

***THE 15***  
***BIGGEST MYTHS***  
***ABOUT***  
***PUBLIC SPEAKING***  
***AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM***



***BY***  
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## Introduction: Speak for Yourself

Contrary to popular belief, it's not just executives and politicians who need public speaking skills. They're essential for anyone who aspires to leadership. The ability to inform, influence and inspire others is indispensable if you want your ideas to be taken seriously.

Yet many speakers—yes, even some executives and politicians—are crippled by mistaken beliefs about public speaking that have probably been around since the time of the great ancient Greek orator Demosthenes. No other field of human communication is so contaminated, so infested, with myths, misconceptions, folklore, fairy tales and just plain B.S.

If you've bought into any of this misinformation (such as the myth that only executives and politicians need to be skillful public speakers), this e-book is for you. It separates fact from fiction and debunks the most common fallacies that I've encountered in my years as a speechwriter, consultant and executive coach.

So read on, and find out how to demolish the obstacles that have stood in your way. If you're an experienced speaker, you'll improve. And if you've been standing on the sidelines, hesitant about speaking up, you'll be ready to take the plunge.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Bellikoff', written over a horizontal dotted line.

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## 1. High Anxiety

**M**YTH: Getting stage fright will mark you as an amateur.

**T**RUTH: Many professional speakers get stage fright too.

You've probably heard Jerry Seinfeld's routine: "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. . . This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."

If this describes you, you're in good company. Legendary orators like Winston Churchill, Adlai Stevenson and Abraham Lincoln have suffered from stage fright. Many renowned performers also admit to it—including Rod Stewart, Carol Burnett, Barbra Streisand, Carly Simon, Kim Basinger, Donny Osmond, Andrea Bocelli and Renée Fleming. Just imagine how many celebrities there are who *won't* confess to having stage fright.

They're actually the smart ones. Why tip off the audience to your jitters? Unless you're uncontrollably stammering, trembling with fear or drenched in flop sweat, they'll never know. So don't make a big announcement about it. Just go ahead with your speech. No excuses, no apologies.

**Perception is what counts.** Stand tall. Smile. Appear confident and the audience will assume you are. Fake confidence looks the same to an audience as the real variety.

**Get off your ego trip. It's not about you.** Most stage fright stems from self-absorption. Don't worry about what the audience thinks of you.

### Fear Management 101

In the Rodgers and Hammerstein Broadway classic *The King and I*, Anna gives her son Louis some musical instruction about confronting fear. It's good advice for coping with stage fright, even if you can't whistle:

Whenever I feel afraid  
I hold my head erect  
And whistle a happy tune  
So no one will suspect  
I'm afraid.

While shivering in my shoes  
I strike a careless pose  
And whistle a happy tune  
And no one ever knows  
I'm afraid.

The result of this deception  
Is very strange to tell  
For when I fool the people I fear  
I fool myself as well.

Concentrate on getting your message across. Think of it as a conversation with a group of friends, not a lecture to a captive audience .

Entire careers have been built on the alleged ability to cure stage fright. I claim no such powers, but here are a few tips to get you started:

- **Accentuate the positive.** Use mental imagery. Imagine the audience reacting to you with thunderous applause, shouts of “Bravo!” and a standing ovation.
- Or try **reverse psychology**. Visualize the worst-case scenario. The audience boos and hurls rotten tomatoes at you. A black-hooded executioner wheels in a gallows. The absurdity of this can help you put things in perspective.
- **Stressbusters:** Just about any technique that relaxes you can help. For example, inhale slowly and deeply, then exhale. Rotate your head from side to side. Shrug your shoulders. Relax your jaw by yawning (obviously before, not during, your speech). Feel the tension draining away.
- **Rehearsing** your talk will help control your anxiety. Being prepared will boost your confidence (See page 8 for tips on rehearsing).
- **Don’t fight your stage fright.** Learn to harness it. Let that adrenaline rush energize rather than paralyze you. As Zig Ziglar says, “Everyone gets butterflies in the stomach. The trick is to train them to fly in formation.”

Stage fright is sometimes called performance anxiety. *Pre-performance* anxiety is more accurate. It often goes away, or at least recedes into the background, once your speech starts.

Above all, don’t think of your stage fright as a disease to be cured, or an opponent to be defeated—a War on Stage Fright. You may never eliminate it, but you can learn to control and contain it.

## Fear Management 101 (cont.)

I whistle a happy tune  
And every single time  
The happiness in the tune  
Convinces me that I'm not afraid.

Make believe you're brave  
And the trick will take you far.  
You may be as brave  
As you make believe you are.

©1951 Richard Rodgers and Oscar  
Hammerstein II

## 2. The Singer vs. the Song

**MYTH:** It's not what you say in your speech that counts, but how you say it.

**T**RUTH: Both your content and your delivery are vital. Neither should be neglected.

This myth is known as the 7% Rule. It goes like this: Only 7% of your message is delivered by what you say. 38% comes from your tone of voice and 55% from your body language. In other words, what you communicate to an audience is just 7% verbal and 93% nonverbal.

If that's true, why bother writing a speech at all? You might as well give a brilliant performance of the contents of the phone directory. Think of all the time and money you could save.

It's absurd to claim that what you say is the least important part of your speech. **Any presentation starts with your words. Content is the foundation that you build on.** Delivery can enhance it but never substitute for it.

Your words and delivery should work together. **Avoid the false choice between style and substance.** Your speech or presentation needs the best of both worlds.

### Origin of a Myth

In the 1960s, Professor Albert Mehrabian of UCLA conducted studies on human communication.

Subjects of the studies listened to recordings of a voice and photos of a face expressing several different emotions. The subjects correctly identified the emotions 55% of the time from the photos and 38% of the time from the tone of voice, compared with only 7% of the time from the words describing the emotions.

The mass media covered the studies in their usual superficial and over-simplified way. They didn't mention that the results were never intended to apply to speeches and presentations, or even conversation. They were based on the information conveyed in a single word.

Yet the myth persists, like some urban legend passed down through generations.

### 3. Familiarity Does Not Breed Contempt

**M**YTH: Always memorize your speech.

**T**RUTH: Never memorize your speech. Instead, learn its structure, concepts and topics.

This is easier to do than it seems. In fact, it tends to happen automatically if you spend enough time preparing your talk and then rehearsing it.

**You'll become so familiar with your material that it will feel like you know it by heart.** Then you'll be able to glance at your notes to stay on track, while delivering your speech in your own words. You'll even be able to ad-lib occasionally if you feel like it, as new thoughts occur to you.

**Exception:** You should memorize your opening and closing, so that you can recite them by heart, starting and ending strongly. You may also want to memorize a few essential phrases, quotations or short anecdotes in your speech.

But other than that, leave the memory stunts to experts like the magician Harry Lorayne, who can remember the names of everyone in the audience after being introduced to them.

#### To Err is Human

No matter how well prepared you are, mistakes can and will occur while you're speaking. Screwing up an occasional word or phrase is a natural and normal part of communication. The audience won't hold it against you—especially if you've connected with them and they like what you're saying.

In fact, most of them won't even notice your flub, unless you call attention to it. So treat it like stage fright. Don't announce it. If you make a mistake, just keep going as if nothing has happened.

Stay calm and don't panic. Slow down. Resist your natural instinct to speed up after a glitch.

If you must correct yourself, do it quickly and casually. Don't make a big deal out of it.

Remember, the audience hasn't seen your notes or script and doesn't know what you intend to say. So never hand out hard copy of your speech to them before you speak. Keep them in suspense.

#### 4. Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

**M****YTH:** You should practice your speech or presentation in front of a mirror.

**T****RUTH:** Never rehearse in front of a mirror.

But isn't it desirable to see how you look when you speak? It is, but not in a mirror. Here's why:

- **The mirror will train you to stand in one spot**, when you should learn to be animated and move around the stage as you speak.
- **Your mirror-image is backwards**, the opposite of how the audience sees you.
- **A mirror will encourage you to rehearse your gestures**, a bad idea. Don't choreograph them. You'll look stiff and robotic. Let them arise spontaneously from your words and emotions, just as they would in conversation.

The appropriate time to check yourself in the mirror is shortly before your speech. Make sure you're well-groomed and presentable, with no embarrassing food and beverage stains or wardrobe malfunctions.

#### So, what's the best way to practice?

Try any or all of the following:

- **Recruit an audience** of colleagues, friends or relatives (Fringe benefit: You can time your speech, including audience reaction).
- **Get a speaking coach** to give you an unbiased professional critique.
- **Videotape your performance** and watch it later, so you can see yourself the way an audience does.
- **Simulate the actual speaking conditions as much as possible:**
  - Wear the clothing you plan to wear (Make it a dress rehearsal).
  - Use your actual notes or manuscript or a teleprompter.
  - Stand at a lectern if you'll be speaking at one.
  - Rehearse with PowerPoint if that's part of your presentation.

Rehearse properly and you'll "Be Prepared." That's the Boy Scout motto—applicable to Girl Scouts too.



## 5. Fresh as a Daisy

**M**YTH: Too much rehearsal will make your speech sound canned and stale.

**T**RUTH: There's no such thing as too much rehearsal.

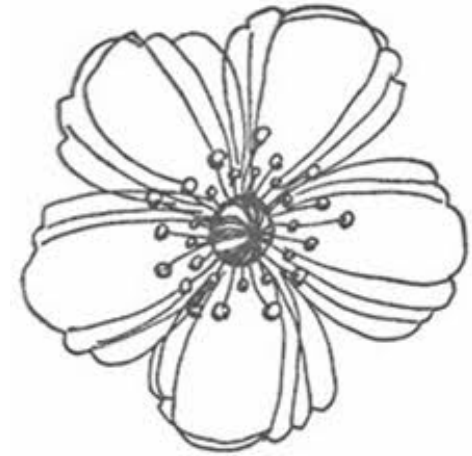
A performance—whether it's public speaking, acting, dancing or playing music—may look spontaneous, but the smoother and more effortless it appears, the more likely it was repeatedly rehearsed.

Even professional speakers and politicians who have given the same speech over and over continue to rehearse it—modifying and fine-tuning it based on previous audience reaction, and customizing it for different audiences. They want every listener to feel like he or she is the only one who has ever heard it.

Don't worry about over-rehearsing making you stale. You're not a loaf of bread.

Think about it. Could you possibly be too comfortable with your material? Too confident? Too relaxed? Of course not.

Besides, in today's globally competitive and fast-paced business world, who has time for too much of *anything*?



## 6. The Great Pontificator

**M**YTH: Always use a lectern when you speak.

**T**RUTH: Only use a lectern when you need a place for your notes or manuscript.

The speech that King George VI makes at the climax of the Oscar-winning movie *The King's Speech* is actually more like a lecture to an obedient nation (That's why it's called a lectern, by the way). A lectern can make you look like that—stuffy, pompous and professorial.

It happens when you let the lectern become a protective barrier between you and the audience. **Don't think of it as a retreat or a security blanket.**

**Don't stay chained to the lectern.** Start and end your talk in front of it. Step out from behind it occasionally to tell stories or anecdotes. This is another good reason to memorize your opening, closing and a few highlights of your speech.

The better you know the structure and content of your speech, the less you'll need a lectern. **Try to gradually wean yourself away from it.** If you can free yourself and learn to speak without it, you'll never want to use one again.

### Things to check before using a lectern:

- **Height:** High enough to see your notes or script, but low enough for eye contact with the audience
- **Width:** Wide enough to display your script or notes, especially if they're on full-sized sheets of paper
- **Lighting:** Bright enough to read your notes or script, especially if you'll be dimming the house lights to show PowerPoint (see pages 19 & 20 for PowerPoint myths, truths and tips).
- **Sound:** Make sure any built-in microphone is working. But a wireless lavalier mike, clipped to your lapel, tie, shirt or blouse, is a better choice. It frees you from the lectern and has no power cord to trip over or strangle yourself with.

### Lectern vs. Podium

It's surprising how many people don't know the difference. It's simple. You stand *on* a podium. You stand *behind* a lectern.

## 7. Prompt Attention Required

**M**YTH: Speaking from a teleprompter is always better than referring to notes.

**T**RUTH: A teleprompter is only better than notes if you learn to use it well.

Giving a speech from a teleprompter is a lot harder than it looks. Skilled teleprompter speakers like Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama are the exception. Most politicians still speak from notes. Watch CSPAN and you'll see.

Nothing looks worse than a rookie teleprompter speaker who hasn't practiced with the prompter. **Rehearsing with the teleprompter is a must.**

**It's not like speaking from notes.** For one thing, the words in your notes don't move while you look at them. You need to get comfortable with scrolling teleprompter text. That takes time.

Also, the teleprompter operator has to get used to your speaking tempo. So try to practice with the operator you'll be working with.

### A Teleprompter Tale

In 1993, Bill Clinton addressed a joint session of Congress to promote his health care reform bill. The White House Communications Agency had loaded an earlier Clinton speech into the teleprompter to test the prompter and make sure it was at the correct height.

When Clinton stepped to the podium, he discovered that the old speech was still showing on the prompter. His aides had given him backup notes for the health care speech in case of a teleprompter malfunction. But the print was too small for him to read without his glasses—which his staff had removed from his jacket pocket so that the bulge wouldn't be seen on TV.

While Clinton's aides hunted for the correct speech and got it loaded into the prompter, he began improvising his address. Even after the proper speech was in the prompter, they still had to scroll through it to locate the spot that Clinton had reached.

Amazingly, the president wound up ad-libbing for close to nine minutes, and his audience never found out until after his speech. Knowing his content inside-out enabled him to do that.

Some teleprompter tips:

- **Don't speed up** as the words scroll up the screen. Speak at your normal conversational pace, with natural pauses. The operator should adjust to you, not vice versa.
- **Know your content** so you won't have to read every word. You'll be able to use the prompter as a guide. This is one more reason to memorize your opening, closing and a few key parts of your speech.
- **Bring backup notes**, in case Murphy's Law strikes and the teleprompter goes down. Also bring glasses, if you need them to read the backup notes.
- **Two teleprompters are better than one.** They'll help you look more natural and relaxed. Don't worry about your head and eyes moving slightly back and forth between the prompters. Audiences are used to seeing this.

A teleprompter can make you a more polished speaker. But it's better to use notes well than a teleprompter badly.

## 8. Over Their Heads

**M****YTH:** Look at a spot above your audience's heads while you're speaking.

**T****RUTH:** Look at your audience's faces while speaking.

Looking over your audience's heads supposedly helps fight stage fright, by distracting yourself from their intense focus on you—and by doing so, making you less self-conscious. Baloney. What it actually does is disengage you from the audience, by eliminating eye contact.

**Eye contact is a key part of your connection with the audience.**

Credibility in our society comes from looking others in the eye when we talk to them. Without it, a speaker can seem evasive and insincere.

Throughout your talk, make eye contact with different people in the audience for a few seconds at a time. Cover every part of the room, but not in any fixed pattern.

**Don't keep your eyes glued to your notes.** Pause from time to time for eye contact at the end of a thought or a topic. This is yet another reason (as if you needed one) to rehearse thoroughly and be very familiar with your material, and to memorize your opening, closing and key points.

Make eye contact with your audience and their hearts and minds will follow. Look over their heads and that's where your message will go.

### Global Tip: Saving Face

Eye contact is vital in Western civilization. But in Asian countries, where humility is the societal norm, it's considered rude and intrusive. So if your audience is Asian, make any eye contact brief and fleeting.

## 9. The Naked Truth

**M****YTH:** Imagine your audience in their underwear, or naked, while speaking to them.

**T****RUTH:** Give your imagination a rest and make eye contact with your audience.

This is another supposed remedy for stage fright. It's just as bogus as looking over your audience's heads. The rationale is, picturing your audience in a ridiculous situation will make you less frightened of them.

More likely, all that mental effort will distract you from your speech—or worse, make you laugh at the silliness of it all.

Make eye contact with your audience just as they are, clothing and all—unless of course you're addressing a nudists' convention.

### Meet & Greet

Don't wait until your speech to connect with your audience. Get a head start by arriving at the speaking venue early and chatting with audience members.

Eye contact during your speech is much easier when you can seek out some friendly faces in the crowd. They won't be just an anonymous mass of humanity.

## 10. Send In the Clowns

**MYTH:** A joke is a good way to open your speech or presentation.

**TRUTH:** A joke is *the worst possible way* to open your speech or presentation.

I started my writing career in sit-coms and know how to write jokes. But if you were my client, I'd discourage you from beginning your speech that way.

Unless you're a stand-up comic or a proven joke teller, opening with a joke is an invitation to disaster. As the old show-biz saying goes, "Dying is easy. Comedy is hard." **If your joke bombs, you can lose the audience at the start and never get them back.**

Don't assume that you're a comedian just because your jokes get laughs from your staff. They're paid to defer to you. The audience isn't. And NEVER tell a joke that you've received in an e-mail; you can bet everyone else on Earth has seen it too.

### Better speech openers than a joke:

- Make a counterintuitive or contrarian claim.
- Cite some startling statistics.
- Comment on a current event.
- Segue from what a previous speaker said.
- Tell an amusing or entertaining story.
- Make a self-deprecating remark.
- Ask a challenging question.
- Recite a penetrating quote.
- Give congratulations on a special occasion (birthday, anniversary, retirement, company milestone, etc.)
- Produce an eye-catching prop.

... or just about any other unexpected and compelling way you can think of to break the ice and grab the audience's attention, as long as it's related to the subject of your speech.

If you have a joke you're comfortable telling, it's safer to **put it in the middle of your speech**, after the audience has warmed up to you, and vice versa.

**Any joke you tell should be rehearsed and tested** in front of a live audience, the way professional comedians do. Jay Leno, for example, tries out his jokes at a comedy club every week before he uses them on The Tonight Show.

Not only that, but Leno's writers produce many jokes that don't make the cut for his opening monologue. You've got to be just as ruthless and lose any joke that doesn't test well.

After all that preparation, your joke may still fall flat. Johnny Carson, Leno's predecessor as Tonight Show host, was an expert at using snappy comebacks to rescue bad jokes. But you're not Johnny Carson.

Proceed at your own risk if you're going to open your speech with a joke. You could wind up as a laughingstock.

### Global Tip: Lost in Translation

Humor is especially risky when you're speaking to a multicultural audience. You may end up unintentionally insulting somebody's mother or uttering an obscenity.

And your joke may still bomb even if it's perfectly translated. There's a good reason why Hollywood's action movies do better at overseas box offices than their comedies. Comedy typically doesn't play well in other cultures. What's funny in the USA may not get laughs anywhere else—including other English-speaking countries like Canada and Great Britain.

After all, Oscar Wilde once described the U.S. and the U.K. as "two nations divided by a common language."



## 11. Silence Isn't Golden

**MYTH:** If no one asks questions during a Q & A session after your speech, it means you've thoroughly covered your subject.

**TRUTH:** Maybe, but it's just as likely to mean that your speech wasn't memorable or thought-provoking enough to prompt questions.

Even worse, it may mean your audience was inattentive to your speech. After a performance, Bob Hope once said, "The audience was swell. They were so polite, they covered their mouths when they yawned." But it's not always that obvious.

There are several **ways to guarantee questions**:

- **Ask the first question yourself.** Say something like "In case you were wondering. . ." or "Sometimes people ask me . . ." This will often jump-start the session, prompting questions from others.
- **Plant a few questioners in the audience.** But make sure they can't be identified, and that their questions are legitimate, not softballs for you to hit out of the park.
- **Solicit written questions** by handing out index cards before your talk. This also lets you choose which questions you want to answer and in what order.

But the best tactic is to make such a riveting speech that your listeners practically stampede to the mike to ask you questions.

### Stumping the Speaker

"He must be very ignorant, for he answers every question he is asked," the 18<sup>th</sup> century French satirist Voltaire wrote.

Don't let this be you. You're not obligated to answer every question. If you don't know the answer, admit it.

Don't wing it. Instead:

- Offer to contact the questioner later (via phone or e-mail) with the answer.
- Suggest a source where the answer can be found—a Web site, for example.
- Ask for an answer from the audience.

Giving an inadequate, unsatisfying (or worse, wrong) answer can get you into trouble—especially if your Q & A session is being shown on TV or is part of a webinar (In this age of cell phone cameras, YouTube and the 24/7 news cycle, it's best to treat every speech or presentation as a media event).

Shoot from the hip and you could end up with your foot in your mouth.

## 12. The Grand Finale

**M**YTH: Always end your speech by thanking the audience.

**T**RUTH: Never end your speech by thanking the audience.

Too many speeches end with a thank you to the audience and then just peter out. **Your closing needs to be powerful.** It's your last chance to have an impact and make a big impression on your audience. Don't blow it.

**Leave them with an unforgettable takeaway.** For example:

- Bookend of your opening. Rephrase it in a new and memorable way.
- Call to action or challenge to your audience. Tell them what you want them to do.
- Memorable quotation or slogan. Make sure it's appropriate to your speech.
- Rhetorical question. Either answer it or let the audience fill in the blanks.
- Brief story or anecdote. Or refer back to one in the body of your speech and add a topper.
- Fable-style ending: The moral of the story is. . .
- Cite a statistic or fact that proves your point.

However you do it, you want to go out with a bang, not a whimper.

### Happy Endings

If your speech or presentation is followed by a Q & A session, never close the Q & A by saying thank you and nothing more after you answer the final question. You'll lose all the energy and impact of your speech and the Q & A.

Instead, return to your speech and take another minute or so to wrap it up. In this situation, you actually need to have two endings for your speech. The first comes just before the Q & A and segues into it, by recapping your main points and then asking for questions.

The second should be your Power Close, your final words to the audience. It's the same ending you would have if your speech wasn't followed by a Q & A.

### 13. PowerPoint Hell

**M**<sup>YTH</sup>: Every presentation needs PowerPoint.

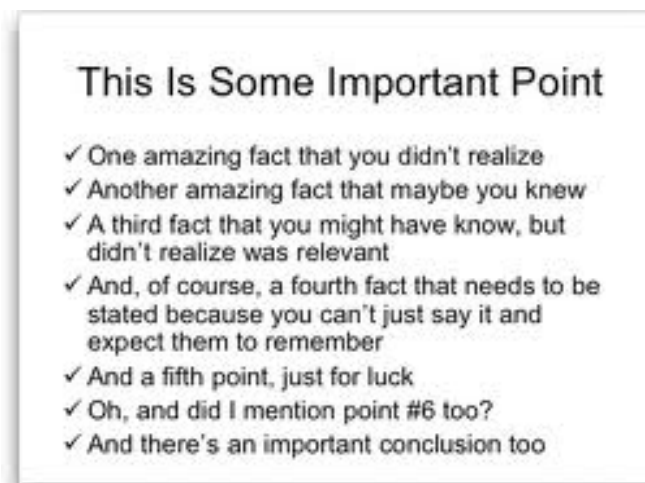
**T**<sup>RUTH</sup>: Some presentations do, but many would be better off without it.

When properly used, PowerPoint can aid your presentation (That's why it's called a visual aid). But **it's not a substitute for content**. Your slides should clarify and complement what you say. They shouldn't divert and monopolize the audience's attention, reducing you to a sideshow in your own presentation.

Don't use PowerPoint the way a drunk uses a lamppost—more for support than illumination.

**Plan your presentation before creating PowerPoint slides. Then add the slides.** You may discover you don't need them—especially if your speech contains vivid language and imagery (as every speech should).

**Don't use slides just to jazz up your talk.** Eye candy can turn into visual wallpaper, leaving your audience sedated—or even worse, anesthetized.



**The Slide from PowerPoint Hell**

## PowerPoint Do's & Taboos

DO	TABOO
<p><b>Minimize the number of slides</b> in your presentation. Less is more.</p>	<p><b>Don't clutter the slides</b> with dense and unreadable data, graphs and charts.</p>
<p><b>Make sure your slides can be seen from the back of the room.</b></p>	<p><b>Don't use stock (and schlock) clip-art</b> that audiences have already seen too many times.</p>
<p><b>Get each slide off the screen the moment you're done with it</b>, so the audience's attention will return to you and not stay on the slide.</p>	<p><b>Don't hand out hard copy of your slides before your speech.</b> The audience will read the handouts instead of listening to what you say.</p>
<p><b>Talk to the audience, not the slides.</b></p>	<p><b>Never turn your back on the audience</b> while showing slides. Other than Miles Davis, who cultivated an aloof and hostile stage presence, no performer would dream of showing the audience his or her back.</p>
<p><b>Rehearse with your slides and bring backup equipment</b> in case Murphy's Law strikes and there's a breakdown. Make sure you can deliver your talk without the slides.</p>	<p><b>Don't shut off the house lights</b> to show slides. Your audience may nod off (especially if they've had a few drinks) and be startled and embarrassed when the lights come back on. <b>Use a dimmer</b> instead.</p>
<p><b>Consider alternatives to PowerPoint</b>, like flip charts or whiteboards. Audiences may find a low-tech approach refreshing.</p>	<p><b>Don't read from your slides.</b> You should describe or paraphrase what they say, not recite it word-for-word.</p>

## 14. You Are What You Eat

**M**YTH: Never give a speech or presentation right after having a meal.

**T**RUTH: A meal beforehand is fine, as long as you're careful about it.

You certainly don't want to pig out before you speak. But neither should you be starving, with your stomach audibly growling. Plus, your host or sponsor may be insulted if you skip their lavishly catered meal.

**More important than the amount is *what* you eat and drink. Items to avoid**—or at least minimize your intake of—before speaking include:

- **Caffeine:** Good for keeping the audience awake, bad for the speaker. It can make you feel wired, and any energy boost is usually short-term. Caffeine is also a diuretic, possibly sending you to the rest room at the most inconvenient time (according to Murphy's Law). Note also that many soft drinks are more caffeinated than coffee and tea. Don't even think about having one of those hyper-caffeinated canned energy drinks.
- **Sugar:** Like caffeine, it produces a quick energy jolt followed by a crash.
- **Alcohol:** There's a thin line between the amount that relaxes you and the quantity that makes you stumble over the podium and slur your words. Also, like caffeine, alcohol is a diuretic.

- **Dairy:** Tends to produce phlegm and mucus, leading to frequent throat clearing and other unwanted sound effects.
- **Spicy Foods:** Can irritate the mouth and digestive tract. Beverages are not a remedy, since capsaicin (pepper) oil and water don't mix.
- **Beans & Legumes:** Could cause digestive discomfort, including bloating and gas.
- **Meat:** Downing a super-sized serving of sirloin can make you drowsy. It's all that blood flow away from your brain to your stomach to aid digestion (That's why the predators in those National Geographic documentaries—and even your family dog or cat—always take a nap after a big meal). Carnivores needn't become vegetarians, but it's best to limit yourself to small amounts of meat, or stick to lighter fare like poultry or seafood, before a speech.
- **Junk Food:** Provides junk nutrition, producing junk energy. Avoid it unless you want to give a junk speech.

Use common sense, based on your experience of how you react to various foods and beverages. But don't make it a choice between feast and famine. Keep everything in moderation. That way, you'll be having food for thought, rather than *Dinner for Schmucks*.



**The Junk Food Pyramid**

## 15. Dress to Impress

**M**YTH: Always dress like the audience you're speaking to.

**T**RUTH: When in doubt, dress *better* than your audience.

You can rarely go wrong wearing a suit (men) or business suit (women). If you discover at the event that you're dressed too formally, you can always take off your jacket. But it's tough to adapt if you're *underdressed*.

**Find out beforehand if there's a dress code for the audience.**

Don't accept vague descriptions like "business casual." That can have different meanings in different parts of the world.

**Consider also the venue and your audience's professions.**

For example, are you speaking to a group of investment bankers? Or donning a hard hat at a groundbreaking ceremony? Those two events clearly call for different attire.

Also **take into account the organizational culture of the audience.** Is it, for example, button-down pinstripe conservative, or computer geek casual?

You want to project a commanding presence without looking flashy. If your clothing attracts attention, you're improperly dressed. The audience should notice what you're saying, not what you're wearing.

### Global Tip for Women: Wardrobe Etiquette

In some foreign countries where gender roles are more sharply defined than in the USA, women are expected to dress conservatively. When speaking overseas, be sure to research the local customs before your trip.

## Your Public Speaking Checklist

You can outsource your speechwriting but not your *speechmaking*. Unless you're planning to lip-synch to a backstage speaker, sooner or later you'll have to address your audience in person.

You'll be well equipped to do that once you've liberated yourself from the myths and misconceptions that plague so many speakers. This checklist will help you review what you've learned and track your progress:

- Q Cope with stage fright and learn to draw on it for positive energy.
- Q Find a balance between your content and your delivery without neglecting either.
- Q Get comfortable with your content, rather than memorizing it.
- Q Rehearse properly and thoroughly, without a mirror.
- Q Decide when and how to use a lectern or a teleprompter.
- Q Discard gimmicky techniques and connect with your audience by eye contact.
- Q Craft an arresting opening and a memorable ending for your talk, steering clear of jokes that could backfire.
- Q Take steps to make sure your audience asks questions at your Q & A session.
- Q Know when and how to incorporate PowerPoint in your presentation.
- Q Dine prudently before you speak, indulging in neither feast nor famine.
- Q Dress appropriately for any audience, occasion or venue.

Got questions or comments about anything in this e-book? Don't hesitate to get in touch with me:  
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# Richard Bellikoff's writing

For over two decades, Richard Bellikoff has been coaching public speakers and writing keynote addresses, advocacy speeches, executive tributes, sales briefings, awards ceremonies, team presentations, roasts, and many other types of speeches and presentations, for a wide variety of companies and organizations.

Unlike many speechwriters who write nothing else and have limited backgrounds in fields like journalism or the humanities, Richard's track record runs the gamut of strategic executive communications, marketing and training—including op-eds, advertorials, corporate histories, biographies and testimonials, white papers, case studies, trade show videos, and much more.

As a former sales engineer in the oil and petrochemical industries, with a BS in chemical engineering and an MBA in finance, he has been in the trenches with some of the world's largest and most formidable corporations.

Richard draws on all of this background and experience for every executive he coaches, and every speech or presentation he writes—bringing a wealth of organizational know-how and subject matter expertise to the table.

His writing portfolio, at [www.rbwriting.com](http://www.rbwriting.com), contains many work samples for you to peruse. Richard welcomes your inquiries at **(626) 355-2736** or [richard@rbwriting.com](mailto:richard@rbwriting.com).



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