

Sections

All (76)

Career insight (48)

Hiring insight (42)

11 knockout tips to ace public speaking

Published: Aug 22, 2017



Michael Cummings is the principal

of Tate/Cummings, which provides consulting and other support services for associations, nonprofits, and those who serve them. He is the Immediate Past Chair of the American Society of Association Executives' Communication Council, and speaks frequently on a wide range of topics, including employer branding strategies, volunteer management, and inspiring workplace creativity.

Public speaking is a powerful skill with a wide range of applications—including pitching new business, meeting with team members, or interviewing for a job. In my history of presenting and speaking, moderating and facilitating, training, and more—close to 1,000 engagements overall—I've picked up a few important tips. Some are more relevant to delivering speeches or

conference room presentations, but all will help you prep for the face-to-face (or face-to-faces) interview that stands between you and your next job, contract, or partnership.

1. **Manage expectations—well in advance.** Whether it is a preliminary conversation or the final round of negotiation, make sure you have a solid handle on what the participants are expecting to gain from the meeting.
2. **Once there, clarify the purpose of the meeting and its time limits.** It's not only good manners, you may be surprised by the feedback you get—I once met with a CEO whose expectations were entirely different from the ones his direct report had given me, but with a few questions I was able to adjust my focus.
3. **Introduce yourself—but don't overdo it.** It's not about you, it's about them: What they need to know, and what they want to ask. Four or five facts about you up front is more than adequate.
4. **Know your audience—but read the room.** As much as you should try to anticipate your audience, also rely on in-the-moment observations: body language, behavior, and tone of voice. Don't be overly jovial unless it's called for: Business is serious, people's time is valuable, and it's better to come across as a little too formal than a little too casual.
5. **Have a central purpose, but don't be afraid to go off on a brief tangent.** If someone has a question or comment, explore it right away, without stalling. Any engagement is worth attending to! However...
6. **Know your stuff.** Really. While "trusting your gut" and emotional intelligence are essential, they do not take the place of research and preparation. If you don't know the answer to something, don't guess or bluff. There is nothing wrong with telling someone you will get back to them.
7. **Don't be needy.** If you get a positive response to something you say, acknowledge it, but don't keep driving the conversation back to the same place. That

can come across as desperate, like begging for a compliment.

8. **Listen, and respond genuinely.** Let people talk and engage. Don't be so anxious that you cannot let a great conversation develop.
9. **Practice.** Practice alone. Practice with friends, family, or your work team. Practice again and again. This will help with many of the previous tips, and help you avoid over-sharing or rambling.
10. **Play nice.** Do not indulge your internal psychodramas and do not engage in passive-aggressive behavior with others at the meeting: No competing, no contradicting. You will lose your audience immediately if that happens.
11. **Present a clear summation and ask for next steps.** If you're teaching or presenting, reiterate takeaways; if you're making a pitch—and especially if pitching yourself—ask about follow-up activities and get dates on the calendar.

Bonus tip: Memorize the mission of the organization—verbatim. This also goes for anyone applying for a job or pitching a potential client or partner: If a mission-related question comes up, you do not want to be caught with that the deer-in-headlights look.

Be inspired! Receive fresh hiring insights monthly. [Sign up now.](#)



◀ [Back to listing](#)