



The Art of Public Speaking

The core ambition of the Cambridge Union Society is to spread the Art of Public Speaking and Debating. As a Society we are home to some of the best Public Speakers in the world.

Every year our competitive debaters travel across the globe teaching public speaking workshops and giving speeches. In the last three years alone, our debaters have been able to travel to Botswana, India, China, USA and Germany, to name but a few countries.

The reason why our Society is one of the most successful of its kind in spreading the Art of Public Speaking is because of the extensive curriculum the Cambridge Union Society has in place. Every academic year the Debating Officers of the Union implement and teach a sixteen-module curriculum which takes individuals who are absolute beginners in public speaking and trains them to be some of the best competitive debaters in the world.

The purpose of this resource is not to teach individuals how to debate competitively, but, rather, to teach individuals the **foundational skills** which are essential to learning the Art of Public Speaking.

There are three core parts to this Public Speaking course:

- **Speaking with Style**
- **Argument Construction**
- **Basics of Speech Writing**

There are two approaches to improving one's public speaking ability: **meta-debating and practice**. This hand-out explains at a meta-level what is required to make a good speech. It is essential that individuals have knowledge of the different components of a good speech before trying to improve upon their basic public speaking skills. Only when you can identify what 'makes' a good speech can you aspire to write and present a good speech yourself. However, simply theorising public speaking is insufficient if you hope to improve your skills. Within the realm of public speaking, the cliché "practise makes perfect" rings true.



Speaking with Style

Introduction

Style is a crucial factor in the overall persuasiveness, clarity and cogency of one's speech. The most effective leaders in any organisation are individuals who are brilliant communicators; one only needs to look at the public speaking skills of virtually every Head of State in the world to see this to be the case.

From the outset it should be noted that speaking styles can vary drastically between different individuals. Irrespective, speakers with vastly different speaking styles can be equally persuasive and, in turn, equally stylistic. No two speakers will have an identical speaking style. It is also important to note that, when considering what counts as good style, you must at all times be asking yourself the question 'who is my audience?'

The aim of this guide is not to teach a **single good speaking** style. Rather, it is to highlight the various elements which help form the **unique** speaking style everyone naturally has. Once you have come to learn the various elements of speaking style you should be able to identify possible weaknesses in your own style and target the specific areas you wish to improve upon. These elements, taken as a collective, form the **Style Skeleton** which individuals should be aware of when addressing an audience.

The Style Skeleton

- Volume
- Speed
- Engagement
- Performance
- Variation

The following section will deal with each of the elements of the Style Skeleton in turn.

Volume

There are three important points to consider about the volume at which you speak:

- **Your first priority is to ensure you can be heard.** Variations in volume, loud or quiet, can have certain rhetorical effect. That said, the **most** important function of volume is trivially simple: you must ensure your audience can hear what you are saying.
- **You must be aware of the effect of your volume upon your tone.** Volume conveys to your audience what the **tone** of your speech is. As a consequence, if you do decide to vary your volume, you should also note that you are varying your tone.
- **Variations in volume are key tools of emphasis.** The most important stylistic device to emphasise a particular point is to vary the volume of your speech. Raising your voice at a crucial point, for instance the conclusion, draws specific attention to the importance of what you are saying and makes it more persuasive. The converse, however, is also true; if you speak at a consistently loud volume, you are unlikely to be able to rely upon this technique.

Speed

There are two important points to consider about the speed at which you speak:

- **Ensure that you speak at a reasonable pace.** It is a basic fact of human biology that we believe we speak slower than we, in fact, do. As a consequence, individuals usually speak **incredibly fast** (especially when they are nervous) rather than at a reasonable pace which is easy to follow. At the Union, we often **record our own speeches and listen to them** to overcome this simple defect in style.
- **Speed is vital to keep your audience engaged.** The speed at which you speak must fit the subject matter which you are discussing. Altering your speed at the right time will highlight important elements of your speech. For example, after giving a vital statistic you can briefly pause in order to allow the audience to digest its significance.

Engagement

A speaker must ensure that they engage with their audience. You must make them feel the speech you are delivering is tailored to them rather than simply organised ramblings of things you are interested in. There are various ways in which this can be done:

- **Make eye contact.** By looking an individual in the eye and making eye contact, you are much more likely to get him or her to listen to what you are saying. Eye contact can be daunting but it is vital in order to hold a listener's attention. If the audience is a sufficient distance away such that it would not be obvious, it can help to focus upon the exact middle between the eyes of audience members, rotating between different individuals.
- **Note taking.** One of the easiest ways in which to ensure you engage is to write your speech in note form rather than as an exact transcript of the words you intend to say. As a consequence, you will not rely on the paper in front of you for your content but naturally become more conversational, and thus more engaging.
- **Do not go into 'automatic mode'.** Often, individuals who are giving a presentation simply remain in 'automatic mode' and aim simply to get through their presentation without engaging either with their own material or with their intended audience. You should ensure you avoid doing this by recognising the audience's presence. Simply pausing for a question can be enough to ensure your audience is kept on their toes.

Performance

Any speech in in any context involves an element of performance. At the end of the day it is very unlikely that the way in which an individual presents him or herself during a speech will be the way in which that individual actually acts in his/her everyday life. As a consequence, you must recognise that there is an element of performance in public speaking. Here is a short, non-exhaustive list of some dos and don'ts:

- Do not sway whilst speaking.
- Keep your feet planted firmly into the ground whilst speaking. One slightly eccentric yet oddly effective strategy adopted by some of our members is to stick a small piece of Blu-tac between the sole of your shoe and the floor as a kinaesthetic cue to stop moving.
- Although gestures used in moderation can be helpful in emphasising specific important moments, excessive gesticulating is off-putting and will detract from your overall point.
- Do not slouch.
- Do not look at one specific point throughout the entire duration of your speech.
- Do not use filler words such as "umm" or "ahhh". These are vocal tics useful in conversation in order to make it clear that you have not finished speaking, but they have no place in public speaking, serving only to make you appear

unprepared and unconfident. Consider simply pausing instead, which makes you appear more in control of your material and of your audience.

- Do not ‘up-speak’ (this is when you finish a statement as if it were a question).

It is impossible to come up with an exhaustive list of things individuals can or cannot do to enhance the performance element of their presentation. A simple exercise, as noted above, is to record your speech with a video or audio recorder, and appraise the performance as if it had been delivered by somebody else.

Variation

In general, there are two types of variation of style you should be aware of:

- **Variation between presentations.** What is demanded in terms of “style” from a particular speaker will be heavily dependent on what the situation demands. At all times a speaker should be asking themselves not only who they are trying to persuade, but also what sort of idea they are trying to persuade their audience of. A presentation to your colleagues and a presentation to your clients may therefore require you to adopt entirely different styles. As a consequence, you must ensure that you vary your style **between** presentations accordingly.
- **Variation within presentations.** As has already been explored above, variation is vital within presentations in order to induce certain reactions amongst your audience. For instance, in attempting to convey the importance of a given event, a speaker might wish to speak in an excited, enthusiastic manner, but when a speaker is describing an unhappy situation in war-torn Somalia, they may choose a more sombre, reflective tone.

Implementation

When planning your speech, it is essential not just to structure your arguments (what you are going to say), but to structure your style-skeleton (how you are going to say it).

One of the most effective ways in which you can control your use of the various style components identified above is to deploy a style map. These can act as pointers to yourself to remind you to change your styles at the appropriate moment. To develop a style map for any given speech, simply write next to each point in your speech which elements of the style skeleton you will deploy when saying that particular point).

Upon deciding to deploy a particular stylistic element, you must ensure that you strike the correct balance. A speaking style that is constantly changing is as bad as

one that stays the same indefinitely. The power of stylistic effects diminishes with excessive use.

The importance of understanding the various components of a stylistic speech is very simple: if you can identify the elements of a speech that makes it worthwhile to listen to you can ensure that your presentations deploy the relevant stylistic conventions to make your speech excellent to listen to.



Fundamentals of Argumentation

Introduction

In British Parliamentary Debating, arguments need to be able to persuade any person from any background or country in the world, no matter what their political outlook, life experience or preconceptions. In order for this to be possible speakers, must ground their arguments on logic and full explanation.

In the boardroom or in front of a corporate group this is no different. When communicating a message or putting forward a proposal, a speaker should **never** take an analytical step or factual detail for granted unless one can safely assume that **any ordinary intelligent person** would accept the statement as **self-evidently true**.

Most statements will not be self-evidently true. As a consequence, when communicating in public settings, what individuals are doing is constructing arguments, whether they realise it or not. The aim of this section is to explain the **Fundamentals of Argumentation**.

It is important to remember what arguments are not before understanding what arguments are:

- Arguments need not be aggressive, or aggressively delivered.
- Arguments need not be confrontational.
- Arguments are not simply a series of premises or unconnected statements.

To put it simply, an argument is a clear, delineable chain of logic which would be intelligible to a reasonable and ordinary observer. There are three things all arguments require:

- Justified premises
- Effective conclusions
- Sufficiently explicated **logical links** between the premises and conclusions

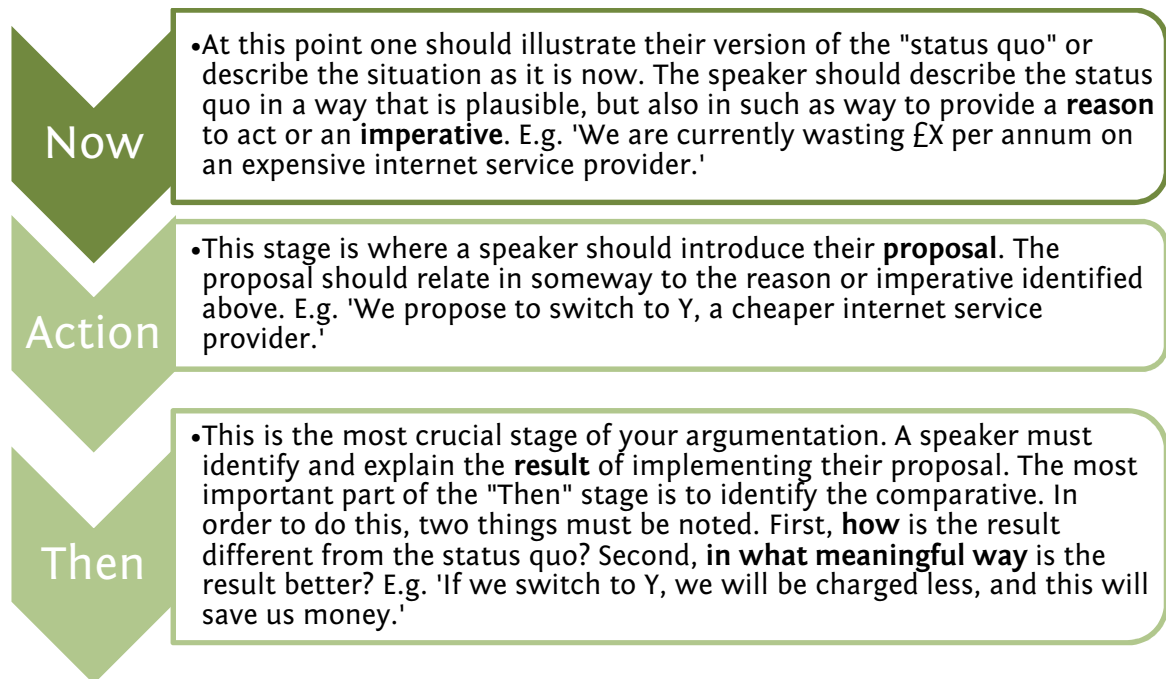
The aim of this document is to provide a structure of argumentation which individuals can deploy in **any** setting.

There are three complementary models of argumentation which we will examine in detail:

- “Now – Action – Then”
- “REAL” (Reason – Evidence – Analysis – Link)
- “I – A – E” (Idea – Analysis – Evidence)

After examining the different models of argumentation, we will examine in detail the best ways to deploy evidence, examples and observations in public speeches.

Now – Action – Then



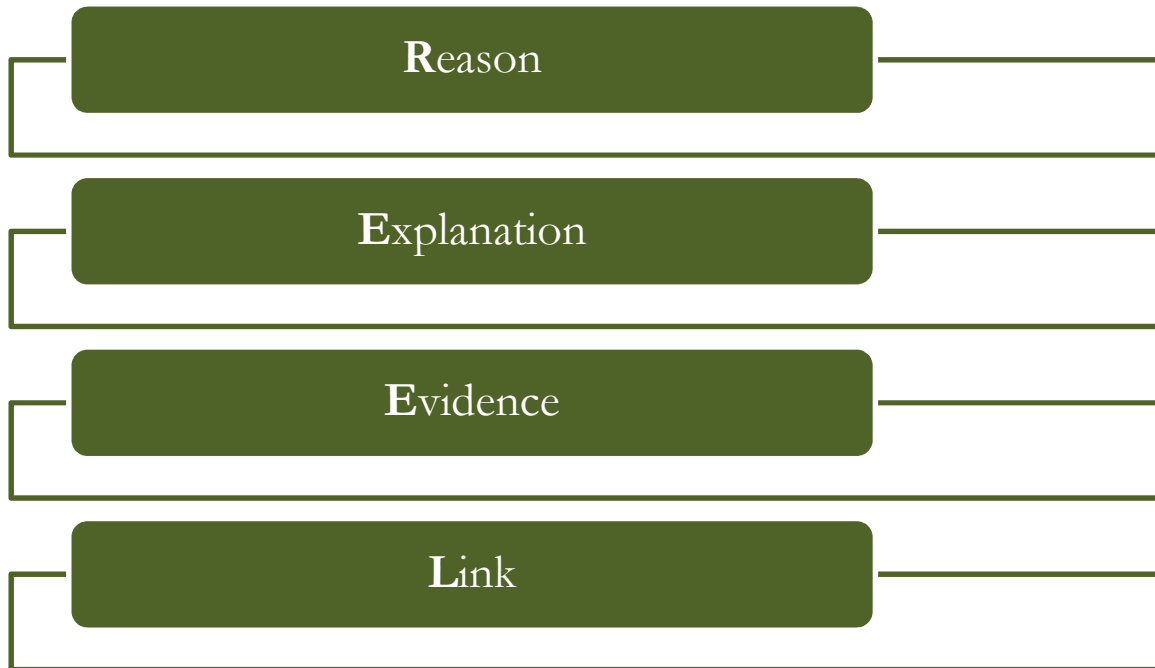
Pitfalls to avoid

The NAT model of argumentation is elegant and simple, but only the **beginning** of a serious **argumentative process**.

- Individuals who wish to deploy **NAT** must ensure they engage in **premise justification**. The “Now” or “Status quo” or “reason” to act may often be complex. Often, especially in a corporate setting, individuals must be ready to **fully explain** their evidence for what the given status quo is.
- **NAT** can often struggle to accommodate **complex argumentation**. In order to get around this problem, speakers must adopt more advanced **substructures** within their speech. To engage in this form of argumentation two things are required:
 - Multiple justifications for each stage (N-A-T)
 - Multiple steps **between** each state.

- **NAT cannot accommodate** non-consequentialist argumentation. Although it is unlikely that in a boardroom or corporate setting a speaker would wish to make a principled or normative claim, it should nevertheless be noted that non-consequentialist argumentation must operate outside the model of **NAT**.

REAL Arguments



The **REAL** method of argumentation is often the best way to incorporate more in one's claims, irrespective of the subject matter.

Elements

- **Reason.** This is simply a headline to the particular line of analysis. In order for this to be most persuasive, think of this as a politician's tagline. A listener should be able to listen to your **reason** and intuitively feel there is some important imperative to act.
- **Explanation.** To find an explanation for your reason, ask yourself the simple question 'why is this a good reason?' At this point, one can **incorporate** the **NAT** model of argumentation **within** the **REAL** model. Whilst deploying **REAL**, one can fall back to the simple **NAT** methodology at the explanation stage to provide further 'teeth' to claims and arguments. Take, for instance, this very simple argument based on legalising prostitution (N.B. Whilst legalising prostitution will **never** be the subject of boardroom discussions or corporate presentations, the example will show how relatively intuitive claims can be ordered to make a comprehensive argument):
 - **Reason:** legal prostitution will be safer than illegal prostitution.

- **Explanation:**
 - **Now:** At this moment in time prostitution is illegal and is deregulated. As a consequence of this illegality it occurs naturally, without any controlling measures, from the state.
 - **Action:** If something is legal it can be regulated. Removing criminality from prostitution could result in state-regulated brothels in which there is compulsory contraception, legal protection and other such safeguards.
 - **Then:** If there is a legal prostitution sector, there will be no incentive for prostitutes to operate in the more dangerous black market. As a consequence, the dangerous black market in prostitution will come to an end.

- **Evidence:** An Australian study shows STIs were 80 times higher in the illegal sector of prostitution than in comparable legal sectors.

- **Link:** If the government can make something safer for all then it should.

- **Evidence.** Examples are extremely important. At this stage, individual speakers should deploy relevant pieces of evidence in order to be as persuasive as possible. For effective use of evidence, please see page 11.

- **Link.** The link should explain why the reason you put forward and the arguments you have given are relevant to the wider claim you are making. Links are often evaluative statements appealing to some intuition. In most corporate settings, your link will often be “**we will make more money this way**” or “**this way our business will stay afloat**”. Irrespective, it is stylistically appealing and important from a listener’s point of view if a speaker does not leave it up to imagination, instead articulating the relevant **link** to their argument.

I-A-E Arguments

Irrespective of the sophistication of the models presented above, good arguments are inherently lucid. Each individual may in very different contexts deploy, either consciously or unconsciously, their own varied form of argumentation. Perhaps, you as an individual speaker prefer to speak without the rigidity of the models presented above.

The IAE model of argumentation is the most flexible form of argumentation. It presupposes the following:

The Anatomy of an Argument contains the following three things: an Idea, Analysis and Evidence.

The central tenet of this ‘model’ of argumentation is that, so long as an individual presents an idea substantiated with some form of analysis with the use of evidence, he or she will be presenting a cogent argument.

- **Idea.** The Idea refers to the concept or proposition that an individual has set out to prove. It might be a simple assertion that a given idea is good, or that an evaluative statement is on the balance of probabilities correct.
- **Analysis.** Analysis is the **mechanism** whereby you can explain why your central proposition is correct or logical or reasonable to the ordinary and intelligible listener. There are various things one ought to bear in mind:
 - In the vast majority of contexts it will be relevant to ask yourself the following: “Why does my proposition/idea/contention/proposal lead to X bad/good outcome”; “why is X good/bad?” and “why is X important in the context of competing considerations?”
 - When presenting a premise, you must challenge the premise by asking yourself “why?” Please note, that too often, speakers at the analysis stage of their argument in answering the question “why?” resort to “evidence” rather than a cogent and reasoned response. Of course, there are many scenarios where one’s analysis is best illustrated by evidence rather than logic, but, a speaker should ensure there is as much logic in one’s analysis as possible before resorting to evidence, for argument in which an audience may actively participate consistently proves more persuasive.
 - Irrespective of what is stated above, at some point a speaker must stop asking “why”. Note Agrippa’s Trilemma, a philosophical term stressing

the purported impossibility to prove an absolute truth. The aim therefore when speaking is to exhaust a reasonable level of analysis before relying on purely epistemic criteria to prove one's point (i.e. through observation and examples).

The importance of the I-A-E model of argumentation is not to provide a structure *per se* for one's speech, but rather to identify the three elements of the anatomy of an argument. If one uses these three elements in a clear fashion, he/she will be presenting a clear and cogent speech.

Evidence – Examples – Observations

From the outset, the use and relevance of examples when presenting an argument is perhaps the most controversial part of speechwriting and argument construction. For instance, in the NAT model of argumentation there is no mention of evidence whatsoever. Many individuals can construct arguments without recourse to evidence, examples or observations.

Examples are **not** free standing entities which **embody** an argument itself, but, rather, they are an extremely useful tool which should be used to **validate one's reasoning**.

The relationship between arguments and examples can be explained as follows: whilst **arguments embody** reason, logic and theory to explain a given state of affairs, **evidence, examples and observations explain and elucidate** instances of how your model of reasoning which you present has actually come to pass.

- **Examples ought to validate your reasoning.** For this reason it is natural that they should often follow your analysis rather than precede it. This is not an absolute rule and there may be occasions where it is more appropriate to start with an example.
- **Examples, evidence and observations must be relevant.** Relevant examples may be either directly relevant or indirectly relevant.
 - For directly relevant examples, a speaker should not have to explain the connection between the relevance of the example and the analysis which surrounds it.
 - For indirectly relevant examples, a speaker should spend time explaining the connection between the relevance of the example and the analysis which surrounds it. Often this is done by drawing an analogy and explanation of context.

- **Do not overburden your speech with examples.** For instance, a presentation which contains lists of statistics will never be persuasive and often cause the listener to be disengaged.
- **Prioritise your use of examples.** There may be many different examples which support your reasoning and point of view. In choosing the 'best' examples consider the following:
 - Examples from recent history are generally more relevant than examples from the past
 - Hypothetical examples are generally the least relevant and least persuasive examples
 - Similarly useless are personal anecdotes
 - Case studies which aim to prove a hypothesis are most useful when the relevant study recognises that it is not absolutely true; quantified doubt is often much more reassuring than case studies which claim absolute proof
- **Know the source of all examples used.** A speaker must be ready to substantiate the credibility of any examples.



Basics of Speech Writing

Once one has come to terms with the two most important facets of public speaking (Style and Argument Construction), the next thing you need to learn is how to write a speech or presentation.

Every individual will have their own unique approach to this task. Like style, there is no one standard form or structure which can be deployed in every context.

That being said there should be three elements of speech writing everyone should consider:

- **Note Taking**
- **Taglines**
- **Synchronisation with Visual Aids**

Note Taking

As mentioned above, speeches should not be written out in full or to the letter. The best presentations are ones where individuals use cue-cards or write in bullet-point form on an A4 sheet.

One of the questions an individual new to public speaking often asks is “what should I write in my notes?” It is difficult to give a general answer to this question. Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to consider the function of note taking: notes should be statements which can point you in the right direction for the next segment of your speech.

Another test an individual can use to test whether or not their notes are sufficiently robust is whether or not upon looking at your notes, an individual who had not written the speech would be able to “fill in the gaps” in logic between one statement and the next. Do not leave too much to memory.

Taglines

It is extremely important to flag the important points in your presentation. Often presentations are split into various sections (different proposals or points). In order to make these proposals more memorable, take some time to think of a tagline which describes the point you wish to make.

The best way to conceive of a tagline is to think of sound-bites politicians often use to describe their policies. It can be a short one sentence which summarises the point of your discussion.

Using taglines in this fashion keeps your speeches structured. The best way to deploy taglines is in the following simple manner:

- Use a tagline to introduce a point and inform your audience that this will be the next subject matter of discussion
- Discuss the subject matter
- Use the tagline in the conclusion of your discussion of the subject matter to reinforce what you have just discussed

The above is another formulation of the classical illustration of the structure of a speech: “Say what you are going to say, say it, and then tell your audience what you have said”.

Taglines are also perfect for introducing and summarising your speech so that your audience feel that your speech is structured, and therefore more persuasive.

Whilst a tagline may prove a rhetorically-attractive label for your argument, remember to ensure that the actual content of your speech fits into one of the models of argumentation outlined in the section above (**NAT, REAL** or **IAE**).

Synchronisation with Visual Aids

In more recent years, perhaps the most important part of speech writing is to your presentation corresponds with any visual aids you are using, most often a Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation.

There are various points to note:

- **Track your speech.** Ensure that when practising your presentation you do so whilst tracking the changes in the slides. If you are using a slide-show it looks unprofessional if the subject matter of your discussion does not correspond to the slide your audience will be looking at.
- **Do not let visual aids overpower you.** If you are standing in front of a large screen, it can often detract from you and from whatever you have to say. Take this into consideration when thinking about the particular style you wish to adopt in your presentation. For instance, if your presentation is particularly visual, you may have to adopt a very commanding tone and volume in order to ensure attention remains on you and the substance of your presentation at all times.

- **Do not read out from the PowerPoint presentation.** If the content of the PowerPoint presentation is identical to the content of your speech, you simply undermine the intelligence of your audience if you read out from a large screen what the members of your audience will most probably be able to read themselves. For this reason, ensure the content of your presentation and speech are **complementary** (discussed below).
- **Have complementary content in your visual aids and speech.** To avoid reading from the presentation, ensure that the content of the visual aids and speech are complementary in content. The best balance is often to have a **summary** of the different segments of your proposal on the screen whilst the actual content of your speech explains in much greater detail the specific points you wish to make. In addition, it is helpful if you use the PowerPoint for elements of your speech your audience are unlikely to remember such as statistics, but devoid of the argument you have constructed and for which they are a vehicle. This will allow the audience to listen to your argument, safe in the knowledge that the facts and figures will be waiting for them on the handout.



The Art of Public Speaking

This guide to the Art of Public Speaking is supposed to provide individuals with sufficient knowledge such that they can improve upon their public speaking skills.

Public speaking is an extremely complex craft that has various elements to it. Upon familiarising yourself with these elements throughout the guide, it should be noted that there is a wide discretion afforded to individuals to find the type of Public Speaking that suits them.

Everything from argumentation construction to speaking with style to writing your speech down on paper must be done in the way in which you are most comfortable.

At the meta-level, public speaking and persuasion have discrete core components which are readily-identifiable. However, when put into practice, all your listeners will hear is a single speech. The best way to improve, to put it simply, is get better speech by speech.