# INTRODUCTION

The Roman Emperor Nero went to the arena to see the lions do lunch with the Christians. The determined animals were munching away with their usual gusto–until one Christian spoke to his lion. The lion appeared to listen attentively and simply trotted away with its tail tucked between its legs. The same fellow continued to speak to lion after lion. Each one hurried away, as meek as it had been ferocious a few minutes before. Finally, Nero could take the suspense no longer and had the Christian brought to him. Nero said to him, “If you tell me what you said to the lions, I’ll set you free.” The Christian replied, “I told them, the lion who wins this contest has to get up and say a few words to the audience.’”

Anyone who has ever had to get up and give a speech can identify with these lions. For many people, getting up front and giving a talk of any kind is like being asked to jump from a plane at 30,000 feet with no parachute. A recent survey found that the number one fear among Americans is public speaking.

If you can overcome your fear and learn to be a good public speaker, you will have an edge in life and are much more likely to succeed in other areas of life. There’s really no mystery about what makes someone an effective public speaker. Just a few characteristics will help you toward success. You need not be a minister, physician, psychologist, expert, or other professional to speak before a group. By virtue of your position as a Women’s Ministry Leader you will automatically have status.

## THE THREE MAIN TYPES OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Some people seem to be able to stand before a group and talk about anything at any time. Their speaking ease is due to a large extent to their understanding the different kinds of speaking tasks. Such speakers are familiar with each type of speech and know how different speeches are organized and delivered. You can learn this too.

All speeches fall into one of three categories: speeches that inform, persuade, or entertain.

1. ***Speeches that*** ***inform*** explain, report, describe, clarify, define and demonstrate. Such speeches can move an audience to action or belief. Their primary purpose is to present facts, details, and examples.
2. ***Speeches that persuade*** are designed to convince and the goal is to influence the audience’s beliefs or attitudes. This can be accomplished by using your own credibility to strengthen your argument. Or you can appeal to your audience’s emotions, reason, or sense of right and wrong.
3. ***Speeches that entertain*** use humor to influence an audience as in an after dinner speech. Once the audience is warmed up, one main idea is presented, still on a light note. Note: This is the most difficult of all presentations because it requires great ease and elegance and depends to a large degree on the charisma of the speaker.

The three types often overlap. Therefore, it is important to isolate and understand the primary purpose of your talk before you start preparation.

**IDENTIFYING YOUR SPEAKING STYLE**

Think of a speaker whom you will never forget. What is it about him or her that is so memorable? Then think of the worst speaker you ever heard. What did each person do or not do that turned you off? Your evaluations of such speakers likely fall into distinct categories. Generally speaking there are three different presentation styles:

***The Cool Presenter*** captures the audience’s attention with clear-headed persuasiveness. During her presentation things will be orderly and stay under control. These presenters are usually on a mission and deliver their message with dramatic intensity. They draw on facts and figures to substantiate what is being presented. Adjectives describing this presenter are analytical, logical, deliberate, rational, intellectual and insightful.

***The Hot Presenter*** can blow the roof off a building. You will probably either like or dislike this presenter but no one ignores this kind. Her presentations are fast and furious, and often delivered with rapid speech. She runs on adrenaline and pushes passions to the limit. The pause, the raising and lowering of her voice, her body movements are all dramatic and enhance the points made. *Hot presenters* are emotional, driven, charismatic, impulsive, and daring.

***Dull Presenter*s** are afraid to take risks so they remain bland and boring. You’ve likely endured a boring speech at sometime. Dull presenters are safe but they don’t change much. Because they are so dull there is minimal risk and it is easily forgotten. Dull seems to be the norm because so many people operate within those boundaries. And few within an audience will tell a dull presenter that she is dull. Dull presenters are cautious, predictable, ambivalent and boring.

There is no one best style since every presenter operates in all these zones but an inherent tendency will pull one closer to one style than another. But the tendency for many is to drift toward the dull periodically. This is usually due to laziness. To become a *Cool Presenter* takes a great deal of research and preparation. The *hot presenter* involves more emotion than intellect. The *Hot Presenter* is a high-risk, high-reward style involving a lot of action. The ideal is to have your presentation be a blend of hot and cool, avoiding the dull.

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

There are four basic methods of delivering a speech: (1) reading a manuscript verbatim; (2) reciting a presentation from memory; (3) speaking impromptu; and (4) speaking extemporaneously.

1. **Reading a manuscript verbatim*.*** A manuscript that is read has several disadvantages. Unless the person who delivers the speech is extremely skilled the recitation will sound just as if it were read and it will likely have a sing-song tone to it. Reading a manuscript also fails to give the audience the eye contact necessary in order to keep attention. If you want to lose your audience entirely pursue this mode!
2. **Reciting from memory**. Daniel Webster, the famous author of Webster’s Dictionary could thrill audiences for three, four, or even five hours at a time. Even more incredible, he often spoke without using any notes which he attributed to his memory! Few people have Webster’s remarkable powers of memory. If you do have the ability to commit your entire speech to memory, you may do so. But one of the main disadvantages to memorizing an entire speech is that it creates too much pressure to get the speech “absolutely perfect.” Memorizing a speech can also result in a stilted, wooden sounding delivery.

Professional speakers who repeatedly deliver the same speech often commit it to memory, yet with each delivery they adjust the speech to suit the occasion and audience. Only a very skillful speaker can do this. The main disadvantage to memorization is what might happen if your attention was diverted and you could not recall what you were to say next. If you choose to speak without notes, make certain you have the necessary delivery skills. You never get a second chance to give a speech.

1. **Speaking impromptu**. The impromptu speech is speaking at a gathering with little or no preparation and without the use of notes. For many it might be likened to trial by fire, but it need not be that bad. Impromptu speaking follows three basic rules: (a) Have something important to say; (b) Make your audience understand or believe it, and (c) Speak simply, directly and meaningfully. Believe it or not, you already know how to speak off -the-cuff. You’ve been doing it for years since you go about your daily business without writing out what you are going to say. And you do just fine at it.

When you are asked to speak impromptu you are actually drawing on the years of experience behind you. One advantage of speaking impromptu is that it automatically sounds natural and spontaneous. Impromptu speaking is easy as long as you follow one rule: *Know what you’re talking about!* And make sure you speak in complete sentences. You may think you speak in complete sentences but you may often be guilty of speaking in fragments. In other words, no–uhs, like maybe, em, you knows, or like sort of! Speaking in lucid, well-formed sentences without any advance preparation is a real art.

When you are asked a question, feel free to pause for a few seconds to collect your thoughts. There’s no law that says you have to speak immediately. Once you pick your main theme, stick with it. Don’t go on into another subject. Open with a general statement which gives you time or organize your thoughts. Then offer just two or three points of evidence without getting bogged down in confusing details. Look at the whole room and not just the person who asked the question. Then wrap up your thoughts with a firm conclusion without adding, “Just one more point . . .” *Stop*. Period.

1. **Speaking extemporaneously**. Most of you will speak extemporaneously. The extemporaneous talk is not totally off the cuff as in the impromptu speech. The extemporaneous presentation includes brief notes and is carefully prepared and practiced in advance. However, the exact wording is chosen at the time of delivery.

The extemporaneous method has several advantages. It gives the speaker more control over thought and language and offers greater spontaneity and directness than do the other methods. Another plus is that it is adaptable to a wide range of situations. It also contains a conversational quality audiences look for in a speaker. The conversational quality means that no matter how many times you have given the talk, it will sound spontaneous to a new audience. When speaking extemporaneously, you are free to establish your ideas, yet are not tied to a manuscript. You can establish strong eye contact, gesture naturally, and concentrate on talking *with* your audience rather than speaking *at* them.

### GETTING ORGANIZED

Several years ago a college professor took a well-organized speech and scrambled it by randomly changing the order of its sentences. He then had a speaker deliver the original version to one group of listeners and the scrambled version to another group. After the speeches, he gave a test to see how well each group understood what they had heard. Naturally, the group that heard the organized, unscrambled version scored much higher than the other group. Later two more professors repeated the same experiment. But instead of testing how well the listeners comprehended each speech, they tested to see what effects the two speeches had on the listeners’ attitude toward the speakers. They found that those who heard the organized speech believed the speaker to be much more competent and trustworthy than did those who heard the scrambled speech.

These are only two studies that show the importance of organization in effective public speaking.

## HOW LONG SHOULD I TALK?

In 1841 William Henry Harrison was elected president of the United States. His inaugural address was 9,000 words long and took two hours to deliver. It was a freezing day. Harrison came down with pneumonia and died a month later. Moral? The speaker who intends to go on for hours should not only have a mighty good speech, but should deliver it where it is warm.

Abraham Lincoln was once asked how long a man’s legs should be. “Long enough to reach the ground,” he responded.

Someone else once said, “There’s great power in words, if you don’t hitch too many of them together.” So, how long should your speech be? Long enough to reach the ground–in other words, to accomplish what it intends. Lincoln’s Gettysburg address― recognized as one of the finest speeches of all time―was only 265 words long.

If you can get your message across in fifteen minutes, why take thirty-five? To sound more intelligent? To “impress” your audience? To show how hard you worked? The truth is, no one likes a speech that runs too long. Even if your speech is interesting, the audience what it to end. And if your speech is boring, the audience wants it to end even sooner!

Unfortunately, length is the most misunderstood aspect of giving a presentation. Speakers are typically given a time frame of a half to one hour and tend to fill whatever time frame they are given. And that’s not smart. If you want to get an audience on your side, you need to choose the right length of time for your message. Each situation needs to be analyzed separately. One popular preacher turned to Divine guidance, offering this silent prayer every time he approached the pulpit: “Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff . . .and nudge me when I’ve said enough.”

Often you will have no control over this since it depends on how much time you have been allocated. Program coordinators tend to think only in “time slots” to fill their agenda. But good speeches do more than fill time slots. As the speaker for an event your job is to communicate a message and to captivate the audience while you do it.

Rather than automatically preparing a forty-five minutes speech because you have been given a forty-five minute time frame consider the following factors: What is the setting? Inside or outside? Air conditioned or not? Spacious or crowded? Remember, you are always better off going under the time limit rather than over. Remember, the only thing worse than listening to a bad speech is listening to a long, bad speech.

Always factor in a few minutes for starting late. It’s a rare conference that stays on schedule. Allow time for someone to introduce you as well as time to distribute handouts, and for people to ask questions. And remember this: The more you have to say, and the more time you take, the less people will remember.

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

One woman was an excellent presenter. Her style and delivery were dynamic. Once after speaking to a large group, a woman complemented her on her delivery. She was about to pat herself on the back, when the woman continued, “I just wish it had something to do with my life!” Some speakers are ineffective because the topic is not a good fit for their audience. Before you begin to prepare your talk, you must know your audience.

**Size of the Group**. The size of the group will affect your content, and presentation style. When speaking to fewer than 30 people you have more flexibility. You can be more informal, and make eye contact with everyone in the room. With 30 to 50 people you will have less flexibility, but can still make eye contact with everyone in the room. If you plan for group participation, you can ask people to break into small groups. Addressing more than 50 people creates some challenges. It is difficult now to make eye contact with everyone, and you will likely need a microphone to be heard.

Audience size affects your presentation style; whether you are formal, informal, direct or indirect, and whether or not you will have interaction, as well as what visual aids you will use. The larger the audience the more you will have to grab their attention with a gripping or humorous story. The woman on the 29th row back knows you can’t really see her and if you don’t meet her needs, she will get up and leave.

**MAKE UP OF AN AUDIENCE**

How you address your audience will depend greatly on whom you are addressing.

* ***Superiors*:** When addressing superiors, *suggest* rather than lecture or dictate. Back everything said with facts.
* ***Peers*:** When talking with peers, *share* information. Draw them into the presentation and ask them to share their expertise and experiences. You will be more successful if you admit to your own human foibles and show that you are slightly vulnerable.
* ***Team Members*:** To team members relate facts through examples. Make sure you use “we” language. Share success with team members, and accept blame when necessary.
* ***Special Interest Groups:***Focus your presentation around the concerns of this particular group. Relate to them by persuading.
* ***Mixed Groups****:* If the group is a mixture of team members and peers, you will need to use a combination of presentation techniques in order to reach everyone. Capture attention in the first few minutes by using examples each group can relate to.

A speaker connects with those in her audience by learning the similarities within the group. Factors to study include: gender mix, age range, occupation, professional expertise, educational background, ethnic/religion mix, family life, hobbies, moral values, upbringing, political beliefs, and attitudes. This is not an exhaustive list but some major factors that can impact the development of your speech. You should also know if any special guests will be among those in the audience, any high-ranking church or government officials or local celebrities. You might want to extend a special welcome.

Now that you have your own analysis, you can look at your audience. There will be some characteristics that you will have similar to others in the group.

Now that you understand your audience, you can begin developing your speech.

## TIME TO OUTLINE

Three women were asked “If you were to die, and at your funeral your family and friends were mourning you, what would you like to hear them say about you?” The first woman said, “I’d like to hear them say that I was a wonderful wife and mother.” The second woman said, “I’d like to hear that I was a mother who made a big difference in the lives of her children.” The last woman said, “I’d like to hear them say . . .’Look, she’s moving!”

If you want to get your speeches moving, outlining will help you. The preparation outline will help you organize your thoughts in a logical manner and that’s a big factor when learning to speak in public with confidence.

Why bother with an outline when you can skip right to the speech writing itself? An outline shows the entire structure of your speech which enables you to see whether you’ve arranged your main ideas and supported them in the best way. Outlines also let you see at a glance if you’ve forgotten anything important.

Before you outline, gather material for your talk. Many resources are available if you take advantage of them. You can research what others have written about this topic in a library or in books. You can write to organizations or individuals to collect information. You can interview people with specialized knowledge about your topic. And you can use yourself as a resource whenever you have personal knowledge or expertise about a subject.

Let’s say you are asked to speak on parenting. If you are a mother, and raising young children, and you are a teacher, you will identify with your audience in those three areas. If one of your hobbies is camping, and you have a rural upbringing, and are a youth leader in your church, you can slant your talk from those perspectives toward your audience. Keep these strong slant areas in mind as you develop your talk. Your examples and support material should come from these areas. If someone has asked you to speak, you should work with that person in choosing a topic.

Remember, good speeches are not composed of hot air and generalizations. They need strong supporting materials to bolster your point of view. The skillful use of supporting materials often makes the difference between a poor talk and a good one. And using supporting materials is more than haphazardly tossing a few facts and figures into your talk. You must decide which ideas need to be supported, given your audience, topic, and specific purpose. You must do research to find materials that will bring your ideas across clearly and creatively.

Vivid, concrete examples have more impact on listeners’ beliefs and actions than any other kind of supporting material. Without examples, ideas often seem vague, impersonal, and lifeless. With examples, ideas become specific, personal, and lively. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Bible, which uses all manner of stories, parables, and anecdotes to make abstract principles clear and compelling.

You may use a brief example in passing to illustrate a point. Or you may use an extended illustration that is longer and more detailed. By telling such a story vividly and dramatically, you pull your listeners into your talk. Examples help to clarify and reinforce ideas as well as personalize them. Statistics can also be cited to clarify or strengthen a point. Statistics can also be used in combination―stacked up to show the magnitude or seriousness of an issue. Statistics can be extremely helpful in conveying your message as long as you use them sparingly and explain them so they are meaningful to your subject and audience.

Since people are often influenced by the testimony of others, by quoting or paraphrasing authority figures, quoting others can give your ideas greater impact. Testimony is especially helpful for novice speakers because they are seldom recognized as experts on their topics. Citing the views of people who are experts is a good way to make your ideas more credible.

## THE PREPARATION OUTLINE

Once you’ve done your research and gathered some material for your talk you are ready to outline. Begin outlining by labeling the parts of your speech. This insures you will have an introduction, body and conclusion. Place the introduction at the top left corner. The most common form of outlining main points is to identify them by Roman numerals. The Introduction will become Roman numeral I. Leave space to sketch in a few points for the Introduction.

Next comes the Body, Roman numeral II, where more space is needed since this is the portion where your major points will be made. Sub points are identified by capital letters. Beyond this there may be sub sub-points as in the example below. The Body will take the bulk of the space. Roman Numeral III, the Conclusion, occupies the last spot

A sample outline is shown below:

**I. Introduction**

**II. Body**

A. Main point

B. Main point

1. Sub-point

2. Sub-point

a. Sub sub-point

b. Sub sub-point

**III. Conclusion**

Once you have organized the body of your speech, you should have identified the main points. You need only flesh out your outline with sub points as necessary to support your main points.

**Building the Body.** Begin developing your speech by working on the middle first, or the body. The body covers everything you want to say during your speech. In other words, the body is the main content. Rather than full sentences use an outline approach with key words to identify what you wish to cover at each point. The body should have three to five main points for a 20 minute to half hour presentation. It would have more points for a longer presentation. And if you want your audience to remember those points, the most effective approach is **point development.** Once your speech is over, the audience is going to remember main points only.

Once you decide what three to five points you will cover, present them from least important to the most important, or vice versa. Sometimes the topic will dictate the order. Other times you will choose the order of presentation. Each point needs to be backed up with additional evidence such as quoting facts, statistics, or quoting experts.

As you write your points, they may sound boring, but that’s okay for now. This is only a first draft. As you continue researching your subject, you’ll find supporting evidence, good examples, stories, and perhaps even a joke or two that will make the speech more interesting and give it flavor.

There is a common misconception that good speeches are given off the top of the head. Those that are given in this manner sound like they are given off the top of someone’s head. You will sound unprepared and incompetent, and this is not what you want to achieve with your audience. So write it out just as if you were writing a theme paper for an English assignment.

**The Introduction**. Just as a movie or video needs an appropriate beginning and ending, so do public speeches. The beginning prepares listeners for what is to come. First impressions are important.

A poor beginning may so distract listeners that the speaker may never be able to recover their interest. Furthermore, getting off on the right foot is vital to a speaker’s self-confidence. What could be more encouraging than watching your listeners’ faces register interest, attention, and pleasure? The hardest part of any presentation is the beginning. If you get through the opening stages of your talk without blundering, the rest will go more smoothly.

**There are three things to do at the very beginning:**

**(1) Get the attention of the audience.**You can get attention and interest by relating the topic to the audience. People pay attention to things that affect them directly.

**(2) Startle the audience with an arresting or intriguing statement**. “Almost one year ago today, a perfect stranger saved my best friend’s life.”

**(3) Arouse Curiosity**. Give an arresting synopsis of what you will explore. Or you may question your audience. This draws the audience in immediately.

As important as the introduction is, keep it brief. While developing the body of your talk, be on the lookout for possible introductory materials. And be creative in devising your introduction, but don’t worry about the exact wording until you have finished preparing the body of your talk. After you have determined your main points, it will be much easier to make final decisions about how to begin your talk. Then practice the introduction over and over until you can deliver it smoothly from a minimum of notes and with strong eye contact.

**The Conclusion.** The conclusion ties up the speech and alerts listeners that the speech is going to end. “Great is the art of beginning,” said Longfellow, “but greater the art is of ending.” Many a public speaker has marred an otherwise good talk through a long-winded, silly, or poorly designed conclusion. Your closing remarks are your last chance to drive home your ideas. And your final impression will probably linger longest in your listeners’ minds. The conclusion has two major functions: (1) to let the audience know you are ending your talk and (2) to reinforce the audience’s understanding of the central idea.

You can let your audience know your talk is ending by saying, “In conclusion,” “One last thought,” “In closing,” “Let me end by saying”–these are all brief cues that you are getting ready to stop. You can also let your audience know the end is in sight by devising a conclusion that hits the hearts and minds of your audience. A dramatic story that brings tears to the eyes of the listeners. The conclusion should take up no more than 5 to 10 percent of the time allotted. Nothing aggravates an audience more than a speaker who says, “And in conclusion,” but then drones on and on.

Give your speech a title is one if needed. In most cases, the title should be brief, attract the attention of those who might attend, and encapsulate the main thrust of your talk.

Allow at least four hours of preparation time for every half to one hour of presentation. An inexperienced person may spend even more time than this. So begin this task early.

**THE SPEAKING OUTLINE**

Most people today thoroughly prepare and practice in advance, but speak extemporaneously, selecting much of the wording while delivering the talk. Your talks will probably be of this type.

The speaking outline will help you remember what you want to say. It is really a condensed version of your preparation outline. It contains key words and phrases to jog your memory with trigger words you do not want to risk forgetting. You should use a similar indentation as in your preparation outline. This will allow you to see at any given moment where you are in your talk while you are speaking. As you are talking you will look down at your outline periodically to make sure you are covering the right ideas in the right order.

**Compare the following two versions of a speaking outline:**

**Ineffective: More Effective:**

1. 1840 - 1860 I 1840 - 1860

A. World Anti-Slavery Convention A. World Anti-Slavery Convention

B. Seneca Falls convention B. Seneca Falls convention

1. Lucretia Mott 1. Lucretia Mott

2. Elizabeth Cady Stanton 2. Elizabeth Cady Stanton

3. Declaration of Sentiments 3. Declaration of Sentiments

II. 1900 - 1920 II. 1900 - 1920

A. National American Woman A. National American Woman

Suffrage Association Suffrage Association

1. Founding 1. Founding

2. Objectives 2. Objectives

B. Nineteenth Amendment B. Nineteenth Amendment

1. Campaign 1. Campaign

2. Ratification 2. Ratification

The wording on both versions is exactly the same. But the visual framework of the one on the right makes it easier to take in at a glance and keeps the speaker on track.

When making your speaking outline, use dark ink and large lettering, leaving extra space between lines, ample space in the margins, and write or type on one side of the paper, half sheets only. Full sheet pages are too large to handle and will flop over. Half sheets are easier to handle. Allow wide margins so you can add some last-minute points. And make certain you number each page in case you accidentally drop your notes. Do not staple the pages together which would cause awkward flipping. A paper clip will hold all the sheets in their proper order. Underline important sections so you can spot them at a glance. Key points can be highlighted for emphasis. Lines can be drawn across the page to separate major sections of your presentation.

Keep the outline as brief as possible. If your notes are too detailed you will have difficulty maintaining eye contact with your audience. A detailed outline will tempt you to look at it far too often. Having lots of notes may be a “security blanket” against something going wrong, but too many notes interfere with good communication. You help yourself by underlining or highlighting key ideas or words you want to emphasize ―or phrases that will trigger your mind. Preparing and skimming this type of outline helps fix the content firmly in your mind. It does not give as much detail but can be prepared in much less time.

Once your speaking outline is complete, carefully time your entire presentation. Too many folks look at their outline and assume it will take about fifteen minutes to deliver. But remember, the speaking outline reflects only the “skeleton” of your presentation. When you add unrehearsed comments the message will run longer. You can pretty well judge the length of a double spaced manuscript speech by allotting 2 l/2 to 3 minutes of time per page.

Whatever you do, don’t forget to take your speaking notes with you. Your notes won’t do you any good if you leave them home. When I travel I keep them with me in my briefcase and never ship them in a suitcase. This way I can always carry on even if my luggage is mis-shipped to Hawaii.

**VISUAL AIDS**

An old saying tells us that one picture is worth a thousand words. This is true since about 85% of our knowledge comes to us through visual impressions. The major portion of learning takes place through sight. When visual aids are used, the retention is 82% within 24 hours. Three weeks later it is 62%. Without visual aids the retention declines to 62% within 24 hours and three weeks later retention drops to 20%.

One of the best ways to enrich a talk is by putting a visual demonstration into it. People will find your message more interesting, understand it easier, and retain it longer when visual aids are used. The primary advantage of visual aids is to clarify what you are talking about. If you are discussing an object, you can make your message clearer by showing the object. We live in a visual age. Television, videos and movies have conditioned us to expect visual images.

The major portion of learning takes place through sight. When visual aids are used the retention of material is 82% within 24 hours. Three weeks later it is 62%. Without visual aids the retention declines to 62% within 24 hours and three weeks later retention drops to 20%.

Visual aids will also make your presentation more interesting. In fact, visual aids can enhance almost every aspect of a presentation. One recent study showed that an average speaker who uses visual aids will come across as better prepared, more credible, and more professional than a dynamic speaker who does not use visual aids.

There are many kinds of visual aids: objects, models, photographs, drawings, graphs, charts, videotapes, overhead transparencies, and computer-generated graphics. Here are a few tips for using visual aids:

1. ***Avoid using the chalkboard****.* You have too much to do during a speech to worry about drawing or writing legibly on a board. Furthermore, you must turn your back to the audience while writing on the board. A bad practice!

2. ***Prepare visual aids in advance*.** No matter what type visual aids you plan to use, prepare them ahead of time. This way you will have time and resources to devise a creative attractive visual aid that will enhance your presentation.

3. ***Make sure your visual aids are large enough*.** A visual aid is useless if nobody can see it. Beginning speakers tend to use visual aids that are too small. When choosing a visual aid make sure that it can be seen easily by everyone in the room.

4. ***Display visual aids where listeners can see them*.** Check the room ahead of time to decide exactly where you will display your visual aid for best viewing. Make sure you don’t stand in front of it blocking your audience’s view.

5. ***Avoid passing visual aids among the audience*.** Once visual aids get into the hands of your listeners, they will pay more attention to the aid than to you. This includes handouts. The audience is more likely to spend a good part of your speaking time looking over the handout. Handouts can be valuable but usually just create competition for novice speakers. When you want participants to have handouts, distribute them at the close of your talk when it won’t create a distraction.

6. ***Display visual aids only while discussing them.***Whenever an aid is visible, at least some people will spend their time looking at it rather than listening to you.

7. ***Talk to your audience, not your visual aid*.** When handling a visual aid it is easy to break eye contact with your audience and speak to the aid. When you do this you will lose your audience. Keep your eyes on your audience and you’ll be able to pick up feedback on how your aid is being received.

8. ***Practice with your visual aid****.* Rehearse with your equipment to be sure you can set up your visuals with a minimum of fuss. Practice handling your aids, and the gestures you will make.

9. ***Real objects often make good visual aids****.* Food, for example, can stimulate more than one of the senses–sight, smell, and taste. An apple, can be nice to touch, have a delightful odor, is beautiful and shiny, and makes everyone want to take a bite.

10. ***VCR/Computer Presentations***. Today’s technology has greatly enhanced many presentations through the use of video clips and computer generated programs. Personal computers can easily create impressive graphics and visual aids which can be shown with only a touch of a button. If you have these available, they can greatly enhance your presentation. But remember the more equipment you use, the more likely you are to have technical problems. Some presenters spend more time trying to fix a computer problem than speaking with their audience!

Visual aids have many advantages. They create interest, hold attention, increase understanding, reduce verbalization, develop continuity of thought, and can motivate an audience to action. Use them often!

## LEND ME A HAND―ALL ABOUT HANDOUTS

Most speakers don’t use handouts but those who do get better responses. Audiences loves handouts. If you provide them, it will likely boost your success. Conference planners say that speakers who provide good handouts typically get higher ratings from the audience on evaluation forms.

Handouts do present certain problems however. When the audience gets them beforehand, they will more likely be reading them than listening to you. It is often wiser to distribute handouts *after*yourpresentation. But tell the audience you will be providing copies of pertinent information at the close. Otherwise, they’ll furiously take notes during the presentation only to get annoyed when they learn their copious writing was unnecessary. And be sure to have enough handouts for everyone. Audiences don’t like it when you run out.

**FLUBS ‘N THINGS**

You mean to say one thing . . .but a slip of the tongue brings something else out of your mouth. Former president of the United States, Ronald Reagan, frequently made flubs, but used his charm to gloss over them. He once referred to the Vienna airport as the Vietnam airport. The point is, flubs happen–even to the best of speakers. If it happens to you, simply correct yourself calmly**.** Try a statement something like this:

Let me try that one more time . . .

Let me correct that by saying . . .

What I really meant to say was . . .

Keep your corrections short and clean. Don’t stammer or apologize elaborately as this will only draw more attention to the error. If you are gifted with using humor at the right time you might try: “For those of you who lack fluency in garble, let me translate that into plain English.”

**LET ME HEAR YOUR BODY TALK―BODY LANGUAGE**

Body communication includes eye contact, gestures, expressions, and posture. It is so important because 55% of what you communicate is delivered this way―without words! Novice speakers are often unsure about what to do with their bodies when giving a talk. Some pace back and forth across the platform. Others shift their weight back and forth from one foot to the other, fidget with their notes, or jingle coins in their pockets. Such quirks usually stem from nervousness. With concentration, such mannerisms should disappear as you become more comfortable speaking in front of an audience.

**Body Posture**. Whenever possible, stand at a slight angle to the audience. When you want to emphasize key points, simple “square” your shoulder to face the audience. To create drama and make a more powerful impression, you can even move a step or two closer to your listeners.

We have probably all seen speakers who roam all over a platform when speaking, sometimes pacing back and forth. Feel free to move about when speaking. But too much pacing can be distracting to your message

**Hand Gestures**. Gestures can be used to enhance a speech or distract an audience, depending how they are used. Here are some practical pointers on how you should and should not use your hands:

* Your hands naturally belong by your side when you are not gesturing. Do not put your hands behind your back, in your pockets, or hold them in front of you. This makes an audience focus on your hands, not your message.
* Your hands belong at your sides even when using a podium unless you are gesturing. Do not place your hands on the podium or table as it makes it look like you have to hold yourself up.
* Most hand gestures should be about chest level. Lower gestures draw audience attention away from your face.
* The open hand is a highly effective hand gesture. Showing the open palm of your hand conveys openness and encourages trust Avoid making a fist as well as pointing at the audience. No one likes to be pointed at. (This may vary in some cultures – be sure you know local customs.)

What you need to remember about gestures is that they should not draw attention to themselves or distract from your message. They should appear natural and spontaneous as well as match the mood you are trying to create. Gesturing naturally comes with experience and confidence. At first, work on not flailing your hands them wildly about or wringing them, cracking your knuckles, or toying with your rings. Forget about your hands. Think more about communicating with your listeners and your gestures will take care of themselves.

**Eye Contact.** The quickest way to establish a bond with your listeners is to look them in the eye pleasantly. Avoiding their gaze is one of the surest ways to lose them. Speakers who can’t look into the eyes of their listeners are perceived as insincere or dishonest. You should be looking into the eyes of your listeners 80 to 90 percent of the time you are speaking.

Avoid however, the tendency to look at one part of the audience while ignoring the rest. Try your best to establish eye contact with the entire audience. If you are speaking to 25 to 50 people you can divide your audience in three and make eye contact with different people in each section throughout the presentation without making anyone uncomfortable. If your audience is larger, you should vary the sections in which you make eye contact. When addressing a small group you can usually look briefly from one person to another. For a larger group, you can scan the audience as a whole rather than trying to engage the eyes of each person individually. No matter what the size of your audience, your eyes should convey confidence, sincerity and conviction. They should say, “I am pleased to be able to talk with you. I believe deeply in what I am saying and I want you to believe it too.”

During your presentation, look for the cheerleaders―the achievers who make up about 20 percent of any group–and appeal to them. If you win over this group, the belongers who make up about 50 percent of any group, tend to follow.

Some presenters tend to be pulled toward the negative person in the audience. Rather than being energized by those who are smiling and nodding in agreement, they are pulled to the one with the frown, or the one who has fallen asleep. Don’t waste your time on such a person. You will likely lose your train of thought and miss out on others who are much more interested.

During your presentation keep coming back to the cheerleaders. They will make you feel good and give you confidence to make your best presentation.

**Facial Expressions**. The initial feeling an audience gets from a speaker comes primarily through facial expressions. The expressions on your face can make an audience feel relaxed or anxious. To use facial expressions effectively, be yourself. Don’t try to act like someone else you’ve seen. And smile before you begin speaking. A smile is the easiest and cheapest way to improve your looks on or off the platform. It’s hard to go wrong if you offer your listeners a good smile. They may not always agree with what you are saying, but they will like you more if you smile when you speak.

## WINNING CONVERSATION―HOW TO TALK SWEET

The voice has been called the melody of conversation: it can be loud, soft, harsh and angry, or mellow and soothing. The tone of voice, which represents 38 percent of any message delivered, can draw others toward you or push them away. Next to nonverbal communication, it carries the most weight in any spoken message.

Voice pitch, volume, tone, speed, number and length of pauses, stammering, intensity, and emotion conveyed all give a meaning far beyond the words themselves. A word may be a word, but how it is received is dependent on how it is said. Some messages are so loaded with emotional overtones that they deny the reality of what was said.

Meaning is given to words by the sender as she chooses the words, but also is taken by the listener as she listens and interprets. Not everyone interprets meanings in the same way. Others don’t always use words the way we do, and we can end up with all sorts of misunderstandings.

Even the rate of speech can alter and affect meaning. The average person speaks at the rate of 100 - 150 words per minute. Some speak slower at only 80 - 90 words per minute, and others gust up to 170 words per minute or even more. President John F. Kennedy was a notoriously fast talker–often topping 200 words per minute! But we can listen at the rate of 450 - 600 words per minute. *This means that we can think five times faster than we can talk*! If you are listening to someone who is speaking at one hundred words per minute while you can listen at close to six hundred, what is your mind doing the rest of the time? Wandering.

A fast talker can be both persuasive and expressive, but fast talk can also irritate a more slowly paced individual. Words that tumble out with rushed urgency may make some people uncomfortable. Equally irritating to others is a slow speaker who implies apathy and indifference. You certainly don’t want to go to either extreme. But, in general, talking a bit fast is better than talking too slow. Why? Speed projects charisma. Slowness projects lethargy. The ideal is to speak fast enough to keep people intrigued with what you are saying, but not so fast they feel uncomfortable or rushed.

Public speaking has a rhythm and flow. A clever speaker can shift her normal rhythm to hammer a point. Hitler became adept at this, he frequently used drum-rolls keyed to the rousing rhythm of his speeches. This added impetus and excitement to his words. Some people speak with a soothing smoothness, others with awkward, unpredictable pauses that create an uncomfortable feeling. Our objective as leaders and speakers should be that everything said publicly may be clear, forcible, and edifying. Rather than allowing our voice to fall after each word, we should keep it up so that every sentence is clear and distinct to the very last word.

Volume can be used to soothe or irritate. A loud, angry voice is an effective weapon to scare the enemy. However, lowered, subdued tones can be used to gain attention. A top television executive deliberately lowered his voice during important meetings and always held center stage as his listeners had to lean forward to hear what he was saying. “Those who talk rapidly, from the throat, jumbling the words together and raising their voices to an unnaturally high pitch, soon become hoarse, and the words spoken lose half the force which they would have if spoken slowly, distinctly, and not so loud.” (*Testimonies to the Church*, Volume 4, p 405).

Each of us, through our voices alone, can transmit cold, uncaring messages of indifference, or we can transmit love, caring and warmth. We need to expend tremendous effort to break negative habits and move toward a pleasing tone of voice that is supportive and productive.

Public speakers must also watch their diction. Contractions like “couldn’t and shouldn’t” should not be slurred. Also avoid reversing sounds. Say “prescription,” not “perscription”; “ask,” not “ax”; “perspire,” not “perspire,” “picture,” not “pitcher.” Other words often mispronounced are words with silent letters such as “often” where the “t” is silent: or “toward” where the “w” is silent. (Translator: give examples in the local language.)

Cut all filler words such as: “ah,” “like,” “you know,” and “um” when speaking publicly. Replace them with a few seconds of silence. There’s nothing like a good pause to grab an audience’s attention.

**PRACTICE DELIVERY**

You should practice all aspects of your delivery along with the words you plan to use. Start your practice sessions early so you will have plenty of time to gain confidence in your presentation. The following five steps may help:

1. ***Prepare your speaking outline***. Make sure your speaking outline is easy to read at a glance. Keep it brief.

2. ***Practice your presentation aloud several times using only the speaking outline****.* Talk through all your stories and examples. If you plan on using visual aids, use them as you practice. Instead of trying to learn your talk word for word, concentrate on gaining control of the ideas. After a few tries you should be able to get through your talk with surprising ease.

3. ***Polish and refine your delivery***. Practice your presentation in front of a mirror and check for eye contact and distracting mannerisms. Tape-record your message to gauge volume, pitch, rate, pauses―and vocal variety. Best of all, try your presentation out on your family or friends―or anyone who will listen. You need to know it goes over well with people.

4. ***Give your talk*** *under conditions similar to those in the real thing*. If you are presenting in a church, go to a church (during non―worship hours), and give the presentation aloud there. Regardless of where you hold your last practice session, you should leave it feeling confident and looking forward to the real event.

When in the early stages of planning public presentations, concentrate on such basics as speaking intelligibly, avoiding distracting mannerisms, and establishing eye contact with your listeners. Once you get these elements under control you can work on polishing your delivery in order to make a greater impact. Eventually you may be able to control the timing, rhythm, and momentum of a speech as skillfully as a conductor controls an orchestra.

DON’T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF―HANDLING INTRODUCTIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS

## Introductions

If you were introducing the president of the United States of America, it would take no more than nine words: “Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the United States.” The President is so well known that further remarks would be inappropriate. Most of the time, however, the person we have to introduce will not be so well known.

During the introduction you will want to accomplish three things: (1) build enthusiasm for the speaker; (2) build enthusiasm for the topic; and (3) establish a welcoming atmosphere that will boost the speaker’s credibility. A good introduction can do much to ease the task of the speaker. In a good introduction you are basically saying, “Here is a speaker you will enjoy, and this is why.” Usually you will say something about the speaker’s qualifications followed by something about the topic―in that order. Remember, the focus of what is said is to be on the speaker, not on the person making the introduction!

**First, make certain the facts presented about the speaker are accurate**. Unless you have been given an introduction about the speaker to be read aloud, always check with the speaker ahead of time to make sure what you are about to say is accurate. Above all, make certain you have the speaker’s name correct. A name is a person’s identity and if you get that wrong, you strip her of her identity and importance.

**Secondly, adapt your remarks to the occasion**. Formal occasions, such as in a worship service, require a more formal introduction. If introducing a person at an informal monthly meeting, you can be much more casual than if introducing the same person during a worship service.

**Thirdly, adapt your remarks to the audience**. Just as you adapt a presentation to a particular audience, you adapt an introduction to the audience you are facing. Your goal is to make this audience want to hear this speaker on this subject. If the speaker is not well known to this audience, it is up to you to establish his or her credibility by recounting some of the speaker’s main achievements. If you were introducing a person to a group of children, the introduction would be totally different than if introducing the same speaker to a group of adults for a worship service.

**And finally, try to create a sense of anticipation and drama.** This can be done by mentioning the speaker’s name last. There may be occasions to break this convention, but even when the audience knows the person, you can build a sense of drama building up to mentioning the name last. If you are called upon to introduce someone well known to the group try to be creative and cast the person in a new light. Talk to the speaker ahead of time and see if you can learn some interesting facts that are not generally known.

Even though the speech of introduction is short (no longer than 1 1/2 to 2 minutes maximum!) it should be written out in advance, at least in outline form and practiced. This is a must if you expect to be creative and dramatic. In the end you should be able to deliver the introduction extemporaneously, with sincerity and enthusiasm.

Your final sentence might sound something like this: “Please join me in giving a warm welcome to Ardis Stenbakken.” Once you complete this last sentence, you would begin the applause and remain at the podium until she arrives. Once she is at the podium, shake hands with her and move quickly to your seat.

## Making Announcements

Announcements should be made in much the same manner as the speech of introduction. They too should be brief, accurate, adapted to the situation as well as creative and sometimes dramatic. Hopefully you would be asked in advance to make the announcement so there is time to prepare, check the facts, get some creative ideas together and sketch out your ideas on paper. Should you be asked to make an announcement in the last minute, take a few minutes even then to check the facts and sketch out in very brief form what needs to be said to announce the event.

## Presenting an Award

Should you be called upon to present an award, you would again follow the same guidelines as in the speech of introduction. The idea is to build credibility and positive feelings before the award is presented. As in the speech of introduction, it is better to build anticipation to hearing the person’s name at the end of the speech. Again you would invite the audience to applaud the award winner by leading the applause yourself.

**ORCHESTRATING THE ENVIRONMENT―THE CLASS ROOM**

## Room Setting

## 

Although you cannot always control the speaking setting, it is very important in effectively communicating your message. The room setting includes such factors as room arrangement, lighting, temperature, and even decor. Remember, the ones setting up the event are often not speakers themselves. As the invited speaker, you have the right to request or make recommendations to the person in charge.

If you can control the design of the room, what design is best? First, the door needs to be at the back of the room. This may seem likely an unnecessary statement, but you simply do not want people walking in a door behind or to the side of you. Yet frequently rooms have side doors through which people can enter and exit. This is a major distraction to audience attention. Try to arrange the room so that traffic moves through the rear door only or one that is closest to it.

Ideally, you want a room which appears to be a bit crowded―not a room where people are packed in and there is standing room only. But a room that is well filled makes you feel more successful and creates a room that is more upbeat for the audience. When a room is large and the attendance small and the people are isolated from each other, it becomes a difficult task to motivate them toward anything let alone join in laughter. Take the same group and put them in a smaller room where they are shoulder to shoulder with a neighbor and you’ve created a warmer atmosphere where it is easy for laugher and a positive attitude to take over.

## Seating Arrangements

One of the most important aspects of the speaking setting is the seating arrangement. Unless you are speaking in an auditorium where there is fixed seating, you should be able to suggest how you want the audience seated. As a general rule you’ll want the audience in what is known as “theater style” two to three horizontal blocks with one or two aisles. The aisles allow you to move closer to your audience, and allows participants to get to you when necessary. This keeps the audience close to you, and allows for everyone to see you as well as any visual aids presented. You will also be able to easily make eye contact with everyone in the audience. This pattern will also assist you in keeping audience attention.

Arrive early so you can adjust the seating to your own needs. Add extra chairs. Create an aisle. Move the front row closer or further from you. All of this must be done *before* the audience arrives. Once listeners are seated, they will not be happy if you ask them to move. Asking an audience to move is like asking a pig to sing: You only waste your breath, and annoy the pig. In the end, the pig still won’t sing and the audience still won’t move.

If you are speaking to a small group (30 to 50) where there are movable chairs, you might arrange the chairs in a semi circle around you several rows deep if necessary. This provides good viewing for each participant since no one sits directly behind anyone’s head. This seating fosters an atmosphere where learning can be fostered in an informal manner, where best viewing of the speaker and overheads can be achieved–all with a feeling of warmth. Where there is fixed seating rope off back rows in an effort to get people to move forward. Fixed seating with straight rows symbolizes formality and rigidity.

**There are many more seating options than you might think:**

**Conference Style:** The conference style where participants are seated around one long vertical table can accommodate four to 16 persons and is a good choice for a small room. Everyone can see the speaker and it allows for easy interaction among participants.

**U-Shaped Style.**  The U-shape is also appropriate for smaller groups of four to 16 people. Participants will find it more difficult to interact unless they are seated beside one another. This style proves good for big group interaction, but people must speak up in order to be heard.

**Circle Style**: The circle style is composed of a group around a round table. The presenter can either stand at the front of the table or sit down with the group for a more informal presentation.

**Pod Style**: The pod style is ideal for a larger group where there are round tables. Each table can work independently when given a project and is well suited for a speaker who likes to walk among participants. It works well when various groups need to organize and discuss agenda items.

**Classroom Style**: The classroom style is more formal than the pod style. The speaker can still move down the aisle and helps participants feel more a part of the group. The tables take up much more room and automatically puts the second row further away from the speaker.

**Chevron Style**: The chevron style is a variation of the classroom style. The tables are angled which allows participants to see each other which aids in helping them feel a part of the group. It can be used with both small and large groups and allows for ample viewing of the speaker as well as visuals.

**Personal Space.** We all have a personal space about us. This area usually extends up to about 4 feet from our bodies and is what we consider our private area. When others invade our personal space we become uncomfortable. A public speaker must be aware of this space and be careful of invading it Therefore you should never stand closer than about 7 feet from the first row to avoid making your audience uncomfortable. Once they become uncomfortable, they stop listening. On the other hand, you don’t want to be too far away from your audience as they may assume you are afraid of them. And you will lose eye contact with your audience.

## Other Considerations

**Platforms.** Platforms are often used to elevate a speaker for better viewing. This accomplishes the purpose of making it easier for the audience to see a speaker, certainly a must for every presenter. But being elevated above an audience destroys another element necessary in establishing a bond with an audience. When the speaker is elevated, it places her above the audience which forces her to *look down on* her audience. One of the objectives of a Women’s Ministries leader should be to come as close to the hearts of her listeners as possible. This isn’t as easy to do when you are *talking down* *to* those seated beneath you.

Often you may have no choice in the matter as when speaking in a church where the platform is permanent. But should you be speaking in a room where you can speak to the group from the same level as they are, you will be able to establish a bond more quickly. You will also be able to interact more readily with this group and they will be able to access you more readily should they wish to ask questions during a break. You can also more easily facilitate group interaction for discussion when needed.

When speaking to large groups of over 100 or more, it is not possible to speak and be seen without a platform. A platform then is very necessary.

**Room Temperature.** A room that is too hot or too cold will inhibit people from receiving the best you have to give. And remember, the more people who crowd into a small room the warmer it gets. If there is a choice between a hot or cool room, choose cool. Shut window blinds or draperies to eliminate glare and prevent the audience from staring outside while they should be listening. The proper appearance, lighting, temperature and atmosphere are important to the mood of learning and fellowship you are trying to create. These factors cannot be overlooked!

**Hostess.** A hostess to welcome people as they enter the room is an asset. Her responsibility is to smile and be friendly to everyone attending. Guests and newcomers especially need to feel welcome in an unfamiliar setting with people they don’t know.

**Recorded Music.** Recorded music playing softly at the beginning and close of a presentation adds a nice touch and helps set a relaxed mood.

**Arrive Early.** You should arrive at the selected location 30 to 60 minutes early. This gives you time to acquaint yourself with the room and equipment prior to your talk as well as time to set out your materials. All equipment should be checked in advance to make certain that it is working correctly. Check the microphone to see that it is adjusted to your level and the sound adjusted for your voice level. This amount of time also gives you a chance to pull yourself together and present to the audience as they begin to arrive the picture of poise and serenity that you want to project.

## PERSONAL APPEARANCE

American Airlines saved $40,000 in one year by eliminating one olive from each salad served customers flying first class. Little things do matter even when you’re giving a talk!

Here we are not going to be as concerned with fashion as we are with proper dress as an aid to your presentation. Many of our physical characteristics cannot be changed, but we can improve our appearance through good grooming, appropriate dress, poise and graceful movement. This may seem insignificant in the grand scheme of public speaking but they matter very much when you want to succeed.

Select clothing which is conservative and yet has enough style so that you do not give the impression you are out of style. Some women dress so conservatively that without realizing it they give the impression that they are not keeping up with the times. This could plant thoughts in the listener’s mind that perhaps her presentation will be just as out of date. Yet you should stay just as clear of severe fashions, temporary fads, or any unusual type of attire which will attract undue attention.

Furthermore, your choice of clothing says a great deal about your self worth as well as your attitude toward your listeners and how much importance you attach to your message itself. Speakers who violate audience expectations will function under a real handicap.

Some guidelines: **(please adapt these to the local culture.)**

* Most people are still more comfortable with traditionally dressed speakers.
* As a general rule, for western wear, a dress or business suit. Dresses should at least be knee length, should have sleeves, not be too tight, or have a revealing neckline. Never wear anything that causes the audience to question your professionalism.
* Avoid fabrics that wrinkle easily. They may look good at home but after traveling may look tacky.
* Avoid distracting jewelry. No sparkly pins that catch the eye or you’ll lose your audience.
* Empty your pockets of loose change or anything else you might be tempted to fidget with.
* If safe to do so, leave your handbag at your seat. Do not carry it up front with you and plop it on the lectern.
* Certain colors and styles of clothing are considered more professional and credible than others. Subdued, solid colors will give you more authority. Blue is the most popular color. Dark blue gives credibility and strength. Soft blues are calming. Red is energetic and dynamic. Yellow is cheerful but also a high-anxiety color. Brown can be calming, but it is boring. White is crisp and clear but under lights it will make your face appear pale. Neon colors and eye-popping shades are distracting.
* The higher the neckline, the less frivolous you appear.
* A tailored look gives you more power and authority.
* If you want more authority, put your hair up and pull it away from your face for a tailored look.
* Choose comfortable shoes. High heels may make you look sophisticated, but the last thing you want to deal with when you get home is sore, aching feet.

Dressing appropriately for a presentation cannot be stressed enough. Not only does it give you a credible first impression with your listeners, but when you know you are dressed appropriately, you can forget your appearance and invest yourself in giving the best of what you have to your audience. Small details add up to a big impression: Make it a good one!

## Platform Decorum

Regardless of the reason you are on the platform, please realize you are on display and people are watching you and making judgments about you based on your appearance and decorum on the platform. In actuality, it begins the minute they set eyes on you as you enter their line of vision. The manner in which you walk, carry, and conduct yourself impacts their opinion of you.

Ellen White states it plainly: “The outside appearance is frequently an index to the mind, and we should be careful what signs we hang out for the world to judge of our faith.” (*Messages to Young People* p. 346) Your aim when you appear in public should be to present a picture of poise, of quiet serenity with no wasted movements, always presenting the loveliest body lines without the appearance of evil.

## Posture

As you appear in public your number one asset is correct posture. It is vital to a leader’s self confidence, and also creates a sense of assurance to onlookers. Women sometimes slump, slouch, or arch themselves trying to make themselves shorter or trying to hide their breasts. But slouching and slumping only make a woman look awkward and ill at ease. Poor posture tells the world that you don’t like yourself.

Posture communicates a mood. If you slouch you look tired and unhappy and project that image. When you sit and walk with confidence you project that image. Your presentation doesn’t really begin when you stand up to speak, but from the minute you walk into a building and the audience gets a glimpse of you. Let’s look at some simple yet effective ideas that will help project the image you want to convey:

* Before your presentation, always sit up straight and appear calm and collected, even if you do not feel that way. Remember, your audience is already forming an opinion about you as you sit waiting to speak.
* When it is time for you to go to the front, stand up straight and do not look at the floor as you walk. Looking down makes you appear less confident.
* Once you begin your talk, maintain good posture without looking so stiff you resemble a soldier.

Here is a posture check: Your ears should be over your shoulders and not thrust forward. Your shoulder blades should form a flat surface behind your shoulders, not hunched forward. Your chest should be lifted upward from the sternum preventing your bust line from drooping. Your stomach should be flat, your knees slightly flexed, and your toes point straight ahead. When your feet are not used correctly, your posture cannot be in balance. Make sure you walk from the torso, keeping your shoulders and hips quiet. There can be a very slight swing to the arms with an easy stride. The length of your step should not be too short―mincing steps which would make you bob―or too long which would make you appear masculine.

## Sitting

Pivot as you approach a chair to sit down. Feel the edge of the chair with the calf of your leg so you know where it is. Then lower yourself toward the chair keeping your back straight. Now place both hands on the forward edge of the chair on either side of your hips. Raise your body slightly and slide back while resting your weight on your hands. While seated keep your hands quiet and in your lap, not on the arms of the chair or folded across your chest. It is better to put them to one side rather than smack in the middle of your lap.

While seated keep your knees together. Place your feet out slightly farther than the knees which will give you a longer more feminine line. Resist the urge to tuck your feet under you. Keep the soles of your shoes on the floor. Slide the heel of one foot into the arch of the other or you may cross them at the ankle keeping the foot in front straight, and both soles on the floor. *And never, ever cross your legs on the platform!*

## Standing

To stand again, reverse the procedure for sitting. Keeping your back straight, slide forward first, while using your arms on the edge of the chair to assist you in rising to a standing position. Should you be required to stand before an audience for whatever reason, assume what is called the social stance. Shoulders low and back, head erect, chest up, buttocks in, relaxed knees, and then place the heel of one foot in the arch of the other with the weight on the back leg. The forward knee is slightly bent. Your hands should be at rest in a graceful position, not behind your back. With your elbows close to your side, hands at your waist, and both palms up is an easy comfortable position to assume.

## Ascending and Descending Stairs

When required to ascend or descend stairs, pause for a second or two before beginning. Bend your knees. Keep your knees slightly bent; with your head high, put your whole foot on the stair with the toe straight ahead, not in or out. Do not watch your feet when ascending or descending stairs. Rest your hand lightly on the railing, if there is one.

Once you have practiced and mastered these few simple rules you will be able to project an exemplary image to the audience before you. And remember, when you rise to speak, try to appear calm, poised, and confident―despite the butterflies in your stomach. When you reach the lectern, resist the temptation to lean on it. And don’t rush into your talk. Give yourself time to get ready. Arrange your notes the way you want them. Stand quietly as you wait to make certain the audience is paying attention. Establish eye contact with your listeners. Then, and only then, should you begin to speak.

Such emphasis on the outer may seem to you supercilious and unnecessary. But taking care of your demeanor when in public will also make a change in your feelings of self-worth. You will feel happier, more self-confident, and have a greater sense of personal worth. Soon people will say, “My, you have certainly blossomed!”

## Something to Lean On―Using a Podium

Most novice speakers want to stand behind a podium. The inexperienced view a podium as a security blanket they can’t learn to speak without. In some circumstances, podiums or pulpits may be necessary and even useful, but there is a valid reason for not using one. You have already learned how to establish confident and credibility before an audience. Every speaker should want to appear as confidence and credible as possible and podiums have a tendency to decrease the effectiveness of a speaker.

A podium appears to be something that the speaker hides behind, a way of shielding herself from the audience, even though it may not be true. A speaker who does not use a podium, one who does not have a barrier between her and the audience, appears more knowledgeable and credible. Because 55 percent of what is communicated to an audience is done nonverbally, a small woman might be almost totally blocked by a large pulpit. It is possible that if the stage area is elevated above the audience, the only part of her seen by the audience might be her head from the chin up! In this case, much of the impact she could be making on her audience would be lost behind the wood.

If possible, do not use a podium of any kind and you will have more impact with your audience. But if you do use one remember these points:

* Do not put your hands on it. Your hands need to be free to handle your notes and to gesture.
* Don’t lean on it. Podiums tend to make a speaker relax and the tendency is to get sloppy in posture. A weak posture makes you appear less confident to your audience.
* Check podium height. If you are short you may need a small riser to stand on.

## PUMP UP THE VOLUME: USING A MICROPHONE

A microphone or public address system can help you communicate more clearly with a large audience. This depends on the speaking event, the size of the room, and the number of people attending. Often a public address system is provided even when one is not needed. If there are fewer than 40 people in attendance and the room isn’t too large, you probably will not need a microphone. You are under no obligation to use a mike even when one is provided. Remember, the less equipment you use the fewer things can go wrong. If you are speaking to a large group, and a microphone is necessary, consider these important points:

* Do not attempt to use a hand held microphone. Hand held mikes are ideal for singers who are only up front for three minutes at a time. But they are a real handicap to a speaker. Since they are heavy the tendency is to let them drop from the mouth and people will not be able to hear. Furthermore, they will inhibit natural gestures, the use of overheads, and handling of notes. Insist on a having a stand onto which the microphone can be placed.
* A lapel mike is ideal if one is available. It can be attached to your clothing and thus keeps your hands free to gesture. It also allows you to move around on the platform as necessary.
* A microphone is not a replacement for vocal performance. In other words, don’t depend on a piece of mechanical equipment to do for your voice what you are not putting into it. It can’t happen. A microphone only amplifies what it gets and cannot enhance your voice. Don’t depend on a mike to make you sound good. Prepare for your delivery as if you will not be using a microphone.
* Adjust the microphone position and loudness before you begin speaking. Most microphones whether on a podium or a stand can be adjusted and positioned to your height. If others are using the mike prior to your presentation and change the height, it will be necessary for you to readjust the height before you begin speaking. Do not begin speaking before this task is completed. Fiddling with your equipment once you begin talking draws attention to the equipment rather than to what you are saying.
* Use the microphone. In other words, if you need a mike, make sure that you are close enough so that it projects your voice to your intended audience. Depending on the type of microphone, your mouth should be about five inches away from it. Remember if you turn away from it, the audience will lose what you are saying. And above all, don’t act like you are afraid of it. Microphones do not bite!
* Do not let the microphone block your face or inhibit eye contact with the audience. Keep the mike below face level so the audience can clearly see your face. Once you get it at the right height, ignore the mike as much as possible.
* Be careful when pronouncing words that begin with “p” or “th”. Such sounds tend to make the mike “pop.” Pronounce such sounds more softly when using a mike.
* Just as microphones amplify the voice, so do microphones amplify other sounds like the shuffling of papers, coughing, scratching, and other noises. Beware.

If you can give your talk without a mike, by all means do so. You’ll save yourself many potential problems. It will give you more freedom to move around, be expressive and genuine. If you are in a situation where the microphone is not working properly during your speech, stop speaking and ask the person in charge of the event or the audio person to correct the problem. Avoid tapping on or blowing into the microphone. Once the microphone problem is corrected, say something like, “I believe the problem is now corrected. We were talking about . . .” and continue with your presentation. No need to apologize. The problem has been corrected so move on.

**Overcoming** **Stage** **Fright**

Butterflies. The jitters. A bad case of nerves. Fear of speaking in public is called “stage fright” but it begins long before one gets to the stage. For many it begins the minute they get the invitation to speak. Some fear their audience, and the more you fear your audience, the more nervous you become. Actually audiences are usually sympathetic to stage fright. Even if they notice you are frightened they usually attempt to encourage a speaker.

**Here are some tips to help you overcome fear:**

* **Pick your own subject matter**. The more you like your subject, the more apt you are to see your audience as friendly.
* **Follow the “as if” principle.** Act *as if* you are confident, and you truly will become more confident. This is a real psychological theory put into a nutshell of truth: Your body tends to do what your mind expects. If your mind expects a successful presentation, your body is more likely to produce one.
* **Put on a happy face.** If you are smiling, your audience will be much more likely to smile with you. If you look scared and miserable, you will unconsciously set the mood for misery.
* **Think positively.** Avoid negative thoughts like the plague! Instead, use affirming statements to yourself: “I am well prepared and know my subject. That’s why I have been asked to give it. I can deliver it well.” This type of positive thinking really works!
* **See your audience as non-threatening rather than fearing them**. Remember, your audience is not against you―at least not yet. They have voluntarily come to hear you speak. Act like you like them, that you are going to have some fun together and they are more likely to like you.
* **Fake it.** Don’t get up front and say, “I just have to tell you how nervous I am.” You may be frightened, but no one will know it if you don’t tell them!
* **Pray.** Make it your practice to pray before you present. Pray for yourself as you deliver your speech, but also pray for the people in your audience―that they might receive all the thoughts of love and good will that you have for them.

Some people actually shake or tremble when fearful. But even trembling doesn’t show half as much as you think it does. If you are a trembler, leave the microphone on its stand rather than holding it in your hand. Leave your notes on the lectern so that people can’t see them shake in your hands. If your legs tremble, shift your weight between them. Or lean forward and grasp the lectern with both hands until the trembling stops.

Believe it or not, stage fright has its good points. Fear produces energy and you can draw on that energy and enthusiasm to help you give a more powerful presentation. Since most people see public speaking as very difficult, when you stand up to speak you will automatically get some respect. You hardly have to do anything else. Just standing before a group gains respect. Then if you are fully prepared you can be confident in your ability to carry this off. Tell yourself, “I am completely prepared. I wrote a good talk and I know my material. I will go out there and with God’s help, I will do a good job. “ Remember, the best way to overcome stage fright is to believe in yourself!

Accept every opportunity you can to speak. Each time you get up front will become easier. In time it won’t be so terrifying.

## CREDIBILITY

One of your prime objectives when speaking to an audience is to establish credibility and good will. Credibility is mostly a matter of being perceived by your listeners as being qualified to speak on a given topic. If, for example, I attempted to speak to you about nuclear physics, I would have to take drastic steps to demonstrate my credibility on the subject since I have limited knowledge of the subject. You too must establish credibility before your audience. Your credibility can come from your elected position as a leader of women, reading, classes, you’ve taken etc. Whatever the source of your expertise, your audience needs to know.

You can be helped toward credibility by preparing an introduction typed up in advance and sent to the one who has been asked to introduce you. Since I speak professionally for many organizations, this is what I have done. My introduction includes the number of books I have written, how many languages they have been translated into, special honors I have received, personalities I have appeared with, and a few other pertinent facts that would establish my credibility to a group before I begin. This promotes a positive attitude among the audience and leaves me with less “proving” to accomplish.

## GENDER BENDERS

A number of researchers believe that gender differences in conversational styles result in mis-communication that often occur in male-female conversation. For example, research shows that women tend to nod their heads more and give more affirmative verbal cues than do men. Men, in contrast, interpret such signals to mean “I agree,”: rather than “I understand.” A female speaker who sees males in her audience failing to nod in agreement with her, may assume that they aren’t listening, don’t agree or that she is being ignored.

Males may also view topics differently than do women. And generally speaking, males have different interest levels, knowledge, and experiences than females about the topic being presented. In order to pick up male interest on a topic be sure to include examples and stories men can relate to.

## TAKING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD―MULTI CULTURAL CONCERNS

When addressing a culture, you are not familiar with, be careful of your body language. For example:

* Americans nod their heads to signify yes and shake their heads to indicate “no.” Bulgarians have the opposite set of nonverbal signs.
* The thumbs-up sign, which Americans take to mean” okay or good work” becomes a vulgar insult in Greece.
* The circle formed with the thumb and first finger that means “OK” in America is obscene in Southern Italy and can mean “you’re worth nothing” in France and Belgium.
* Americans see eye contact as a sign of honesty, but in other cultures, looking down is a sign of appropriate deference. In Muslim countries, men and women are not supposed to make eye contact.
* Americans smile much more often than people from other countries. The Japanese, for example, smile not only when they’re amused, but also to cover embarrassment, sadness, and even anger.

In other words, when speaking before a culture unfamiliar to you, check with a leader to see that you are communicating what you *think* you are communicating.

**THE LAST WORD**

If things don’t go quite as well as you had hoped, do not be discouraged. Like all skills, you will get better each time you make a presentation. Many of those who have made a positive impact in the world have been public speakers. Remember, the expression of great ideas and information causes great things to happen.

Keep growing and building confidence and skill as a public speaker. It will enrich your life and the lives of all those in the audience. Your presentations may well touch the lives of many people over a period of time and help these people to get more out of life, and grow in the Lord as well as prepare them for the Second Coming. It’s a wonderful feeling to realize that God has used you to touch people’s lives!

**About the auhor**

**Nancy L. Van Pelt** was a Certified Family Life Educator, and Family and Consumer Science Professional who had conducted over 1,000 seminars around the world. She was a gifted communicator who taught with power, warmth, enthusiasm, and humor. She was also a best-selling author of over 40 books and some have been translated into 30 different languages and her books *Compleat Marriage* and *To Have And To Hold* have been best sellers. She traveled to over 74 countries teaching families how to love each other. Her hobbies were traveling, getting organized, quilting, and having fun with friends. Nancy lived with her loving husband in California and felt blessed with their three grown children. Nancy passed away in November, 2013.