

# MYTHS OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

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For countless people, speaking in front of a group is an experience that is feared. The statistics indeed support Jerry Seinfeld's humorous claim that most people at a funeral would rather be the corpse than the person delivering the eulogy. But, it is the ability to communicate effectively that is cited as the primary factor contributing to one's professional success. Here are some common myths surrounding presentation skills and the reality behind each:

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## Myth #1

**START OUT WITH A JOKE— IT GETS THE AUDIENCE WARMED UP.**

### Reality

Although it's certainly true that the release of adrenaline and endorphins into the system heightens learning and interest, a joke is seldom, if ever, appropriate. Too many speakers confuse comedy with humor. Humor is the relating of funny, relevant and non-offensive stories, cartoons or anecdotes to support the message. When they fail in their purpose, you don't. Leave the comedy to the professional comedians.

## Myth #4

**YOU'RE THERE TO INFORM THE AUDIENCE OF PROGRESS—NOT PERSUADE THEM— SO DON'T WORRY ABOUT PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES.**

### Reality

Many people say there are two types of presentations: one to inform and one to persuade. Wrong. There is only one type of presentation—the one to persuade. Whether you're selling a product, a service, an idea or your own credibility, you're persuading, and you need to know how people are persuaded.

## Myth #7

**PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.**

### Reality

Practice makes permanent. Practicing the wrong techniques makes for bad habits that are difficult to break. Learn the techniques that work for you and practice those.

## Myth #2

**PUT YOUR HANDS IN YOUR POCKETS. IT WILL MAKE THE ATMOSPHERE CASUAL.**

### Reality

Studies have shown the critical importance of the visual element in presentations. This includes eye contact, attire, stance, grooming and gestures. When a speaker's hands are buried in his or her pockets (or placed behind the back), one-third of the ability to communicate is eliminated. Supportive gestures enhance the message and facilitate learning.

## Myth #5

**DON'T WORRY ABOUT USING VISUAL AIDS. THEY DISTRACT THE AUDIENCE.**

### Reality

When you use visual aids, you are perceived as more professional, credible, persuasive and better prepared. Research shows that when you support your presentation with relevant, interesting, colorful and multi-sensory visuals, learning is improved by 200%, retention by 38%, and the time to explain complex subjects is reduced by 25% to 40%.

## Myth #3

**SHARE ALL OF THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION PERTINENT TO THE TOPIC.**

### Reality

Your audience only needs to know enough to understand your premise. Allow for a Q&A period at the end of your talk to answer those questions the audience is most interested in. If needed, provide detailed information in a handout.

## Myth #6

**IF YOU USE THE LATEST AND GREATEST PRESENTATION TECHNOLOGIES, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT YOUR PRESENTATION SKILLS.**

### Reality

A quick recipe for disaster is to be lulled into thinking that all you need is the latest technology and your problems are over. That idea is unfortunately becoming more prevalent with the introduction of more innovative methods for incorporating visuals into presentations. Your visual aids are just that— aids. They are intended to enhance your presentation, not make it for you. Presenters must remember to focus on the human side. Regardless of how flashy or impressive your visuals may be, you are still the most important visual for your listeners.