



# COMMUNICATION

Public speaking

# Public speaking



## Strategies to share with students

Suggested ideas and practices educators can share with students to support awareness of the topic and development of the skill. Strategies can be adopted/adapted as needed.

- ☑ **Do not memorize.** It is tempting to memorize a talk, particularly if you are nervous. This technique is likely to increase public speaking fears.
  - Memorized talks often fail for three reasons:
    - You are likely to speak with an unnatural cadence that contributes to a more robotic delivery.
    - You may be more focused on what you are supposed to say next rather than engaging with the audience or perceiving how they are receiving the information.
    - It is easy to get “stuck” when you lose the specific word or phrase. Your speech is interrupted because you may spend too long trying to find the exact phrasing you memorized, rather than simply moving on with the talks. Instead, prepare a set of bullet points or talking points for reference. These talking points should be general.
- ☑ **Work with your nerves, not against them.** In general, it is not possible to simply be less nervous when delivering a public talk. Instead, it is important to understand how your nervousness manifests itself and develop specific strategies to reduce the outward expression of those nerves. Reflect on how your public speaking nerves manifest and think about ways to reduce them in the future.



# Public speaking



## Strategies to share with students

Suggested ideas and practices educators can share with students to support awareness of the topic and development of the skill. Strategies can be adopted/adapted as needed.

- Don't read your slides.** The best speeches have minimal slides or visuals. This is because the presenter is the star. If the audience can read the slide deck and understand the topic in full, then there was no incentive for them to listen to the talk itself. Slides should only be used to communicate specific details, such as quotes or data. Where possible, consider how to make the data as visual as possible—graphs and pie-charts are more effective in a talk than mathematical formulas. To ensure that the presentation is accessible for everyone, it is better to prepare an optional hand-out for the audience to refer to rather than pack the slides full of details.



# Public speaking



## Tips for course design and delivery

Ways educators can bring awareness of the topic and incorporate development of the skill into post-secondary course design and delivery.

- Provide a space for one-to-ones.** Students with stage fright are typically just as engaged in the subject matter as more talkative peers, so it is important to provide these students with opportunities to interact directly with the course instructor and/or teaching assistant. Ensure that students have regular opportunities to connect with course instructors in office hours. This approach gives students a place to voice their concerns as well as brainstorm alternate assignments and assessments where applicable and necessary.
- Replace cold calling with structured discussions.** Instructors may rely on cold calling, where students are selected one at a time to speak, to ensure that one or more students do not dominate class discussions. The fear of being “called on”, however, can distract students and prevent them from engaging in the rest of the class. If it is necessary for all students to participate in an oral exercise or activity, prepare students for their turn by listing names in advance or providing an easy and predictable organizational pattern (left-to-right, back-to-front, alphabetical, etc.). You can also give students time to chat with their peers prior to providing an answer or provide the option of passing.



# Public speaking



## Tips for course design and delivery

Ways educators can bring awareness of the topic and incorporate development of the skill into post-secondary course design and delivery.

- ☑ **Help students prepare.** Spontaneous discussions, impromptu questions, and off-the-cuff speeches are particularly hard for students who dislike public speaking. Help prepare students for class discussions by providing questions and materials in advance. Limit the need for on-the-spot thinking by providing ample time to reflect ahead of sharing, which is a secondary barrier to class participation. Consider this step a way to coach students to feel more comfortable and confident with their public speaking skills.
- ☑ **Practice makes perfect progress.** It can be tempting to drop public speaking requirements out of a desire to minimize student discomfort, but this decision does a disservice to most students. If the course or program learning objectives include public speaking you can share the rationale for this and why it is important. The goal is not to overcome nerves, but to find ways to work with nerves—nervousness and excitement can elicit similar physiologic responses. The best way to help students overcome fear of public speaking is to provide multiple and gradual opportunities for public speaking, ideally via low-stakes tasks and assignments.



# Public speaking



## Activities to do with students

Downloadable activities with suggested guidelines that educators can do with students. Activities can be adopted/adapted as needed.

## Activity: Presentation Skills Self-Inventory

### Overview

Ask students to complete a presentation skills self-inventory. Students can complete a current self-assessment and set future goals simultaneously. Students can also complete a current self-assessment at the beginning of the term and then a second self-assessment at the end of term to compare progress.

Review the [Educator Activity Guide](#) before getting started with this activity.

### Time

- Under 20 minutes
- 20 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Over several classes

### Modality

- In person
- Online synchronous
- Online asynchronous

### Format

- Individual
- In pairs
- Small groups
- Large groups
- Whole class

### Resources

- Module notes
- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Laptop/tablet
- Speeches: videos, audio + scripts



# Public speaking

## Instructions

1. Share with students that a self-assessment tool can support the development of public speaking skills by highlighting areas of success and by highlighting areas to improve. Tell students that they will be creating a self-assessment checklist tool in the upcoming activity.
2. Make small groups and ask students to begin the activity by researching and looking for videos/recordings of famous speeches. Students can select three or four speeches to evaluate
3. Have students listen to/watch/read the speeches.
4. Ask students to list and discuss the features that make these speeches powerful and memorable. Ask students to consider what these speeches can suggest about effective presentations and audience engagement?
5. Ask students to then try to arrange these features into categories (e.g., words, facial expressions, body language, connections with audience etc.) of effective presentation/public speaking skills.
6. Inform students that they can create a checklist of these features/categories so that they have a resource that can be used as a presentation/public speaking self-assessment tool. Students should be deliberate and organized in their design and layout (e.g., consistent text, spaces for students to check or write answers etc.).
7. Encourage students to use this public speaking tool as a guide for their own presentation and public speaking skills. They may also wish to share them with the larger class.
8. *Optional:* Invite the class to reflect on their experience making this tool. How did they choose which aspects to include? Are there any features they wish to add after having heard other presentations?

## Variation(s)

- Before a presentation, have students identify one area of their public speaking tool that they will focus on. Build a place in the evaluation for this area to be recorded and include a way for the student to monitor his/her goals surrounding this area.



# Public speaking



## Activities to do with students

Downloadable activities with suggested guidelines that educators can do with students. Activities can be adopted/adapted as needed.

## Activity: Record and Review

### Overview

Students record themselves (audio only) delivering a short presentation (~5 minutes) on any topic. Then, they re-listen to their talk and count the number of times they used verbal fillers (e.g., um, uh, like). Asking students to “code” or “count” their verbal fillers can give them a better sense of which verbal fillers they may be overusing and help them deliver talks more effectively.

Review the [Educator Activity Guide](#) before getting started with this activity.

### Time

- Under 20 minutes
- 20 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Over several classes

### Modality

- In person
- Online synchronous
- Online asynchronous

### Format

- Individual
- In pairs
- Small groups
- Large groups
- Whole class

### Resources

- Module notes
- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Laptop/tablet
- Presentation with slides to use in example
- Means to record/listen





# Public speaking

## Instructions

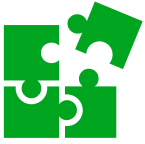
9. Begin this activity by explaining to students that recording and reviewing a presentation can reveal flaws in their habits and delivery that are otherwise easy to miss.
10. Ask students to record themselves (audio only) delivering a short presentation (~5 minutes) on any topic.
11. Have students re-listen to their talk and count the number of times they used verbal fillers—ums, uhs, like, you know, and extended pauses. The goal is not to eliminate filler words. Although they are a critical part of all speech, asking students to “code” or “count” their verbal fillers can give them a better sense of which verbal fillers they may be overusing.
12. Ask students to reflect on the learning this activity brought them and consider ways to continue the learning (e.g., repeating this activity, practice speaking to family with no/minimal filler words).

## Variation(s)

- An extension of this activity could be to ask students to record (video) themselves delivering the same talk. As students re-watch the video with the sound off, they can accelerate the video to 2x speed to see if they are fidgeting or overusing specific gestures.
- A modification to this exercise could be pairing students. Students would then exchange recordings and comment on each other’s verbal fillers.



# Public speaking



## Activities to do with students

Downloadable activities with suggested guidelines that educators can do with students. Activities can be adopted/adapted as needed.

## Activity: Impromptu Speaking

### Overview

Provide students with images related to upcoming course content and have them present their ideas (e.g., making predictions on themes) to their peers in small groups. Provide students with the images and instructions just before they are set out to speak so that they can practice speaking naturally (i.e., unrehearsed, unmemorized).

Review the [Educator Activity Guide](#) before getting started with this activity.

### Time

- Under 20 minutes
- 20 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Over several classes

### Modality

- In person
- Online synchronous
- Online asynchronous

### Format

- Individual
- In pairs
- Small groups
- Large groups
- Whole class

### Resources

- Module notes
- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Laptop/tablet
- Accessible images related to course content



# Public speaking

## Instructions

1. Find images related to upcoming course content that you will be teaching and provide these to students.
2. Ask students to look at the images, consider the details, and make predictions as to what course content these images might represent. Students may want to record their predictions.
3. Form/have students form small groups.
4. Ask students to present their ideas/predictions to their peers (each member should speak for two to three uninterrupted minutes) in their groups and let students the goal is to practice speaking naturally (i.e., unrehearsed, unmemorized). The rest of the group can offer questions or share ideas before the next person speaks.
5. After all students have spoken, engage them in a discussion about how they felt about this task. Some questions to ask can include:
  - *You did not have a lot of time to prepare for this activity. How did that impact your presentation of your thoughts?*
  - *How might this activity have been different if you had been given more time (e.g., a few days) to prepare?*
  - *How does this activity shape your understanding of the skill of public speaking?*

## Variation(s)

- Use images of past learning to summarize/review material.

