

# Public Speaking Primer

You may not expect to do much public speaking as part of your writing or illustrating career, but it's likely to be part of how you promote your books. Even if you've mastered speaking at school visits, presenting to adults at conferences and public programs is another matter.

For many, the prospect of addressing an audience of peers is daunting. In fact, according to surveys of top fears, public speaking is ranked at or near the top. Why? Because the speaker is not sure how his message will be received and is afraid of being embarrassed. Doing well requires good preparation and presentation skills, and also understanding your audience.

Start by focusing on your audience. In [“Speaking is a Team Sport,”](#) author and consultant Stefania Luccetti points out that, “Most speakers approach their presentation as if they were the star actors in a theater play” whom the audience is excited to see. Instead, Lucetti continues “speakers need to take on a perspective that is intensely audience focused.” So, ask for information ahead of time about who is likely to attend and consider what they'd most like to learn from you.

As a double-check, and to share that intent, start your program with an opportunity for the audience to provide direct input. In a small group, that might mean letting them say something about themselves and why they've come to hear you. A larger group could fill out cards with questions that you could incorporate as appropriate. If you do take written questions, invite them to include their email address so you can reply to those you don't get to. This will also let you get in touch afterward to invite them to visit your website and link to you on Twitter and Facebook.

When crafting your presentation know that audiences today have short attention spans: In a recent seminar I attended, the speaker said you could expect a person's mind to wander off topic in less than 15 seconds. You'll also face the added challenge of engaging audience members who are texting, Tweeting, or otherwise multitasking. Counteract this by building your presentation around quick sound bites that they can easily remember. Think in terms of “sticky ideas,” defined in Chip and Dan Heath's book, *Made to Stick*, as having six key attributes: simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions and stories.

During the presentation, change the dynamics periodically, using a variety of visuals and styles of delivery. Avoid common pitfalls, like “I want to tell you everything”, “grab bag”, “shopping list” and others outlined by Olivia Mitchell in [“Speaking About Presenting”](#). Focus on making the experience memorable, repeat key points, and include action items to encourage the audience to stay connected with you afterwards.

Preparation includes not just rehearsal but materials to encourage further interaction. Provide handouts directing the audience to your website, blog or newsletter; as well as information sheets or postcards with book information. If the audience is appropriate, have a flier about booking you for school visits and events. For people who speak with you directly, give out a business card listing your website, Twitter and Facebook information. Offer them something special, such

as a discount on a school visit or talk, if they contact you and say they attended your presentation. 1:2/11