



PRESENTER'S GUIDE

20 Ways to Connect with an Audience for Lasting Influence

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To be a great public speaker, you have to go beyond delivering information. Can you get on listeners' wavelength and stay there for the length of your speech? Here are 20 ways to connect with an audience.

1. **Get out from behind that lectern!** Apart from making you a static speaker, a lectern is a physical barrier between you and those you're trying to reach. Let audiences see all of you.
2. **Wear a lapel mic that lets you move around.** Your performance needs to be as visually interesting as your slides. That means moving, and using full-body communication.
3. **Make solid and realistic eye contact.** Forget the rules of how long you should look at listeners and all the rest. Make a point of looking at everyone, or all parts of a large audience, for a normal amount of time.
4. **Get your body (and facial expressions) into the act.** There's an old B-movie called *They Saved Hitler's Brain*. Do not emulate this approach! Your body language and facial expressions are clues that you know what you're doing, you love doing it, and audiences can trust you.
5. **Have a conversation with your audience.** The Age of Speechifying is long gone, and even formal presentations are now informal. You're at your best when you're having a conversation with friends, which is what your listeners should sense they are.
6. **Use humor and a self-deprecating approach.** There will be plenty of time to drive home your serious points. Let the audience understand first that you're not full of yourself, and you're fun to be around.

7. **Live in the world of your audience.** Understand that in the public speaking solar system, the audience is the sun and you are a planet revolving around it. Always conceive and deliver your speech in terms of the audience's needs and desires. Why not get better at understanding those needs?
8. **Use "you" and "we," rather than "I" and "me."** Self-consciousness and the desire to do well leads us to focus on our success as speakers. Instead, let the audience hear that they're the reason you're up there on stage.
9. **Ask frequent questions, including rhetorical questions.** This will remind the audience that they are an active partner in this enterprise. Your speech is all about them, after all, and it should sound that way. In a 20-minute speech, there should be at least a dozen times you should ask them something, i.e., "You've seen this many times, haven't you?" You needn't expect answers.
10. **Include the three adult learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.** Some people learn best from what they see; others respond strongly to what they hear, and still others think in terms of physical response. And though you can't lead listeners in hands-on exercises, you can say, "Try to grasp this concept," and so on.
11. **Use shared cultural references.** The latest remarks or behavior in terms of shared culture fly around the globe at warp speed. People will immediately feel the connection with each other, and you.
12. **Tell stories.** Speakers often feel the need to present data on its own because it's important. But do you lose anything by weaving your content into an engaging story that has people at the heart of it? You do not.
13. **Break up your talk.** People can read a report whenever they have the time—but they must listen to you in real time. Think in terms of delivering segments that listeners can absorb and retain.

14. **Use concrete, specific language.** For the same reason as the previous point: your language should have immediate impact. It's one of the ways you can enliven your speech and keep it engaging.
15. **Speak visually.** That is, create "word-pictures." We see, and even think visually now, and audiences expect information to contain a visual component. In addition to your slides, use metaphors or descriptions to help listeners create a visual image in their minds.
16. **Employ pauses.** Your audience needs to take a breath! The fight-or-flight hormone adrenaline may push you to speak more quickly than usual. After a surprisingly short amount of time, your audience will feel exhausted. Give them some breaks.
17. **Get closer to listeners whenever possible.** Physically and literally. Go to both ends of the stage, come downstage closer to the audience, or roam among the audience if you have that luxury. Literal closeness leads to the metaphoric kind.
18. **Speak from notes.** Don't memorize or use a manuscript. Memorizing a speech or reading from a manuscript are both behaviors that keep you out of moment-by-moment engagement with your audience. (When you memorize, you're actually in the past retrieving each segment of your talk.) Audiences expect even experts to have notes handy, and don't mind when you glance at them.
19. **Thou shalt not, on pain of death, read thy PowerPoint slides!** Your job is to amplify, support, explain, clarify, or put in context what's on the screen. That's the reason you're there in person
20. **Move naturally to all the parts of the stage.** Every speaker knows about body language, but too few use the stage itself as a tool of physical expression. Watch exceptional performers and you'll understand the power of movement on stage.