

Stand and Be Heard: Becoming an Effective Public Speaker and Adapting to Time Constraints

Marc Pollack (PhD Candidate, Microbiology)

Why Public Speaking?

- Public speaking is extremely important to our success
 - Interviews, presenting results, acquiring funding...
- My background
- Desire to give back to the campus that fostered my own speech skills
- Watched students and post docs struggle with public speaking

Why a Workshop?

- Little knowledge of resources on campus
- Many have too little time to take a class
- Need an opportunity to learn about what's available and sample

Workshop Structure



- Help students recognize that they can become great speakers
 - Discussion of anxieties
 - Pervasiveness of these fears
 - Speaking as a skill vs. talent
 - Even perceived failures are stepping stones
 - Audiences want to be a part of a speaker's success
 - Can fake it until you make it
 - Anxiety can be channeled beneficially



- Be informed
 - Watch good speakers
 - Outline
- Be prepared
 - Practice!
- Be relaxed
 - Exercise, calming techniques
- Avoid anything that distracts an audience and betrays anxiety
 - Body language
 - Behaviors
 - Filler words – Practice and discuss!
- Build effective habits
 - Good posture
 - Engaging movements
 - Using pauses and transitions



- Short Speeches (3 – 5 min.)
 - Contents: what is the idea/proposal, why does it matter, and how does it work?
 - Construction: Attention grabber, supporting points, call to action
 - Considerations: word economy, limit complexity, connect with widely varied audience
 - Outline and present – Practice and discuss!
- Long Speeches
 - Keep attention using emotional jump leads
 - Careful and clear flow of ideas
 - Avoid overwhelming audiences

Results/Takeaways

- 10 attendees between the two workshops
 - Mix of PhDs, post docs, and an undergrad
 - Included ESL students, wide variety of experience
 - Individual attention, participation
 - Feedback: positive!
 - Almost everyone requested a copy of the slides
- The workshop was a learning experience for me
 - I was as much an example as an instructor

Resources

- Examples (working with anxiety, building effective talks)
 - TED Talks
- Opportunities for dealing with anxiety and improving presentations
 - Courses
 - Campus resources
 - Teaching
 - Psychology
 - Off-campus resources

Acknowledgements

- Huge thanks to:
 - Teresa Dillinger, director of GradPathways and PFTF, who helped me organize the workshops
 - Joya Cooley, a TA consultant with the CEE, who helped organize and flesh out my scattered ideas and sat through a practice presentation
 - Bai-Yin Chen, a counselor with CAPS, who informed me a great deal of the anxiety and tools sections

Professors for the Future, 2015-2016



PFTF Fellow: Marc Pollack

Program: Microbiology

Major Professor: Bryce Falk

Project Title: "Playing to the Crowd: Making Yourself and Your Research More Accessible."

Project Summary:

Public speaking is an integral part of any the life of any academic. Most students, post docs and academics experience this chiefly in insular groups, presenting complex research to experts in their fields. However, this practice usually places the content of a given presentation above its construction and delivery, two aspects that are, perhaps, even more important for broader audiences. Even the best research is only impactful when it is conveyed well, and when it comes to acquiring funding and getting media attention, effective delivery is essential. As such, researchers have to bridge the gap in understanding between themselves and the general public. And with programs like the Grad Slam competition, students have very real opportunities to present complex topics in a digestible, interesting fashion. Unfortunately, improving public speaking often takes a backseat to other goals. The result is that many researchers are plagued by persistent fears of public speaking. When they do speak, their presentations are often laced with problematic and distracting tics that interfere with their messages. Researchers also need the tools to keep audiences engaged, and the knowledge of how to adapt their speaking to a variety of speaking times, in order to disseminate their research effectively.

To provide students and post docs with an accessible means for improving their public speaking, I offered two workshops that covered the topics of public speaking anxiety, effective speaking habits, and the organization and presentation of both short and long speeches. Each of these workshops was 2 hours long, and during that time, attendees were asked to express and face long-standing fears of public speaking, practiced avoiding distracting speech habits, and crafted and delivered a short, three minute speech on their research. Each of these sections included lessons I had personally learned, not only from my history in public speaking, but also in preparing for this specific presentation, as I used many of the same resources I referenced in my slides. Though these sessions were both small, with five attendees each, the small size of the group allowed for individual attention and pushed even the most reticent in the room to speak. Feedback was positive, each student went home with a sheet of resources to use in improving their public speaking skills, and most attendees requested that I send them my slides afterward.

University of California, Davis