

Professional Speaking Skills for STA 130 Students

It takes most people many years to develop professional speaking skills, but this is a goal you should start thinking about during your years at university. Here are some small steps you can take even now to enhance your ability to communicate effectively in a professional (or academic) setting.

Preparation and Organization. Note that some professional presentations are prepared in advance, whereas others are more spontaneous. If you speak up in a meeting (or in your tutorial) take a moment to collect your thoughts and even jot down a few notes on what you'll say. Here is some further advice:

- Avoid memorizing what you plan to say; use **point-form** notes instead. Don't worry if you end up saying "uh" and "um," correcting yourself, or even forgetting a detail and having to go back to add it later. All of this is still more interesting for your audience than listening to you recite from memory or read from a page.
- Use **previewing** to introduce the purpose of a presentation or even brief remarks during a meeting. Tell your listeners what you are going to tell them: "I'm going to show you a possible.../ I'd like to start by explaining.../ I'm hoping to convince you that.../ My analysis illustrates the.../ Basically, my interpretation is that... /My calculations suggest that..."
- Be sure that each step of the explanation is made explicit. Avoid leaving it up to listeners to figure out how one step fits with the next. The best way to achieve this is to use **signal words/transitions** to indicate where a new idea or detail is introduced: "Another important point is.../ This is just part of the picture.../ Another aspect of X which we should be considering is.../ Now that you have some idea of Part A, I'd like to show you how Part B relates..."

Speaking with Clarity. Note that these simple actions, if followed, will allow nearly anyone to speak and be clearly understood by an audience:

- Remember that professional speaking usually involves complex matters. Speak more **slowly** than you would in ordinary conversation. Use some **pauses** to give your audience time to digest what you're saying or to take notes.
- Make **eye contact** with as many people as possible, but avoid staring too long at anyone. (Hint for students: Don't just look at your TA when you speak—look around at your classmates, too).
- Focus on **articulating** every part of each word, from the beginning of the word to the end. Avoid dropping off letters at the end of a word or slurring words together.
- Make a distinction between the language you use for everyday purposes and the language you use professionally. Don't use **colloquial** expressions like hang out, chill, rock, lame, etc.
- Make sure you know how to pronounce the **key words** in the presentation. Consult the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (click on the speaker icon) for sample pronunciation. Pay particular attention to which syllable is stressed.
- Speak **loudly** enough to be heard in the back of the room. Raise your volume on your key terms.