

4-H Public Speaking Hints & Tips



Although many people have the “gift of gab” expressing oneself clearly in front of your peers is a real talent, but always remember... EVERYBODY CAN IMPROVE THEIR PUBLIC SPEAKING ABILITIES!

Often there is a fearful reaction to a speech. It even strikes people who speak to groups nearly every day as part of their job. Anyone can get nervous. But it can be overcome, even by a first year 4-H member. The ability to speak effectively to other people is one of the most vital skills you can develop.

PRACTICE DOESN'T NECESSARILY MAKE PERFECT, BUT IT SURE DOES HELP IMPROVE SPEAKING EASE... AND IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT DOES!

The idea of getting up in front of your friends is a little bit scary. Try to think of public speaking as talking to a friend. Use the same words you use normally. Be yourself in your speech. Trick yourself by not calling it public speaking, but just talking.

TOPIC:

Choose a topic which is related to some experience you have lived through, your favorite hobby, or something you are interested in. The level of topic a member chooses is one of the criteria that a judge uses to evaluate a speech. We like to see juniors talking about subjects that they enjoy or one of their pets. Senior speakers should choose topics that they can go into a bit deeper. This could be current affair issues or a talk on the misuse of alcohol or drugs. Watch, though, so you don't use an over-talked about topic. If your idea is new and interesting, your audience will want to listen.

PREPARE FOR YOUR TALK:

- You may need to do some reading about your topic - remember to summarize what you read into your own words
- Discuss the subject with informed persons, teachers, your minister, your parents, etc.
- Think about it yourself for a few days before you begin writing; jot down a few notes when you think of them and then you'll have them to put together later

Outline for Preparing a Speech

Introduction:

- Start by addressing the chairperson. Example: "(Mr. or Madam) Chairperson, Honorable Judges, Fellow 4-H members and friends."
- Speakers should not introduce themselves;
- Make it a different opening - ask a question to start off - that usually gets people's attention;
- Then introduce your topic, "The topic I am going to speak on is" or "Today I'm going to talk to you about..." or "is important to me..." I'm going to share a few thoughts with you on that topic;
- Your introduction should get attention and give a clear idea of what the speech is about.

Body:

- The main part of your talk
- Use illustrations or examples
 - Make them timely, close to home and personal, if possible.
 - Have something on hand you can show.

Ending:

- A brief summary of your main points. (no new ideas at the end)
- Make it a natural ending — think of a catchy way to let people know you are finished — ask "Doesn't this make you want to go out and get a pet for your family?" or "Life sure was good back then, wasn't it?" "I'm concerned about this topic. I hope you'll think about it, too." or "I've enjoyed sharing my experiences with you today."
- The words, "thank you" do not constitute an effective way to end a speech. It usually feels very natural, though, to say thank you just before you sit down upon finishing your speech. (But, instead, it is the audience that should say "thank you" to you - not to them – and they do it by clapping.) So, practice, especially, your ending so it is effective and not awkward.

Write your speech using your outline as a guide. Then go over it several times. Make up notes that pick out the main parts of your talk. Then try to go over the speech just using your notes. It may be different from when you wrote it out long. Don't worry - only you knew just exactly what you had before. As long as it still says what you wanted - that's all that's important. Keep your notes then and that's all you'll need.

When you have your speech written: PRACTICE TO YOUR FRIENDS, PRACTICE TO YOURSELF IN FRONT OF A MIRROR, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Presenting Your Speech:

- Try to be natural. Speak as you would talk normally.
- Short sentences are more effective.
- Look at the audience. Pick out a couple of people you know in different places and change your focus every little while. That makes it look like you are talking right to the people.
- Use your notes – glance down when you need to or want to. Don't take your written speech up front with you – you will be tempted to read it. You should always take notes with you. You might think you know it well enough, but you're just being safe if you take them with you – whether you use them or not.
- Speak up!
 - Sound confident
 - Sound like you want everyone to know what you must say
 - Try to speak at your natural speed - this usually means "slow down." We tend to speak too fast. (Practicing will help you with this.)
 - Be enthusiastic! Think that what you are talking about is the most important thing in the world!
- Smile! Look like you are enjoying it!
- Stand still - don't pace back and forth, but don't act like a statue! Have your feet slightly apart with your hands at your sides, or holding your notes at your waist.
- Use a few gestures - hand movements to emphasize a point, show direction or size, or to count – facial expressions to show emotion. **AVOID OVER GESTURING!** Gestures help to get the interest and attention of the audience, but they should be natural.
- The length of the speech is not critical. Judges base their scoring on the time the speaker can hold the interest of the audience and the depth to which the topic is considered. A good short talk is better than a long one that loses the audience.

NOTE: All 4-H members are reminded to check with the rules and guidelines for both the Public Speaking and Demonstrations Competitions before writing the speech. Ensure your eligibility before you start! Then, when it's written, obtain a score sheet and go over all of the items in the evaluation. This will help you become aware of how you are being judged and it may help you prepare knowing the score card requirements.