Speaking of Speech tells about a method of teaching public speaking for non-native speakers. Mr. LeBeau says a simple **approach** helps English learners.

So, the professor divides public speaking into three parts: the physical message, the **visual** message, and the story message.

"The central thing to remember about public speaking or presentation is that it's a very complex, sophisticated **communicative** activity. For non-native speakers it's a really **scary** activity. So to make that more simplistic and easy for them, and to keep it from being so **overwhelming**, because there's so many things going on, the approach that I've taken is to simplify and break it down. First if we look at presentation, what's going on, there are basically three messages that the presenter is giving the audience, all **simultaneously**. There's what I call the *physical message*. It's basically body language. It's the way that my body, as a speaker, is talking to the audience. Then there's also the *visual message*. The visual message(s) are the slides that we now make and show the audience. The third message is the *story message*. The story message is the content of our presentation. So another way we can think of the story message is that it's the verbal message, it's what we say to the audience. The story message also includes how we organize our ideas to present to the audience."



The graphic [click to enlarge] shows examples of these three messages. Mr. LeBeau finds that company employees are under pressure to perform well when giving professional presentations. He says it can take years to improve general English speaking ability.

He says the simple approach to breaking down the parts of public speaking has proved itself. He says learners improve quickly and do a good presentation after a few days of study.

The Three Messages in a Speech

The graphic illustrates the three messages in a speech. It is divided into three columns:

- The Physical Message:** Shows four photos of speakers. Below the photos, it states: "Not all communication in a speech comes from words. The way you stand, where you look, how you use your hands and vary your voice send a message as well. In this book, we call that the Physical Message."
- The Visual Message:** Shows three slides: "The Green Machine" (with a map), "Green Machine Popularity" (with a line graph), and "Green Machine Market Share" (with a pie chart). Below the slides, it states: "Speech is not just about what you say. What you show and how you show it is as important as what you say. In this book, we call that the Visual Message."
- The Story Message:** Shows a structured outline of a speech:
 - 1 INTRODUCTION
 - Greeting
 - Why
 - Overview
 - Main Point 1
 - Main Point 2
 - Main Point 3
 - TRANSITION
 - 2 BODY
 - Main Point 1
 - Numbers / Examples
 - TRANSITION
 - Main Point 2
 - Numbers / Examples
 - TRANSITION
 - Main Point 3
 - Numbers / Examples
 - TRANSITION
 - 3 CONCLUSION
 - Main Point 1
 - Focus Point
 - Main Point 2
 - Focus Point
 - Main Point 3
 - Focus Point

Courtesy of Macmillan Education in Japan

"They don't have the time to work and improve their English, they don't have three or four years to work on their English and become better English speakers. What they need to do is work on their presentation skills, so that they can give a good presentation *next week*, regardless of the level of their English. So I think this is why focusing on presentation skills is really, really important. Of course, over the long run they have to improve their English. But if we can help them improve their presentation skills, they can do a good presentation regardless of their English level."

Modern technology is an important tool in teaching and learning public speaking. Many students now have a phone or device that can take videos. Using these videos, students can watch themselves and see how they appear to their audience. They can also watch models of good speeches on the Internet and learn from watching videos of public speaking experts.

In the next 'Speaking Tips' we will explore Charles LeBeau's recommendations for improving the *Physical Message*. He thinks this is the public speaking skill that is easiest for English learners to improve quickly.

Three Messages - Charles LeBeau's Public Speaking Instruction

I'm Jill Robbins.

Jill Robbins wrote this story for Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

consultant – *n.* a person who gives professional advice or services to companies for a fee

practice – *v.* to do something again and again in order to become better at it

visual – *adj.* relating to seeing or to the eyes

feedback – *n.* helpful information or criticism that is given to someone to say what can be done to improve a performance, product, etc.

approach – *n.* way of dealing with something; a way of doing or thinking about something

communicative – *adj.* relating to communication

scary – *adj.* causing fear

overwhelming – *adj.* used to describe something that is so confusing, difficult, etc., that you feel unable to do it

simultaneously – *adv.* referring to events happening at the same time

Dictionary word lookup v2

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/content/public-speaking-tips-three-messages/2637519.html>