

Career Seminars for Fellows
Public Speaking in Science
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
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Delivery: Use of Voice and Body
Engaging your Audience

Tip #1 – Connect with your Audience.

Public speaking is a dialogue or exchange between speaker and audience. Even if the audience remains mostly silent—such as during a lecture or formal presentation—it is still an exchange. Think of it like playing catch with a ball—the speaker pitches an idea or concept; the audience catches it and throws back signals in response such as nodding, taking a note, raising a hand with a question, or even looking confused or inattentive. There are three steps to throwing a ball—just as there are three crucial steps to communicating with an audience during a speech, presentation, or interview.

1. Are you ready? (make eye contact with your audience—prepare them for each pitch throughout your talk)

2. Throw the ball (pitch your idea/concept to your audience).

3. Did you get it? (Did your idea “land”? Did the audience catch it?)

- Public speaking is not about *you* it’s about communicating your idea or message to your *audience*.
- Make genuine eye contact around the room all through the presentation to make sure your audience “catches” what you “throw” out.
- *Be in the room.* React to what is going on around you. Concentration is about *taking things in*, not about shutting things out.

Tip #2 – Breathe!

- Take a deep breath before you begin your presentation and make eye contact with several people in the audience. (Are they ready?)
- **Breathe** low and deep between sentences throughout your presentation or talk. If you tend to get nervous, speak too fast, or mumble—taking regular deep breaths will help you calm down, slow down, and speak clearly and distinctly.

Tip #3 - Connect with your Body.

- Remember: you speak with your entire body—not just your mouth. Stand up straight, **breathe**—energize your presence and “own the room.”
- Be conscious of your body language. What signals are you sending through your gestures, stance, and tone of voice? Do you have any distracting habits? (“Signal vs. Noise”)
- Do a physical or vocal warm-up or some sort of physical activity before you start your talk—it will help you deal with nerves and focus on the task at hand.
- Let your arms and hands rest in an open and available position—don’t clasp them in front or behind you. If you are standing at a podium or sitting at a table let them rest on the podium or on the table. If there is no podium or table let them rest at your sides. Don’t worry about planning hand gestures—if you are focused on your audience and your hands are relaxed and available when the urge for a gesture comes they will rise.

Tip #4 – “Speak the Speech”

- Present important or operative words (including terminology, names, and key phrases) clearly and generously. (This is your specialty—don’t assume your audience has heard these terms before).
- Vary your pitch, rate, and volume to stress these important words and phrases
- Calibrate the volume of your voice and enunciate clearly enough to reach the people in the back of the room—the audience should be able to hear and understand you *effortlessly*.
- Keep your vocal energy up throughout the sentence—don’t “trail off” at the end of sentences.
- Instead of looking down at your paper *as* the sentence is ending, stay with your audience until the very end of the sentence and “land” your idea.