

A Cornell Cooperative Extension Publication

# PUBLIC SPEAKING MADE EASY

Darlene Ortiz



Illustrations by Carlton R. Ryan

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**Being able to speak well in public** is a skill that can help you teach, persuade, or entertain others. Good speakers, such as Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. had the ability to accomplish great things because they knew how to deliver their message in a way that made people want to listen.

You can become a good speaker, too! With the help of your leader, teacher, and parents you can learn to give a public presentation.



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## About the Author

**Darlene Ortiz** was a Cornell Cooperative Extension intern when she developed this guidebook. Miss Ortiz, a graduate of Cornell University, developed public presentation materials and programs to enhance cultural awareness during her internship.

## What are public presentations?

Public presentations teach, entertain, or persuade people to take action on a particular topic. There are several different types of public presentations. You will probably do either a demonstration, an illustrated talk, or a team presentation.

**A demonstration** is a way to teach others how to do or make something. In a demonstration, the presenter shows and explains each step of an activity. A finished example of what has been demonstrated is usually displayed at the end of a demonstration.

**An illustrated talk** is a useful way to explain a topic if animals or equipment necessary for the presentation are too large or too hard to handle in front of an audience. The presenter depends on models, posters, or charts to explain his or her topic in an illustrated talk. A finished example is not required.

**A team presentation** is given by two or more presenters who teach others how to do something. All presenters should participate equally in preparing and presenting the information, including the question and answer period.

## How do I know which type of public presentation is for me?

The type of public presentation you decide to do will depend on what you talk about. There are no rules that state what style presentation should be used for particular topics, but here are some guidelines to think about:

Do a **demonstration** if you are a first-year presenter or your presentation topic allows you to show a finished product.

Do an **illustrated talk** if your project is too large or too small to display during a presentation or if you cannot complete a finished example in 10 to 15 minutes.

Do a **team presentation** if the topic is too large for one person to cover well alone or if one of the goals of the presentation is to provide the audience with several opinions on a topic.

## How do I get started?

First you have to decide what you want to talk about. That may seem pretty simple, but there are many things to consider.

## How do I choose a topic?

Pick a topic that shows your interests in your club, the community, or school projects. Make a list of interesting things you have done, such as

- a. Unusual experiences—when you organized a “Teens against Drugs” conference, established a neighborhood watch, or your job in the veterinary clinic, for example.
- b. Hobbies, talents, and skills—woodcarving, fishing, hydroponics, or needlepoint, for example.
- c. Subjects that are important to you—recycling, cleaning up your neighborhood, or animal care, for example.



## What should I do after I pick out my topic?

1. Decide what *you* want to say about your topic.
2. Decide what information about your topic *your audience* would find most interesting.
3. Write down the most interesting and important points on note cards.
  - Try writing down only the most important steps of your presentation,
  - or**
  - Try writing down the first sentence of each paragraph in your presentation.
  - Do not clutter your note cards with a lot of information.
4. Number your cards and place them in order before your presentation.
5. Write on only one side of your note cards.
6. Narrow your topic so that you can talk about it in 10–15 minutes.
7. Get a copy of your county’s public presentation guidelines. This information will explain what the judges will be looking for.

**If you were doing an illustrated talk** on how to plant an evergreen tree, for example, your note cards might look like these:

**NOTECARD #1**

Dig a hole 18-24 inches deep

- Width of bottom=width of top
- Evergreens:  
hole=18" wider than root ball

**NOTECARD #2**

Following these rules results in:

- good root system
- better growth
- greater chance for survival



## Where can I find information on my topic?

Your leaders, teachers, and other club or classroom members may know information about your topic that could help you get started. They may know someone who has given a presentation on the same or similar topic.

School and public libraries are good sources of information. Try talking with a librarian about your topic. Your librarian can help you locate reference books, newspapers, and other sources that might be useful for your presentation.

Authorities on the subject are people who know a lot about a particular topic. They can provide you with exciting, up-to-date information. Using an authority's exact words ( a quote) or mentioning something interesting he or she told you will make your presentation more interesting.



## How should I arrange my information?

Public presentations are made up of three parts: the introduction, the body of the presentation, and the conclusion. Now it is time to put all the information you have gathered from your leader or teacher, the library, and an authority into one of these categories.

*Note:* You may not need to use all the information you have gathered.

### Introduction

The introduction is the part of your presentation where you have to grab your audience's attention. This is where you have to say something that will make your audience want to listen. An introduction should:

1. Get the audience interested in your topic.
2. Tell the audience what they will learn if they listen to you.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUR INTRODUCTION

There are several ways to get an audience interested in your topic. Some examples are shown below. Choose the method that you think will work best with the topic you are presenting.

- Start your presentation with a story or joke, but make sure your story or joke is about your topic.
- Tell the audience about something that has happened in your life that made you interested in your topic.
- Tell the audience some history about your topic.
- Use an interesting quote you gathered from an authority or library resource.

## EXAMPLE OF AN INTRODUCTION

Did you know that plants can grow without soil? The Egyptians in ancient Babylon were one of the first people to discover that plants can be grown in water that has been enriched with plant food. This process of water agriculture is called hydroponics. Today I would like to show you how you can make your own soilless garden.

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## The Body of a Presentation

The body of a presentation is the part where you will show your audience how to do something or how something works. The body of your presentation should:

1. Explain how to do something if you are doing a demonstration or explain how something works if you are doing an illustrated talk.
2. Include “how-to” steps the audience can follow.
3. Include interesting examples.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE BODY OF YOUR PRESENTATION

- Write down on note cards the important facts or steps you want to talk about.
- Arrange the note cards in the order you want to present them.
- Decide how the notes you gathered from your leader and the library can be used to help explain your topic or make it more interesting.
- Write down what you will say as you do each step of your presentation.

*Note:* Note cards are to help you plan and practice your presentation. Use them in your actual presentation only if absolutely necessary.



## EXAMPLE OF A BODY OF A PRESENTATION

The equipment necessary for a hydroponics project is plastic piping, a growing medium, seeds, nutrients, and running water. The first step toward making a successful hydroponics apparatus is cutting your plastic 3-inches wide. This is important because your plant needs enough room to grow.

## The Conclusion

The conclusion is the last part of your presentation. It is very important because it is your last chance to leave your audience with the feeling they have learned something. During your conclusion:

1. Repeat anything you want your audience to remember.
2. Answer any questions the audience may have.
3. Pass out information or a sample of your project.
4. Give the names of resources you used in your presentation. Some examples of resources are encyclopedias, magazines, and newspapers.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUR CONCLUSION

Restate the main point or lesson of your presentation.

Explain the benefits of learning about your project.

- Show the audience your finished product.

Do not tell your audience you are about to finish. For example, do not say “. . . and now to finish up I’m going to. . . .”

## EXAMPLE OF A CONCLUSION

Hydroponics is an excellent way to raise plants if you do not have much gardening space, do not like to weed, plow, and dig, and if you enjoy raising plants all year long. Remember, with hydroponics anyone can have a beautiful garden.

The information I shared with you today is from the University of Illinois’s pamphlet “Hydroponics as a Hobby—Growing Plants without Soil,” and “Hydroponics, The Art of Soilless Growing,” distributed by U.S. Agro Systems, Inc.

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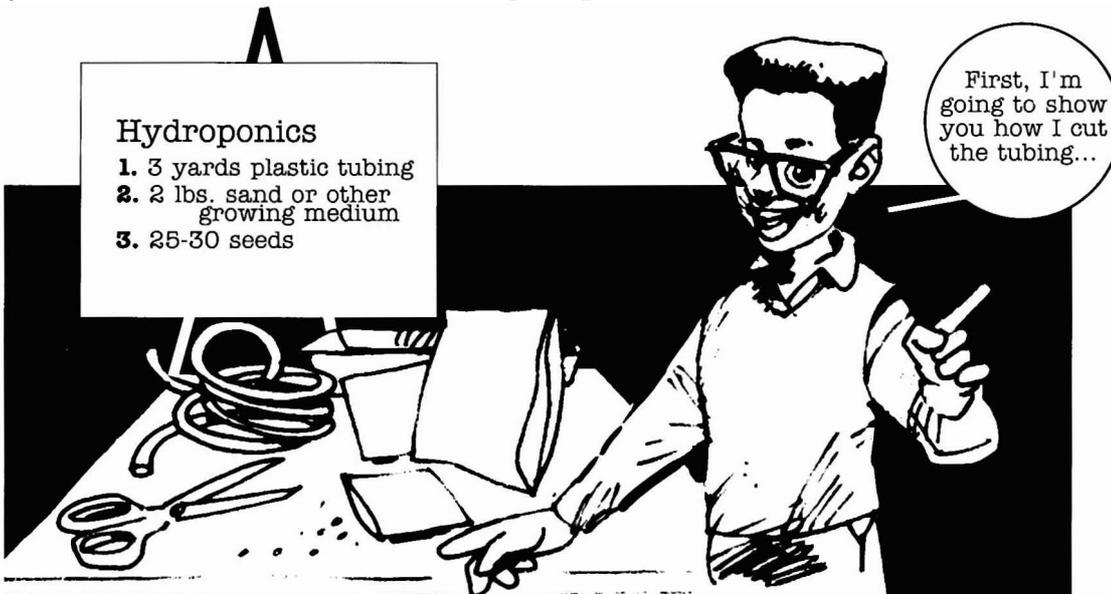
## What kind of equipment should I use?

The type of equipment you use depends on the type of presentation you are giving. Some things to keep in mind:

1. Use equipment suitable for the job.
2. Choose suitable size containers.
3. Clear glass bowls are best for food demonstrations because it is easier to see the ingredients.
4. Have paper towels and a damp wash cloth handy in case of accidents or spills.
5. Tape a plastic bag to your work table to serve as a waste container.
6. Remove dirty dishes and equipment before displaying finished product.
7. Use equipment that is both useful and attractive to best show off what you want to display.
8. If you have equipment that may not be familiar to everyone, briefly describe it.

## How should I set up my work area?

No matter what kind of presentation you are doing it is important that you arrange your area so your audience can see what you are doing at all times. A neat, clean work space will help you find your materials easier and reduce accidents. Setting up your materials in the order you will need them will help you to remember what comes next in your presentation.



## When should I use a poster or chart?

Knowing when to use a poster or chart can be tricky. The main purpose of a poster or chart is to make it easier for your audience to understand your topic. A chart is used when a picture, such as a graph, best explains your topic. A poster is most useful when you want your audience to remember important facts or steps. Posters and charts should not be used to show the obvious.

### HELPFUL HINTS FOR MAKING A GOOD POSTER

1. Use dark letters on white or light-colored paper.
2. Make sure everything is large enough to see from the back row of a room.
3. Make your poster in pencil first then trace over the letters with a dark marker.
4. Use a ruler to keep your letters straight.
5. Make your poster neat and easy to read.
6. Do not put too much information on one poster or chart.

## What about my appearance?

Your appearance affects your audience's first impression. Make sure your first impression is a good one by keeping the following tips in mind:

1. Wear casual, neat clothes.
2. Wear clothes that are appropriate for the task. For example, don't wear a ball gown if you are demonstrating how to make spaghetti sauce.
3. Don't wear too much jewelry or makeup.
4. If your project is messy wear something to protect your clothes.
5. Cleanliness is important. Make sure your clothes, hands, and nails are clean.
6. Stand straight. It gives people the impression you know your information.

## How can I control my nervousness?

It may surprise you, but being nervous can help your presentation. You need to be a little nervous to be a good speaker. Good speakers control their nervous energy and use it to make their presentation sound more exciting. Here are some tips to keep your nerves under control.

1. Practice. It's your best weapon against being nervous. Try practicing aloud in front of a mirror so that you can see what your audience will be seeing.
2. Remember a good feeling before you speak. For example, think about when you first got your dog or when you succeeded in doing something you had worked hard on.
3. Avoid standing with your fists clenched or your knees locked because this will make you more tense.
4. Make sure your equipment is working and in a convenient spot before you start to speak. For example, if you need to use the blender at the beginning of your demonstration, make sure it is in a spot you can reach quickly and easily.



## **HINTS TO HELP YOU CONTROL NERVOUSNESS**

Even the best speakers get nervous. You will probably be most nervous just before your speech and during the introduction. If you remember that these will be the two most difficult times then you can relax once you begin your presentation. Remember that the audience is on your side. No one wants to see you do poorly, so remain calm and confident.

## **What makes a good presenter?**

1. Practice.
2. Know your information well.
3. Show enthusiasm.
4. Use your voice to get your audience interested in your topic.
5. Do not look at your notes often.

## **Before the Presentation**

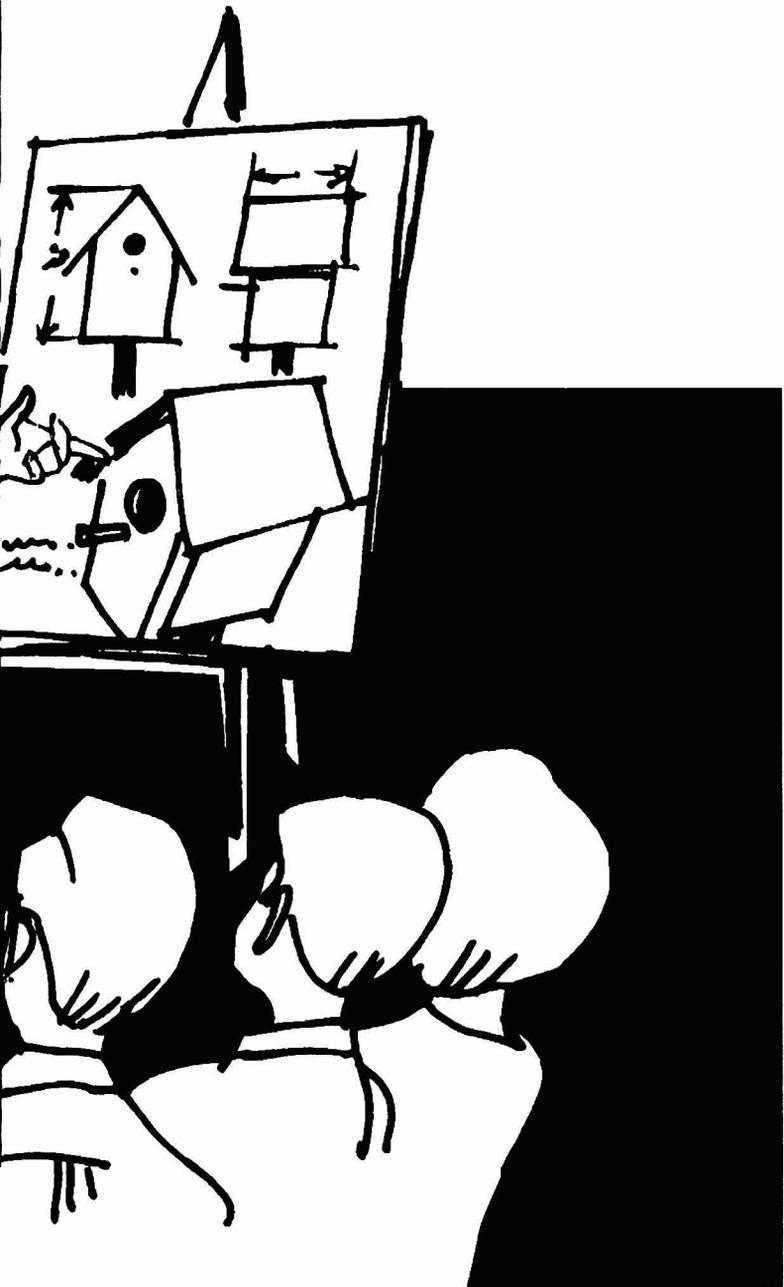
1. Practice as much as possible to work out the rough spots.
2. Be able to say all the main points without reading from your notes.
3. Know what the judges will be looking for. Get a copy of an evaluation form from your leader or teacher.
4. Make a list of all the equipment you will need and check it before you begin.

## **During the Presentation**

1. Speak in a loud, clear voice.
2. Use correct grammar.
3. Look at your audience while you speak.
4. Use natural hand and face expressions.
5. Do not let your movements become distracting.
6. Do not read your presentation to the audience.

**A good speaker** picks the right topic, prepares properly, and practices. Following these guidelines and those of your teachers or leaders will help you to learn a skill you will use the rest of your life.





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