

Public Speaking Checklist  
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Not every speaker will have the innate charisma and power of an orator like Winston Churchill, but the specific skills that make a presentation better can all be learned. There are many excellent and knowledgeable speakers in the Washtenaw area who might be tapped to act as expert coaches.

The assessment of public speaking skills is not as tricky as it might seem. One method for determining skill level might be as follows: ask each new participating team to give a sample pitch of no more than five minutes. The coaching team, and in particular the speaking coach, might rate the participant on a scale of 1 to 3 (e.g. poor-good-excellent) or 1 to 5 on characteristics and habits that make an good speaker.

Skills, Attributes, and Habits for Solid Public Speaking

1. Body Language

a. Hands, Arms, and Gestures

*Hands should be held loosely at one's sides, not clenched, fiddling with a pen, or shoved in pockets. Arms should be loose and not locked at the elbows. Gestures should be meaningful and used sparingly.*

b. Posture

*Speaker should be standing straight and confidently, and be facing the audience directly.*

c. Fidgeting and Pacing

*All movements should be meaningful. Movement should be directed at the audience, e.g. walking from side to side to make eye contact. Nervous movements should be eliminated.*

d. Eye Contact

*Speaker should make eye contact with a variety of members of the audience, in different parts of the room. No section of the audience should be neglected, and speaker should not maintain eye contact with any individual for more than a few moments.*

2. Voice

a. Vocal Variety

*Tone, volume, and pitch should vary meaningfully, to give texture and interest to the speech, and to inform the audience about the importance of different parts of the speech.*

b. Filler Words (Um, Er, Like, You know, I mean)

*Should be eliminated entirely.*

c. Pauses

*Pauses should be used to allow the audience to absorb meaning, and to indicate important points in the pitch.*

d. Breathing techniques

*Breathing should be integrated with the rhythm of the pitch, and should be natural and even.*

3. Grooming

*It is essential that the speaker's personal grooming not distract from the pitch. Many entrepreneurs are uninformed about the standards of business dress.*

a. Hair

b. Clothing

c. Make-up

d. Nails

4. General Persuasiveness

a. Confidence: the result of Practice

*Musicians practice a performance piece until it is committed to muscle memory. That frees them to focus on the immediate situation when they are performing. The same is true of a good pitch. There is no such thing as too much practice.*

b. Know the audience

*The NEF pitch is developed to appeal to investors. Speaker should be aware of the implications of that—demographics, psychographics, etc.—and should be able to adjust his or her language appropriately.*

c. Don't apologize

*A very common mistake, and very distracting. Speaker should project an air of calm and mastery; unless the apology can be integrated into the pitch, it doesn't belong. (E.g. "I'm sorry that the rain is so loud. Fortunately, I'm here to talk about an innovative plan for hearing aids.")*

d. Taming stage fright

*Many speaking mistakes are the result of fear. There are a number of techniques that can be learned to alleviate stage fright. Of course, the best is lots and lots of practice.*