

A Useful Guide to Public Speaking



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Published by Pansophix Online
Sterling House, 10 Wheatcroft Business Park,
Landmere Lane, Edwalton, Nottingham, NG12 4DG

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This edition published February 2013 (a)

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ISBN 978-1-906460-36-5

Introduction

To be invited to stand up and give a speech is an honour. However many people cannot help but feel a moment of trepidation and others just cold harsh fear. It is said that speaking in public is one of the top ten fears we have along with flying and ending up in a pit full of creepy crawlies. Not sure if this has been tested out though.

However, you may worry about making a fool of yourself, about forgetting what to say, or not finding the right word. But it is normally the fear which causes the distress not what might actually happen. For your speech to be enjoyable you need to be fully prepared, well practised and confident. This Useful Guide will help you to achieve that.

There are a number of reasons why this Useful Guide might be helpful for you. It is suitable if you are going to be presenting your business at a networking meeting, or sharing useful information to help others. If you are an employee you may be asked to make a presentation to the board or to a potential client. You may be reading this because you have been invited to be a guest speaker or after dinner speaker.

Someone once said:

“A speech is like having a baby – easy to conceive hard to deliver.”

I want to show you in this Useful Guide that by using the tips and techniques here, and by practising regularly up to the big day, you will be able to speak entertainingly and confidently and hold your audience enthralled.

The Useful Guide is easy to use. It is designed to allow you to build up your speech or presentation from start to delivery. Each section is broken down into a series of topic areas which you need to cover when preparing and delivering a speech. You can work your way through carrying out the exercises, or dip into those sections which cover your particular interest.

If you intend to use the Useful Guide as a workbook here is a 'Blue Peter style' list of things you will need which you may find helpful: a selection of different coloured pens, some hi-lighters, sticky notes, a few sheets of blank A4 paper and, if possible, a flipchart or a roll of paper.

This Useful Guide is not a quick fix option. If you are looking for that you will find ready-made speeches on the internet. These can be adapted (however clumsily) to fit your circumstances. Many people use them and I have had the misfortune all too often of hearing them.

To make a successful presentation or speech you need to put a lot of energy into the preparation. This includes confirming your objectives, researching your subject, arranging the order, preparing a script or notes and then practising until you feel confident. If you work your way through this Useful Guide, follow the rules and above all allow yourself enough time you will enjoy the process. Then you can be sure you will give the speech of your life to an attentive and happy audience.

Charlotte Mannion

March 2011

There are several exercises in the Useful Guide. You can either print out the relevant page and write on the printout or, if you prefer, you can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#) and do the exercises on your computer.

It's all in the planning

The first step in building your speech is to plan it. Like any key task it is more likely to be successful if you take time to plan. This includes deciding on your objective for the speech, the structure, and the timing. As with any public speaking you need to be clear what your purpose is and write it down to remind you. You may think your purpose is obvious, but is it? Is the purpose of your speech to excite your listeners? Is it to encourage them to buy from you? Or maybe motivate them to sell more for you? Is it to educate? Or to entertain?

So think about your purpose and jot down your objective for making your speech.

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Next consider these four questions and list your answers here as a guide for you.

1) Who are you speaking to?

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2) How much do the audience already know about your subject?

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3) How long do you have?

.....

4) What do you want the audience to do as a result?

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.....

Your answers will give you a framework into which you will place your speech or presentation.

Once you agree your purpose you need to consider the structure. Unlike when we read a book an audience cannot go back and check the beginning of the sentence should they lose concentration, so guiding them through a clear structure helps them to concentrate and understand your message.

I would recommend you cover three main topic areas. The brain copes well with threes, hence 'Three Blind Mice', 'Three Billy Goats Gruff', 'Three Musketeers', 'Three Little Maids Are We'. This helps you too. Because your brain is so comfortable with threes it makes it much easier to remember your key points. You don't need copious notes by your side and you don't have to memorise chunks of speech. This approach makes delivery of your speech a real breeze.

What are your three key topic areas? List them here. You may want to change them later but this gives a good starting point.

1)

2)

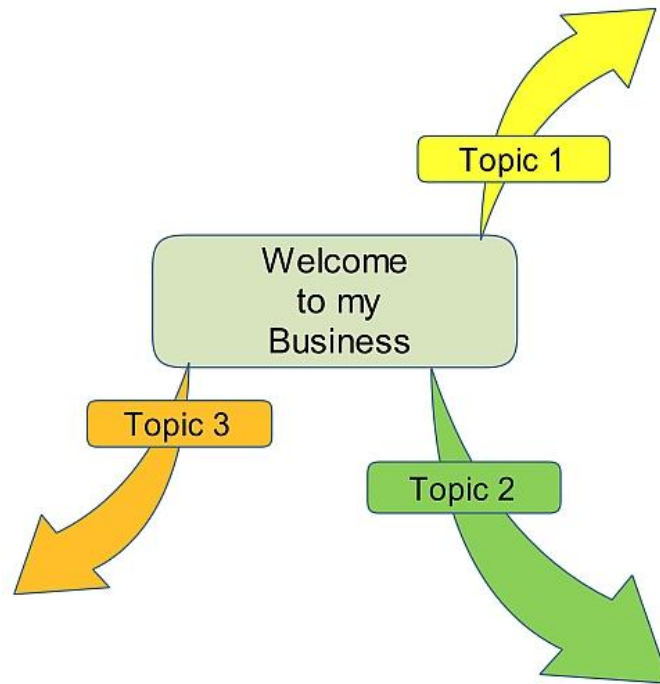
3)

These then are your key messages. We now need to brainstorm some content. Your brain doesn't work well with long linear lists so it is better to use a visual map or spider diagram.

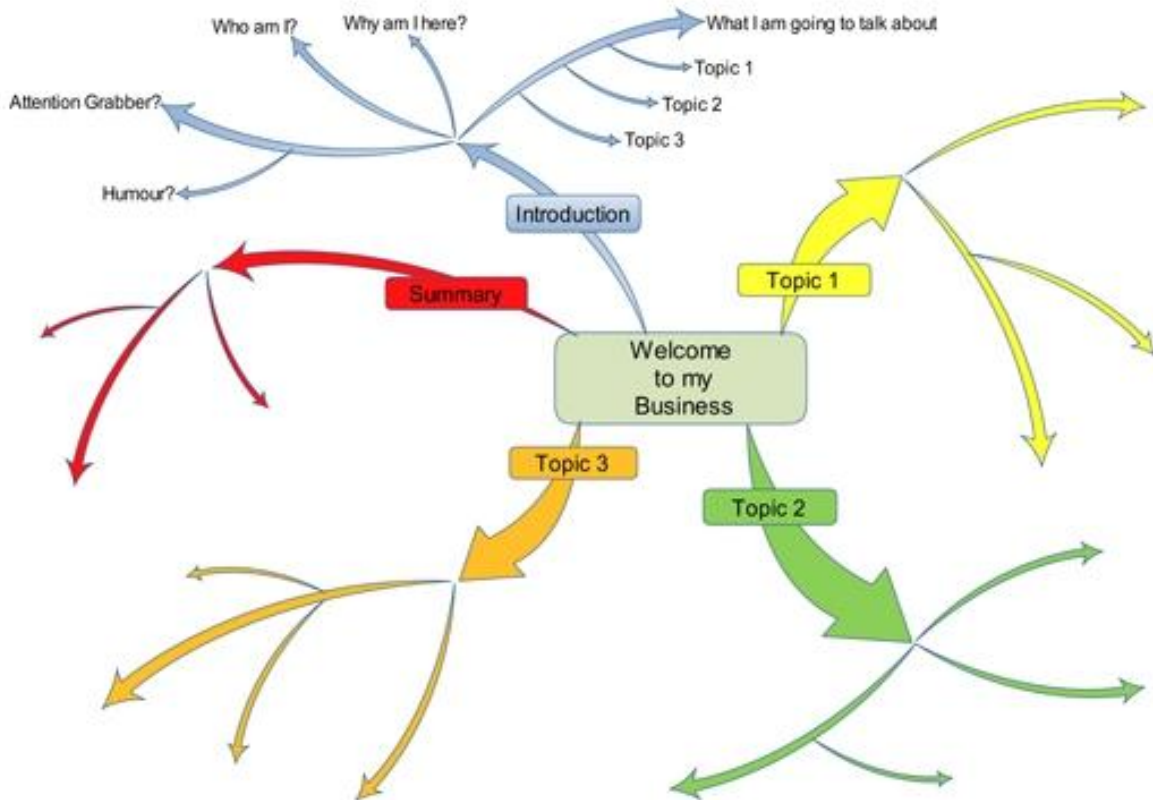
Capturing your wild thoughts on a visual map allows your imagination to soar. This is a brain storming exercise and you should not at this stage try to select the final material. By using a large sheet of A4 paper in landscape mode and some coloured pens (the brain likes colour) you will be able to make your own mind map. You must add everything you think of however wild or silly.

Mind you the best ideas do not necessarily come while staring at a blank sheet of paper. They are much more likely to leap into your mind when you are in the shower, watching or playing football or driving on the motorway. So, if this happens, imagine the idea in colour or as a picture and slotted into your mind map. This technique ensures you will remember it and you can then add it in when you have a pen in your hand.

On the next page you will find examples of a mind map. This concept was created by Tony Buzan, the author of a number of books on the subject and who is fascinated with brain friendly tools to aid learning. A mind map or spider diagram works with your brain to capture thoughts and ideas without the need (at this stage) to order them. If you are familiar with right and left brain theory, this will make complete sense to you. The theory is that the right side of the brain handles creativity and ideas and the left side is logical and analytical. If you try to think of new ideas and thoughts, and at the same time order and structure them, the two 'sides' are competing and neither side achieves its goal. Mind mapping will keep the creative part going strongly and imaginatively. In the next chapter we will let the logical and analytical part of your brain have its turn.



From this picture you can add in anything which occurs to you about that topic by branching out from each topic area as demonstrated below



Each map will be personal to you, so feel free to branch out in your own style. This could be using clouds or stars; you could draw little pictures rather than have all words. You do whatever suits you. The principle is the same when you are gathering material for your speech. Remember to research among your staff or fellow business people for ideas, thoughts and anecdotes which will be helpful to you. All you need to do then is to add them to your topic branches.

This is a good time to think about ways you might enhance your speech with supporting tools and interesting visuals. Any kind of prop, handled well, helps you in keeping your audience's attention and if you are nervous you will be pleased to know it takes the spotlight off you.

Illustrating your talk

I cannot write this section without mentioning PowerPoint. However although it can be a useful tool to enable you to illustrate your key points it is far more often used to prop up the whole presentation. Not for nothing has the mantra Death by PowerPoint been bandied around.

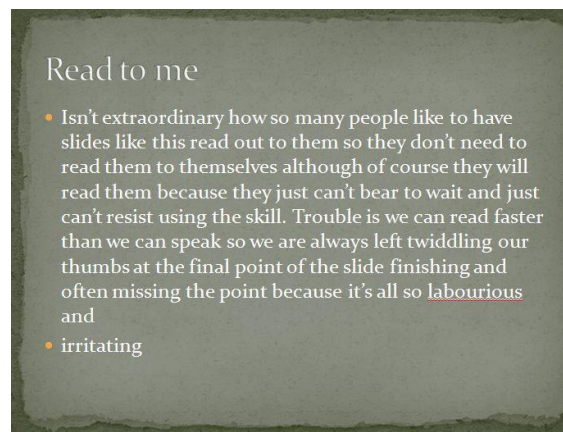
PowerPoint is fine if it's used to demonstrate a point, usually with a carefully chosen illustration but not please with a random piece of clip art. However, far too many speakers start off with the template and begin to write straight into it without being clear about the purpose or objective. What is often surprising is everyone knows what is wrong with using PowerPoint in this way yet they still persevere with it. I would be very rich if I had a pound for every time the presenter starts off by saying this isn't going to be Death by PowerPoint and then proceeds to do exactly that.

So before looking at how to illustrate your talk or presentation let's look at what you **shouldn't** do.

1) Use bullet points as a guide to what you want to say.



2) Put too many words on a slide and then read it to your audience



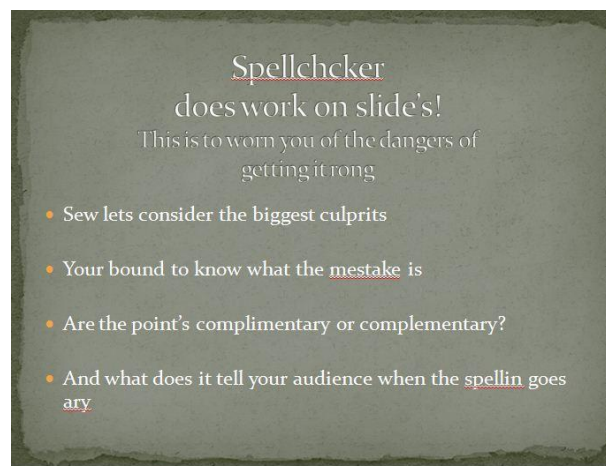
3) Use graphs and charts which cannot be read by the audience



4) Mess around with fonts and clever animations



5) Forget to check the spelling



One of the most obvious reasons for such a presentation to fail is that the slides are often written to try and meet the needs of more than one audience. When you are using the slides to illustrate your talk or presentation they may mean very little afterwards if used as handouts, and worse, completely meaningless to someone who wanted a copy of the slides as they couldn't attend the talk. It is far better to address the different audiences more appropriately than try to do a one size fits all. So you could produce an A4 sheet with your main points as a handout for those who wish to have reminders of the presentation and one page summary covering your main points for those who missed it. Then you can leave the slides to entertain and inform on the day.

There is a quote often used which says 'a picture paints a thousand words' which means, I think, that people understand more if they get a fresh perspective of the presentation through another medium.

People with concerns about figures may be able to understand your points if they can see them in a graph or chart. Others can relate to size if it's compared to something they know or can picture. For example 'the number of potential customers for our business would fill the Albert Hall'. If you have a 'call to action' why not illustrate the slide with a picture of a telephone beside the number; a computer next to the email address; a screen dump of the home page of your website. If you have small products pass them around the audience, larger items can be produced on posters to decorate the walls, white boards and flipcharts can be used to capture instant thoughts and sudden noises or music at the right moment can also be used to keep your audience alert and involved. The more creative and imaginative you can be the more the audience will appreciate your presentation.

OK now with the preparation completed we can start the process of putting it all together.

Putting it together

Once you are happy you have done all the planning and preparation you can, you need to move on to putting your speech together in a coherent and easy to follow way. You should have enough ideas on your mind map to work with. Now you can sort through them and discard the less appealing or maybe less entertaining ones.

Take this mass of ideas and divide them into the three key areas. You may decide that the original topic areas you thought of are irrelevant and that you want to go in a different direction. That is fine, because now we need to make structure out of chaos.

Take a large sheet of paper. A roll of paper is ideal if you don't have access to a flipchart. Look at your three topics and then capture the thoughts onto sticky notes. You only need a keyword or two on the sticky notes to remind you of the story, joke, or the point you wish to emphasise. Next move your sticky notes around on your paper until you are satisfied with the order, you are convinced

you have a good flow, and that all your points fit in and are relevant. Make sure you include the key words for your opening and your ending.

Beginning your speech

The success of your speech does tend to ride on a good opening. OK that sounds scary but you know that people decide whether they like someone in the first few seconds of meeting and it's the same for speeches so we need to get the audience on board fast.

Your opening needs to be attention grabbing. As with an advertisement or an article in a magazine where it is the headline which makes you decide to read on so it is with engaging with the audience to encourage them to listen.

To get their attention in the very first part of your speech, you may consider telling a joke, but only as long as it is fresh and true. If you are concerned about using and delivering humour, you will find lots of information to help starting on page 15.

When you first stand up to speak, your audience needs time to acclimatise to your voice so they can understand you. They need time to follow your tone and pace and link in to your accent or way of delivery and they don't want to miss any of it. So scan them with your eyes and check you have their attention, then start to speak slowly and deliberately.

You may also have to cope with background noise and distractions. As an after dinner speaker or at a networking meeting you may have to contend with staff trying to clear plates just as you get up to speak. Hence you must make your first few words commanding and confident to instil quiet and raise awareness of your presence.

How can you make your opening memorable? Some people are confident of using humour effectively but for many of us, especially in the first few lines, it's a step too far. A relevant and amusing quote can often be used. It's easy to just look up quotations on-line and there are masses around covering almost every subject. Often just sharing how you feel in an entertaining way helps you to relate to your audience who are of course delighted it is you and not them having to speak!

The introduction should also be used to give some guidance to the audience and some structure to enable them to follow your reasoning. So, comments such as “during the next ten minutes I am going to tell you some very surprising secrets about my company” gives them both an understanding of the time you will be speaking and whets their appetite for some amusing anecdotes.

Jot down your ideas for opening statements here

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And ending.....

As with the beginning of a speech you need to signal the end. This allows you to reiterate the key moments and add your final signpost of words such as “finally” or “all it remains for me to say now.....” If you are stuck for an ending, look for a suitable and possibly humorous quotation about your topic to bring your speech to a clear conclusion.

Once you are happy with the order you should now add in your introduction and your finishing statement. This gives your speech some structure and helps the audience know where you are going and when you are finishing. A speech planned for fifteen minutes can be timed like this:

Introduction	3 minutes
Main part of speech	10 minutes
Ending	2 minutes

Now is the point when you read your notes, sticky notes or your mind map. Check your ideas for opening and for your finishing flourish and critically check it out:

- Is my opening statement attention grabbing? Does it reach out to the audience? Is it overtly linked to the occasion? Will it help the listeners to relax and look forward to my next words?
- Am I using memorable phrases or images? The English language is very beautiful, and is full of wonderful words. Am I using them well and conjuring up magical images in my listeners' minds?
- Am I speaking from the heart? Can people see how much I feel and care about the occasion through my words? Am I appealing to their thoughts, emotions, feelings and sense of humour?
- If I use props or visuals, will they add impact or detract from my speech?
- Does the humour help to get and keep the attention of my audience?
- Have I avoided all comments which could be described as racist, sexist, religious or culturally sensitive which may upset or annoy members of my audience?

Once you are happy with your answers we can move on to preparing our first draft. But first a few thoughts about using humour.

Using humour

Of course when you are first making a presentation of any type, or speech of any sort, people will often tell you to avoid humour because it is difficult to do. However if you want to hold attention you will be both entertaining and meaningful. So, let's look at dispelling the myth of 'it's too hard to do well' and concentrate on some techniques to help you be as funny as you want to be. Delivering funny lines is a special skill but it is possible to learn how to do it. The first thing to remember is that even stand up comedians have bad days and they'll also tell you the same joke goes down differently from audience to audience.

One golden rule is don't use old jokes. Even if you think the joke is fairly new there is bound to be somebody in the audience who has heard it before and there is nothing worse than hearing somebody recycling jokes. A colleague told me of the nightmare when he was a best man. He had found what he believed to be a very entertaining joke on the internet. Imagine his panic when the father of the bride stood up and used the same joke. He had just 30 minutes to mentally rewrite his whole speech.

There are lots of jokes available on the internet but if any of your audience have heard them before I am afraid they are going to fall on stony ground. If you can adapt them to your own circumstances and then change them enough to make them your own, you should get away with it. But please never use the expression "that reminds me of....." which really is the fastest way to kill a joke. Humour should sound spontaneous and uncontrived and should never be read aloud. This means your jokes and humorous stories need to be well known to you if you want them to be well received.

All your humorous comments need to be based around the topic you are addressing and bearing this in mind will help when you are preparing your speech in the first place. Beware of sexist, religious and racist remarks. A joke in the pub surrounded by your closest mates doesn't work so well in a larger venue and with a wider audience. Often your first joke will be successful if it's about you. It helps relax the audience and show them you don't mind people laughing even when you are the butt of the joke.

One way of making sure you understand how comic lines are delivered is to look to the masters and watch some of the stand up comedians. You won't need to go far as there is someone on television most nights. The modern stand up comedy performers usually just tell stories about day-to-day life and this really is what your presentation, your speech, is going to be all about. So, think of the situation and take notes and observe how they follow that through to the story's logical end.

You can learn so much about the delivery of humour from watching others. As you observe them you will notice where they use pauses for affect, where they emphasise a particular word, the way they pitch their voice up at the end of a sentence to make sure that you hear the punch line and know this is the end of this story.

In the English language we tend to drop words at the end of our sentences but when we are giving a speech we should be lifting it up at the end just to make

sure it is clear, can be heard and not disappear into an indistinct mumble. Mostly importantly, do not to rush the last line. You need to make sure that your punch line or the end of your story is as clear, if not clearer, than the beginning of the joke or the story that you are telling so don't throw away the laugh in your hurry to finish.

Now, looking at your humorous statement or punch line.

Write it out below and underline each word which needs to be emphasised to help you do it.

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.....

Look at where you feel the need to place the emphasis and practise it aloud until it feels comfortable. Putting the emphasis on the last word of your sentences will also help you to lift your voice rather than let it drop.

As we'll explore in more depth later another key skill is the art of pausing. Using judicious pauses helps enormously in comic delivery. Having your audience wait just for a millisecond sharpens their listening and brings their mind back to you if they were daydreaming. Silence from a speaker can be more effective than shouting to get people's attention.

Timing is crucial. Use emphasis and a mixture of pauses together with slowing down the delivery for the punch line. And remember don't panic if you don't get a huge laugh. You are not a comedian dependent on audience reaction. It's worth remembering that many of your listeners may be chuckling inside but offering only a smile to you.

Finally, if they do laugh out loud you must stop speaking immediately. Wait until you feel the laughter slowing down then take up your speech from the beginning of that sentence. Don't lose your humorous remarks by ploughing on regardless or they may stop laughing at your great humour and try to remain quiet so they can hear the rest.

The first draft

It is at this point that many people try to write out their speech. Really the only time this is necessary is when the presentation is later to be published in say a conference report. I am assuming you are unlikely to need or want to do that. If is a requirement you are better off recording the speech while rehearsing it and have someone type it up for you.

There are dangers when you try to commit your speech to the written word. The style between writing and speaking is completely different. When we speak we do so in short sentences and mostly using short words. However, something strange overtakes us when we write. Sentences get longer and we will often try to beef up the words and look for grander sounding ones. For example using 'approximately' instead of 'about'! Fine on paper but it makes your speech clumsy and makes you sound pompous.

All the clues for understanding the written word are in the layout. Punctuation is given to the reader through emphasis and pauses. Paragraphs are signposts as they start a new topic. When you are reading to yourself, these signals naturally point the way and keep you on track. If you lose the plot or don't immediately understand the message, you can return to the beginning of the sentence or paragraph and reread it.

However, listeners cannot do this. Your pauses and stop points in your speech will be signposts for them. We can announce our structure by using words like "firstly", "finally" etc at the start of our unseen paragraphs. Short sentences are much easier to grasp than long-winded ones. If you need to read out a list of items then you must give your audience the context first. For example Catherine, Anne, Jane, Ann, Kathryn and Katherine were all wives of Henry VIII. Without the written visual clue and the chance to return to the start of the sentence your brain will be busy thinking about what this might mean rather than listening attentively. You may even miss hearing the first name or two. So for the listener we need to signal that a list is coming and offer it in bite-sized chunks or short sentences. *"Henry VIII had six wives. Their names were*

Catherine..... etc” or even “Three of Henry VIII’s wives were called Catherine. Two more were called Anne and one was called Jane”. Three short sentences and no comment on the different spellings. The listeners may not know that and unless it is an important part of your message, there is no need for you to worry about it either.

In essence, if you want to write down your speech you need to think of it as a script, not an essay. So, write it in everyday language. For example, write “can’t” instead of “cannot”, “it’s” instead of “it is”. Type up your key points in the order you have chosen. Make sure it is in a large enough font to read comfortably from a distance, make sure the lines are double spaced and at least triple spaced between your paragraphs. Type out whole numbers. “*We are delighted to be welcoming one hundred and twenty two delegates here today*” not ‘122’ which is much harder to read out. Don’t let a sentence carry on to the next page of your notes and, of course, number your pages clearly in a large font. Do not fall into the trap of stapling them together which limits your approach if you have to make changes.

Once you have printed it off you can go carefully through your script highlighting important parts. Use coloured pens and hi-lighters to remind you where to put your pauses for dramatic effect or to take a breath. If you are concerned about timing, you can also highlight what has to be said versus what could be left out if you need to make up time.

There are, of course, alternatives to having a script and that is using cue cards, notes or other aide memoires and we’ll explore those in the next chapter.

Notes and memory joggers

How will I remember my speech? What will I do if my mind goes blank? These are the fears of most public speakers (not just you!) and so it is always wise to have some sort of aide memoire. Your audience does not expect you to be delivering a perfectly memorised speech. On the other hand they will be disappointed if you ‘read’ a story about your business venture when patently it is yours and you should know it well enough not to need notes.

There are a few rules about cue cards. They are best prepared on postcard sized cards and should contain simply ‘clue’ words. Your first one can include your opening statement but if it’s a joke, write down just enough words to get

you started. Your last note might be your final statement or closing comment. All the others in between are just headings to paragraphs/topics/stories. Use different coloured hi-lighters to make your notes easier to read at a glance. Topic in capitals and keywords in colour.

You should never read from the cards. They are there as a memory jogger only. When delivering your speech with notes, you should pause to read your clue words and then look up at your audience to continue your speech.

Don't fix your cards together. It makes them hard to turn over or move and bulky if you have them all in your hands at the same time. Make sure you number the cards clearly in large lettering so they can easily be put back in order if you should muddle them up or drop them before the speech.

Watch out too for any attempt at 'nervous' shuffling. I watched a speaker once in fascinated horror who, while waiting to speak, absentmindedly shuffled his cards. His face was a picture when he stood up to speak, glanced at what should have been his opening remark and realised what he had done. Each card came as a revelation to him and his structure and the key points were lost on the listeners.

However an advantage of having loose cards is you can choose to change your sequence, leave bits out or approach the stories from a different angle if it seems more suitable. You cannot do that if you are stuck with a script.

An alternative to using cards and my favourite is the mind map approach outlined in earlier. If you have all your speech reduced to keywords around your topic areas with both words and pictures, you will find it a perfect form of notes. Here you are working with your brain and as you prepare the map, your brain will become instantly familiar with it and will need very little prompting when you come to deliver your speech. We are much better at remembering pictures, colours, flow charts, stars and clouds than long linear lists. Of course another advantage is that you will literally need only one sheet of A4 paper to see you through the whole speech. It can sit on the table in front of you like a place mat, so you can occasionally glance at it for reassurance but it will not get in the way of your delivery.

Making a good impression

Even before you open your mouth your audience will have made many assumptions about you. They may have met you in the past, seen you around the office or at networking events. They may well be good friends of yours or have never seen you before in their life. One thing we do know is they will make up their mind very quickly whether they are going to enjoy your presentation.

So, how do you make that good first impression? You have a great opening organised, you know who your audience is and you have a neat humorous opening comment so what might get in the way? Well surprisingly, it might just be you. In any new situation especially if you are feeling a little nervous or tense, your body can send some very undermining signals to the audience. You may feel you are speaking confidently so everyone can hear you but your body is shouting out that you are feeling sick and uncomfortable. Research shows that when an audience is presented with the two conflicting messages it tends to believe the body signals over the words.

Body language is a very important part of the first impression you are going to make and you need to ensure that everything you do and say, the way you behave, reflects your presentation and your speech.

The first thing is to "**SMILE**". It is a very important sign showing friendship and yet when you are lacking in confidence we really find it very difficult to do. Smiling at the audience, smiling at the people who are watching and listening to you says "*I'm really, really happy to be here and I am really glad that you are here too*". Now, that probably isn't what you are feeling when you first get up to make a presentation but it is the signal that you want to send out.

Luckily some body language behaviours cannot be seen directly. Your audience can't actually see your heart beating away at nineteen to the dozen. They don't know that your stomach is churning and you wish you hadn't eaten so much at the meal. So if you don't really want to show on your face how your insides are behaving you must smile and give people a really good warm welcome. And the great thing is that people are programmed to respond to smiles with a smile too.

Follow up your smile with your eyes. Described often as the 'windows to the soul' your eyes 'speak' volumes. There are countless examples of how much we

appreciate eye contact. Expressions such as “*I could see it in his eyes*” tells us how much we value this form of communication. To be successful and to involve your audience you must give as much eye contact as you can. To do this you need to look at as many people as possible while you speak. However that does not mean darting erratically from one to the other but watching people’s faces as you look around the room. Be careful not to stay with the first welcoming face. This shuts out the rest of your audience and can often make the person you appear to be staring at feel very self-conscious. They’ll eventually start to think “why me?” You may well catch other people’s eyes so move on smoothly and you will see in their eyes and in their faces their warmth and their interest in what you are saying.

So here you are, you’re smiling, you are able to look out over your audience and give them eye contact. But there is one more trap for the unwary speaker. Under stress the body sometimes does very odd things. These are the irritating habits or mannerisms that in one to one conversations seldom surface. It’s your arms, your legs, your hands and your feet which all conspire to cause you maximum distress.

Don’t let your arms and your hands have a completely separate identity. They should only move when you want them to demonstrate a point for example. Remember, your hands are attached to your arms. If you are going to move them your arm and hand should do so together. Don’t move or flap your hands like a demented penguin.

Don’t pick things up which you then rattle. Keep your pen in your pocket, your watch on your wrist, your necklace undisturbed and your small change away from your pocket.

Don’t pick things up without a purpose. Your audience will be watching out for what you plan to do with it. I can remember one presentation I went to where the speaker held a glass of water throughout the whole of the speech. It was an important business speech but I became more interested in whether or not he was going to drink it rather than listening to his talk. In fact during his 45 minute presentation he didn’t actually take a single sip but I have no idea now what he was talking about!

The final parts of your body which you need to keep under control are your feet. Like your hands, these creatures on the ends of our legs seem to be stimulated by nerves and they act very strangely.

Perfectly normal people, once they are standing on their feet and about to speak in public, start hopping from one foot to the other. Or they take two steps forward and two steps back or they stand on one leg. They rock back and forth and when they cross their legs it looks like they might really want to go to the loo! Some people sway from side to side or they start bouncing which is quite interesting to watch but does distract from the speech. They can start rising up on their toes, sticking one foot out or start to bore for water with their heel. Going on an undirected walk-about is a 'No-No' too, especially if you are using a static mike. If you feel the urge to walk, then please make sure you are going somewhere, don't drift in one direction and then drift back. And at the same time don't pace up and down like a caged animal.

In summary, remember to use your eyes to make contact with your audience, your face should say *"I am really happy to be here and I am so glad you are here too"*. Your hands should be empty and still. Your gestures should start from your shoulders and be relevant to your speech. You need to stand tall, never sit down to speak as it affects your breathing and you need to balance on both your feet. Let that beam of calm confidence shine out from you.

Your voice says it all

Public speaking is not like a conversation. When you stand up to make your speech you will be in the same situation as an actor, who must ensure that his or her words are listened to with rapt attention and that the meaning in every word is understood fully. Actors know that their audience may often have a short attention span so how they use their voices is critical to holding the attention.

To be a great speaker you need to be able to manage your voice. Your voice is like a violin to a soloist in an orchestra, or clarinet to a jazz player. It is your musical instrument and should be used with the same amount of care as any violin or clarinet. Your words become like music, seducing your audience and giving pleasure in the listening.

It perhaps won't surprise you to know that you need to practise using your voice effectively in order to fill a large room and hold the audience's attention. Some speakers have naturally varied voices, where others have to work really hard to make their voice sound more interesting. So many things can affect your voice. Nerves will often hamper your breathing, making you swallow words or sound shaky. Poor breath control can make you sound more monotone than normal and the impact of problematic breathing will make you speak higher up in your voice box, which will make you sound shrill and desperate.

The key areas to concentrate on to make your voice effective are monitoring your speed of speaking and varying your pace. Work on your inflection and the emphasis you use and, finally, manage the volume so you do not end up talking too quietly. To be successful you need to utilise speed, pauses, emphasis, volume and articulation.

Speed

Speed is about not talking too quickly. For first time speakers there is, again because of nerves, a tendency to gabble and rush through a speech. But if you do all that hard work preparing your speech, why waste your effort when no one can hear your words? In normal conversation, on average we speak about 160 to 180 words a minute. When you are giving a speech you need to bring that down to fewer than 120 words per minute. This can be achieved if you concentrate on enunciating your words clearly and avoiding mumbling, gabbling and swallowing your words. You also need a variety of speed or pace. It's not too difficult once you get the hang of it. Slow down for emphasis - speed up for the climax.

Pauses

A really useful tool for the speaker is the skill of knowing when and how to use pauses. These are not for taking a breath, they are for effect. So pause first, then breathe. Think of how a pause in the right place can add to the meaning and enthral the audience. Looking at your draft speech, where will you place your pauses? What is the effect you want? Remember, too, that pauses are silent. Too many people worry about not speaking and add in "ums" and "ahs". Many novice speakers will use "you know" or "actually" and these, too, are non-words. They are the same as "ums" and "ahs". These interruptions to your speech are simply bad habits which will detract from your presentation and stop people from listening.

Emphasis

Emphasising words helps to bring meaning and clarity to your speech. If you take the following sentence and then say it aloud, changing the emphasis with each word, you can see it is also possible to change the meaning. Try it aloud now.

What is this thing called love?

What **is** this thing called love?

What is **this** thing called love?

What is this **thing** called love?

What is this thing **called** love?

What is this thing called **love**?

Hopefully you can see how the meaning of the sentence changes. The word *love* here could be the object of the sentence or simply an affectionate term.

Volume

First time speakers often find trouble turning up the volume but it is possible, with some simple techniques, to make your voice big enough to fill a conference hall without the need for a microphone or the need to shout. When you are facing someone, and talking normally to them, you speak in a quieter voice. However, when you have to fill a room it has to be much louder. Moreover, all sorts of things in a room will soak up the sound - things like curtains, carpets, the people who are sitting in the room and their clothes - all of which affect the sound and muffle your voice.

The key way to produce volume is by using your breath and your breath control. The deeper you breathe the more air you have to sustain your voice and the easier it is to project your voice outward. Inside your skull there are some handy echo chambers - two behind your temples and two more at the back of your head just above the neck. Fill your lungs enough to push your rib cage outwards then, as you release the air and speak, allow your voice to resonate through your skull and out into the room. Assume you need to be heard by

people in the next room. Do not shout because that just damages your throat muscles. Your voice will become louder the more air you use. It will require some practice and it will sound very unnatural at first. But once you get into the habit of doing it you will find it very easy and you will recognise that voice when you want to use it.

If you are giving your presentation in a very large hall with maybe a high ceiling and you are concerned that you just can't be heard, then you may want to use a microphone. However, it can be tricky to balance the sound and you definitely need to try it out beforehand. It is also worth bearing in mind that as soon as you start to rely on technology then all sorts of problems can arise, particularly if it fails when you are least expecting it.

Articulation

You need to make sure that your speech is clear and precise and you do that by sounding out the consonants. Whenever we speak it is the vowels (A, E, I, O, U) which carry the sound. The remainder of the alphabet comprises consonants, which carry the meaning of the language.

Your lips, your tongue, your soft palate, your hard palate and your teeth, in variety of combinations, set up barriers to your breath as it leaves your body to make the crisp clear consonant sounds. Make sure you emphasise the consonants on the ends of words. Words ending with T such as 'cut' 'print' and 'great'. Think about words starting or ending with P and K which have a slightly explosive sound. Try 'peep', 'quick' and 'trek'. The advantage of concentrating on pronouncing words with care means that, as well as making yourself heard your words will take longer to say and slow down your speech.

One way to check out how your voice sounds and comes across is by reading aloud. Take a small passage from a newspaper or from a book and read it aloud. Then read it again seeing how well you can vary your voice from very loud to very soft. Try making your words come out faster and then slower. Go up a register at the ends of the sentences as you might if there was a question mark on the end. This sounds better than dropping your voice down and losing the sound. You need to read aloud without mumbling. Speak clearly and concisely and precisely.

If you do not speak loudly and more slowly, or if your voice lacks tone or pitch, your audience will not hear or understand you. A microphone may be able to improve volume but cannot help you if you do not enunciate your words.

Now read the following poem 'When' by the poet Maurice Spillane. Think about the meaning of the words. What does it mean to you? What do you think the poet wanted you to think about when you read his words?

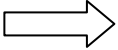
When

I hate the indecisiveness of it,
When to put your arm around her shoulder,
Hold her hand, touch her hair,
Fold her gently, so very gently,
Like fine china, that kind of gentle.
She looked good tonight.
The stitch in her sweater –
I watched it unravel, urged to pull,
To hurry the unravelling
As if travelling that endless path
Might lead to a consequence,
Might lead to knowing when.

So, if you are reading this aloud, how will you pace it? Where will you slow down the reading? When will you speed it up? Which words will you emphasise? What about the tone? Will you read it with gentle tone or passionately? Will the tone be teasing or serious? Maybe there will be two or more tones even in a piece as short as this. Where will you let the voice rise or fall and how will that bring out the meaning of the words?

Now have a go, either with the poem above or copy it onto a blank piece of paper, changing the line structure to make it easier to read aloud.

My thoughts are as follows:

I've used \\\ for longer pauses \\ for shorter ones. I've used grey to highlight the measured 'need to be heard' lines and underlined the words I think require emphasis. To speed up I've used arrows 

I have also rewritten it into a better layout for reading aloud, as opposed to the constraints of poetry writing rules.

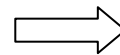
'When'

I hate the indecisiveness of it. \\\

*When to put your arm around her shoulder, hold her hand, touch her hair, fold her gently, so\\ very gently *

Like fine china, that kind of gentle.

She looked good tonight.



*The stitch in her sweater \\ I watched it unravel, urged to pull,
to hurry the unravelling -as if \\ travelling that endless path
might lead to a consequence,\\ Might lead to knowing when*

Do you agree with my version? Does it make a difference to how you might interpret the thoughts and ideas in this poem from your first initial reading?

Concentrating on enhancing your vocal skills will give you huge confidence when you stand up to speak.

Handling stage fright

It may surprise you to know that everyone who has to perform in front of others has some sort of fear before striding onto the stage. Many actors submerge themselves into the character they are playing to free themselves from nerves. Let's look at some ways to help you to overcome your fear of speaking in public.

The good news about feeling nervous is that the speech will be driven by surges of adrenalin which will keep you on your toes, alive and interesting. The bad news is that it often gives you a palpitating heart, churning stomach, and shaky knees. You can experience tightness in your throat, feeling as if you are unable to swallow, a dry mouth or find you have too much saliva. You can sweat from your palms, you can blush profusely, you can feel very hot or very cold. You can have a blank mind unable to focus on your audience, or start feeling faint. The worst part is when you experience a shortness of breath, which can give you a nervous laugh, a trembling voice or makes you stutter.

So it is well worth thinking about what makes us get so nervous that we experience all these feelings. What are the fears? In the space below, jot down what you think is going to make you the most frightened. What are the things that you are terrified of when you think about having to make a speech?

I am most afraid of:

The sorts of things that you fear are just the stuff of nightmares. A popular one is the fear of forgetting what to say. Or the fear that you may not be up to the

job, that you are not able to entertain people but rather bore them. If you are the after dinner speaker you may think that people will just start talking to each other and pouring more drinks. Or are you really just worried that people are going to think that you are a complete idiot and you should never have been asked to make a speech in the first place? In all the years that I have been working with people and coaching them to give presentations I have yet to meet anyone who hasn't at some point or other felt really nervous about speaking in public.

Feeling nervous is normal but like any nightmare we can and will wake up and find it's all a dream.

So what can we do?

Well it turns out one of the top fears we have as human beings is a fear of flying. My husband is an airline captain. I asked him why pilots were never afraid of flying and his answer holds a lot of truths for us when we are preparing and making a speech. For pilots, it is all down to the preparation. Before taking control of the aircraft, the pilot checks the weather conditions for the whole route. He or she then checks out all the suitable airfields en route, where they might divert to if an incident arises. The next step is to check out the aircraft to ensure that everything is working correctly. They check all the instruments on the flight deck and even walk around outside the plane to check all is well. Finally they run through all the emergency and safety briefings to ensure that the whole team will know what to do and how to behave if there is an emergency. And of course most importantly they practise handling every conceivable problem in the simulator every six months. As a result there is nothing for them to fear from flying. The message is that if you prepare, practise and do your checks, you will have nothing to fear from giving your speech.

A useful way to manage our fears is to start by being positive. You can control any kind of panic or nerves by thinking about the positive outcome. We are very good at thinking about the negative outcome of all those things which could go wrong but now we have got to turn it around. So, drawing on the advice of pilots, I suggest the following.

Prepare properly as outlined in earlier. If you know what you are aiming to achieve and you know what you are going to say, you can start to imagine the result.

You must practise, practise and practise. It is the very best defence against failure. The more you rehearse, the more you practise out loud, the more you will feel confident, comfortable and safe.

Manage your breathing. Deep breaths before you start will fill your lungs with oxygen. By slowing down your deep breathing (that is, by drawing in air, counting to three and then letting the air out slowly) you will be sending a signal to your heart to slow down too. This does, however, require to be practised before the big occasion to be most effective. Deep breaths also help you to project your voice so as to avoid the need for a microphone.

If you suffer from breathlessness then you need to take deep breaths. Shallow breaths will make you sound very panicky and it can make your voice sound very odd as if you are going to lose control completely. Luckily, we breathe automatically but when we are under pressure we need to think a bit more about how we are breathing and to breathe in deeply and exhale deeply.

Physical symptoms when your throat tightens up and your voice becomes restricted will need to be managed too. You can relieve a tight throat by yawning, (obviously not straight in front of your audience!) but step out for a moment and try yawning to relax your face and throat. Laughter is good for helping to relax your facial muscles, this is particularly useful if you cannot be alone.

An old trick, used by actors, for when your mouth dries up is to imagine the audience sucking on lemons. It's the quickest way to bring the saliva back into your mouth. Even writing it here is making it work for me!

Visualise your success. Create a picture in your mind of what it is going to look like after you have spoken. Will your audience be sitting there smiling or laughing and asking for more? Try and paint a vivid picture of the situation including your own feelings of relief and pleasure and don't let any negative thoughts come in. The more you concentrate on doing this, the more it will come true for you. Link your thoughts to a memory of when you have achieved something in your life that has made you feel good. Each time a negative thought appears think back to that happy memory and hold that in your head. Counsellors who help people to overcome fears in all sorts of areas often encourage them to visualise a really happy time in their lives and then keep that

picture in your mind. This works very well for keeping control of yourself in unknown situations.

It should go without saying that drinking alcohol does not improve your speech or remove the nerves - though it may make you think you don't have any! You know you should not drink and drive and it is great advice for speech makers too. Even if you are speaking at a dinner, keep your alcohol drinking until after your speech.

Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse

Actually before you rehearse you need to practise. What I mean is, you practise saying the words on your own first before trying out on a tame audience. It is easy to put off practising or not allow enough time to practise, but you will definitely lose out if you don't go through this stage. I can assure you, that contrary to opinion, you will not become over-rehearsed or get stale.

What practising will do for you is to help you to get comfortable with the content of your speech. The more you repeat it the more it will sink in. And feel right. This, in turn, will give you more confidence, help to control your fears and avoid the awful thought that when you stand up your mind will go blank. Another advantage of practising is that it will help you develop your voice and use appropriate body language.

Once you have run through it a couple of times you may find it useful to look at yourself, as you practise, in a full length mirror. You can then check out the effect of your body language and what messages it is conveying and make sure you have no irritating mannerisms creeping in. However this can sometimes make you feel self-conscious. So at first go slowly and take every opportunity of being on your own to read through your notes or mind map and practise speaking out loud. The aim is not to memorise chunks of your speech that always sounds unnatural but it is to enable you to become comfortable with the words, the sentences and the structure. At this stage, you may also find you remember other points you would like to add or realise there are some examples you want to remove. If you have tried to memorise big chunks of written words you will be able to see if it is too complicated or clumsy sounding. And remember we talk in short sentences but tend to write longer sentences so as we are talking aloud, sentences need to be shortened to make them sound more like real language.

The next stage is to record your speech once you are happy with the content. If you haven't heard your voice on a tape or MP3 file before, you may be surprised. Your voice sounds different for a number of reasons. Sometimes the equipment you may be using for recording has a narrow bandwidth reducing the range of your voice. But it's mostly because when you hear your own voice it has had to get to your ears by way of your skull and this has had a different affect on the sound. However you are not checking the timbre of your voice. What you are checking here is how you get your message out to your audience.

So you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I sound lively and interested?
- Does my enthusiasm show through?
- Is it well paced? Not too fast or too slow
- Is it timed correctly?

Once you are sure you have the right speech with the right humour and balance, and you are sure it's interesting and relevant, then you can move to the rehearsal stage. A rehearsal with an audience, even if it is only your nearest and dearest and the family cat, allows you to practise looking around the room as you speak and to engage in eye contact with members of your audience. We know that an audience who can see you engaging in eye contact is more likely to feel involved and respected.

You should always stand up when you rehearse as it helps you to get used to standing, improves your breathing and helps you use your notes or cards with more confidence.

You will also need to know how your speech is being received. A close friend or colleague can be really helpful at this stage by listening critically and giving you feedback on how you come across to an audience. Of course, you can use a video recorder to film your speech as a final arbiter. To benefit from this approach you need to be objectively self-critical but not so much as to become a shuddering wreck and reducing your confidence. Don't use a video if you think the latter may happen. Rely on trusted friends for the feedback.

After your first run-through, ask your 'pretend' audience to give you feedback about the content. Did you make a good enthusiastic opening? Did they understand the structure and understand your key points? Did it give the right information? Was it humorous in the right places and did you deliver the

stories/jokes well? Is the call to action clear? Is it the right length? Ask, too, about any distracting mannerisms. Keep an open mind and listen to the feedback, so you can decide if and how you can use it.

Remember rehearsing helps you to: ...

- Feel more confident and therefore helps you to control your nerves.
- Become familiar with your speech so you can use less and less support from any notes you may have
- Develop your speaking voice – volume, tone, diction

Ready for the big day

In an ideal world it would be good to get in a final dress rehearsal at the venue, where you can also check out the size and layout of the room and audience. However there is often little or no time for you to set up your presentation slides (if you are using them) or handouts without worrying about going through the speech as well. If you can gain access to the room for ten minutes before the meeting starts, it will make you feel more comfortable to see where you will be sitting and how the room is laid out. Stand where you will be when you make your speech so you know what the room layout looks like from that angle.

If it isn't possible to have a dry run at the venue make sure you have a dress rehearsal at home. Make it as closely as possible as if you were in front of your audience. It's not called a dress rehearsal for nothing. It's a really good idea to wear the clothes you intend to wear on the day so you feel really comfortable. Once you start the speech there should be no stopping or apologising, you must carry on exactly as you will do at the occasion. This alone will give you confidence and help you spot any tricky moments, so there are no surprises on the day.

As you prepare to deliver your speech you can be confident it will go well. At the beginning of this Useful Guide I said that if you follow the steps and work your way through the exercises you will have created an 'easy to deliver' speech. To get a really good speech you need to put a lot of effort into the preparation. Having three key topic areas will help your memory, as well as the mind mapping technique for brainstorming.

You have hopefully worked on having an attention-grabbing introduction. This wakes up your audience and fills them with anticipation and wanting to hear more. Telling them the key structure in your introduction ensures that they stay with you to the end. The 'meat' of your speech will centre around your three key areas with lots of anecdotes and examples before leading into your carefully crafted ending.

During the second part of this Useful Guide we have been concentrating on the delivery and the image you present to your audience. Part of your practising time will have been spent on checking out your body language and identifying and getting rid of any annoying mannerisms. Your voice - the instrument you'll be using for your speech - will be by now highly tuned. Make sure the breathing control you have learned will project your voice to the far corners of the room. Your breathing technique helps you to produce clear consonants, so everyone can understand, and you have practised slowing down your speech so none of the carefully honed words and phrases will be lost.

If you are going to use a microphone you need to have time to make sure you know how it works. You need to know how to switch it on and that you are comfortable with the volume level. Be careful if there is more than one speaker sharing the same equipment. If you learn about the equipment you can help to adjust the system/slides for the other presenters when they come to make their speeches.

Given a choice I would advise you use a microphone you can attach to your clothing, as it is more sensitive to your voice. A lapel microphone makes life a lot easier because you don't have to think about where it is when you are speaking. If you want to turn your head when you are speaking, or you want to move around a little bit, then the microphone will stay with you and you can be heard. However, you must resist the temptation to lower your voice when you hear it coming through the speaker system and continue to project your voice as far as possible.

Beware, too, of patting the lapel mike during your speech and deafening your audience. And it goes without saying that when you are not using it make sure it is switched off! There are legendary stories of people making embarrassing asides to the whole audience.

Prepare a checklist for all the things you need to remember on the day. I have some thoughts which I have outlined below. I am sure that once you have checked out the venue and considered the plan for the session you will think of more. So add in anything else you can think of so you can tick them off on the day and relax knowing everything is in hand.

At the table you will need ...

- A glass of water. You probably won't need it but it's very reassuring if you fear having a coughing fit or a dry throat.
- If you are an after dinner speaker have a glass of wine to raise for any toasts. Don't gulp it down, remember there should be enough left in the glass for all the toasts!
- Your notes or mind map. Remember which pocket they will be in or if you are going to lay them on the table before you need them.
- Microphone, if you are using it, and that you know who has it or where it has been placed. Also, you need to know how to switch this particular microphone on and off.
- Your presentation slides on both laptop and on an extra memory stick, and any handouts or props which you may wish to pass around your audience during the presentation
- Reading glasses (and spares!) if you use them.

A word of warning

Reading this Useful Guide without practising the techniques is pointless. It would be a bit like learning to play football from a book. You might read about the various techniques, even study sketches or photographs of famous footballers performing well, but you just won't know if you can play effectively if don't have a go.

So there we are. You have prepared your speech, researched your ideas and examples and practised it carefully. You have your notes, you know what you are going to say, you know it's good. So now there is nothing else left to do but to enjoy the occasion.

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<http://www.pansophix.com/useful-guide-feedback.html>

If we use your feedback to improve **A Useful Guide to Public Speaking** we will email you a copy of the updated version.

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About the Author



Charlotte Mannion, author of this Useful Guide and [A Useful Guide to Mentoring](#), is the founder and a director of [Quicklearn](#) a communications consultancy based in Wiltshire. Charlotte works as a coach and facilitator helping people to communicate better in both their writing and through public speaking.

Charlotte first trained as an actor and spent much of her theatre career appearing in repertory companies mostly in the north of England. This background has enabled her to use her love of words and performing to help others deliver confident and comfortable presentations. Having attended a number of networking events and conferences she realised that for many people preparing and delivering a speech in this situation was a very new and often frightening experience; an experience for which there seemed to be little support or access to training. This guide is the result. Charlotte's approach to learning relies on her students 'learning by doing'. Above all she believes in making that learning both memorable and fun.

Charlotte is married with three grown up children. She is a member of Rotary and enjoys working with others to raise money for charitable causes. Charlotte is an enthusiastic public speaker and the artistic director of the Ridgeway Theatre Company where she keeps her hand in directing productions of different and unusual plays. She loves walking in the country and food (if someone else is cooking!)