

# How to Speak Persuasively, Whether in Person or Remote

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## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

You don't have much time before people form an impression of you. The experts say it takes from a tenth of a second to 30 seconds. A first impression is a decision as to how your audience will receive you. And it can be very arbitrary.

### Left Brain / Right Brain

The left side of the brain is the seat of reason and logic: rational and linear. The right side of the brain is the seat of emotion: irrational, associative, and utterly idiosyncratic.

The most powerful side of the brain is the right side—the irrational, the emotional side. How people respond to you emotionally, as random as that may be, that is what controls how they think of you. What happens on the right side of the brain controls the thinking on the left side.



### Unconscious Bias

What influences that emotional first reaction? What criteria are people using to evaluate, judge, or respond to you in as little as a few seconds? Often the primary determinants are things like gender, age, race, use of language, perceived sexuality, dress, etc.

The challenge for us as speakers is that some of those may not be favorable to us, so that when we posit a point of view or an argument, people may be filtering how they respond to that argument through an emotional reaction that is often unconscious.

You may have heard something like: "You know... I just don't like him, I can't even tell you why," or contrarily, "I would trust her. I can just feel it in my gut she's smart, she's a trustworthy person." Those are examples of how people can respond to you on the slimmest of criteria.

### It's How You Say It

So how do we deal with that as speakers, as people who want to persuade? As lawyers, you know how to craft a compelling argument and to appeal to the left side of the brain. But for people to hear what you say, craft how you say it.

*"People will forget what you said...but they will never forget how you made them feel."*

— **Maya Angelou**



## WHAT IS PRESENCE?

Presence impacts not only the effect you have as a speaker but also the confidence you project and your ability to persuade people.

Presence is that quality in a speaker that wordlessly:

- Persuades listeners of the correctness of their judgment
- Inspires belief in their authority & leadership
- Commands respect



## Authority

Part of presence is the confidence you have in your knowledge of your subject matter. If you're skilled and an expert in your field, and if your field is law, you might know how to craft an argument to persuade a judge and a jury. Those skills translate to other arenas such as meeting with a prospect or opposing counsel, or consulting with other attorneys.

## Remote Aesthetics

First impressions are as important online as in person. When your audience first sees you, it makes a big difference if they see something neutral, or even better, a bookcase or a nice painting—anything is better than showing your kitchen.

While Zoom backgrounds may be clever, they may also be distracting and unprofessional. If you do choose to use a virtual background, ask a friend for feedback. This way you're not just going on your own instinct.



## THE SPEAKER'S INSTRUMENT

There are two aspects to speaking—one internal, the other external. The internal aspect is your mindset, whether you're giving a speech or meeting with a prospect. What is the attitude you convey with your whole being?

The external aspect is the speaker's instrument—what you can use to influence people both consciously and unconsciously: body language, voice, and eye contact.

### Body Language

Body language may be even more important now over Zoom. How close should you be to the camera? Don't be so close that your face fills the entire screen, but if you're too far, you can't connect. It's best if people can see just the top part of your body.

#### Facial Animation

Keep your face expressive and animated. If the first thing an audience sees is someone who doesn't look enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge, regardless of how much they know about their subject, they are less likely to be heard. Keep in mind what you want to say and how excited you are to share it.

#### Speak to the Camera

Know where your camera lens is in relation to your monitor. When you look at the camera, imagine your audience where that lens is, and speak to it as just as you would speak to people. You can think of it as a friend you're speaking to.



#### Gesture

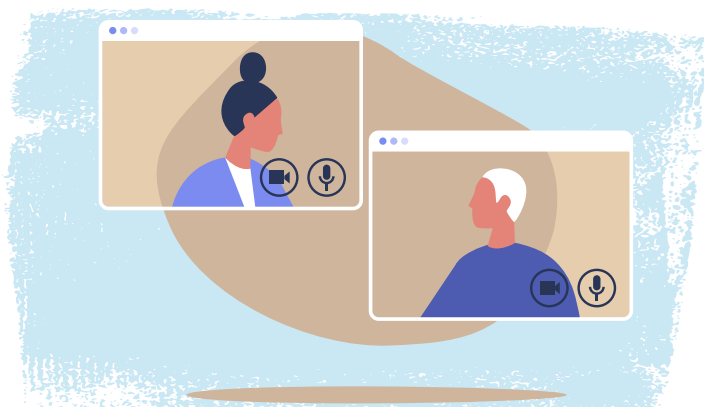
Whether you're speaking in person or remotely, gesturing means that people aren't looking only at your face. You don't want to gesture constantly, but if there are points that you can demonstrate using your hands, do it.

When you're not gesturing, keep your hands at your sides. That can be difficult to learn but that's where your hands belong unless you want to emphasize something.

#### Posture

Posture is more important when you're in person, but it does count on camera. Your posture should be erect but not stiff. You want to have a solid stance, or seat. Many people are not even conscious that they're burning off nervous energy by rocking or pacing, which are distracting for your audience.

If you are on a stage and walking, you want to walk firmly in the direction of someone you've engaged through eye contact as opposed to aimlessly pacing, which will simply project nervousness.



## THE SPEAKER'S INSTRUMENT

### Voice

#### Pausing

Pausing should be a natural part of your rhythm when you speak. Pausing does a few things. First, it helps you control your pace. One of the biggest speaking challenges many people face is that they speak very quickly and they're not aware they're doing it.

Pausing gives your audience a chance to absorb what you're saying, and a chance to respond. If it's important that you persuade people to your point of view or to take action, you want to gauge how people are responding to what you're saying. Pauses can invite your listeners to express their reaction.

#### Filler Words

Pauses also served a valuable purpose in that they help you to weed out filler words like "like," "um," and "really." The best speakers weed out extraneous words, just like good writers weed out superfluous words. Pausing helps you to control filler words, because you're giving yourself an extra second to have your brain frame what it is you want to say, then say it, and say it smoothly.

#### Pitch

The best speakers speak in a conversational tone. There is a rhythm to how they speak, and their voices go up and down. Think of the way you speak if you're telling a story in an informal setting. You enliven your story with natural variations in pitch as well as pauses for effect.

Changing your pitch also allows you to emphasize certain things, and simply be more interesting to listen to. If you speak in a monotone, everything you say has the same emphasis, which is no emphasis at all. You can make that even worse by talking at a very quick pace—in a flat monotone.

#### Practice

Record yourself. You can record yourself with video, or just audio. Listen to the sound of your voice and respond to how it sounds: Is it engaging? Does it sound warm? Is it someone that you would enjoy listening to? Self-reflection can be helpful in developing the awareness you want.

If you have a negative feeling about your voice, get feedback. So many people, including intelligent professionals, are hard on themselves. Their perception of how their voice sounds can be very unflattering and is not shared by other people. If you do decide you want to change the quality of your voice, there are professionals who can help you.





## THE SPEAKER'S INSTRUMENT

### Eye Contact

Eye contact conveys transparency, trustworthiness, and confidence. We've all sat across from people who look down when they think. Rather than holding eye contact and pausing while the next thought floats to the top of their mind, they look away, or down at the floor. That has a subtle effect of disconnecting from the person they're speaking to.

Where do you look when you pause to gather your thoughts? Ideally you want to maintain eye contact while pausing. It only has to be for a second or two. What you want to say will come to the top of your mind and you won't have to use filler words to dance up to it. That admittedly can be a challenge, but if you do look away, people's attention can drift.

If you do look down, look up and reconnect with the person before you speak again. Keep it as abbreviated as possible. See if you can train yourself. When someone asks you a question, hold eye contact while you're cogitating how you want to respond.

### Remote Eye Contact

Eye contact is very powerful in person. You lose some of that power when you're speaking remotely, but you can engage the camera and treat it like a person. If you want to refer to notes, don't spend much time away from the camera. Get back to the camera right away.

### Eyes on Stage

In person, another aspect of eye contact is that it helps you motivate movement as you cover a stage space. If you start speaking to a group of people from center stage, as you continue you will want to walk towards your audience. Deliver a whole phrase or sentence making eye contact with one person, and then move to another section of the audience and speak directly to another person. As you do that, walk towards that second person. This can make each one of 50 or 100 people feel you are talking just to them. That's when you create magic and people will open their minds to what you say.

If you are uncomfortable looking someone in the eye when you're speaking publicly, you're not alone. Public speaking is one of the most feared life experiences. If making eye contact is uncomfortable for you, look right between someone's eyebrows. Your audience will never know that you're not looking them in the eye.



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## ELEVEN USEFUL PERSUASION TECHNIQUES

Energy, conviction, and emotion in telling your story help you own the room. Begin with your own mindset and move on to master the basics: using your body, your voice, and your eye contact to establish authority, to convince, and to connect.

**1. Project Energy and Conviction.** Energy is the most important quality any speaker can have. Most attorneys appeal to the left side of the brain. They are logical and rational, but the best legal speakers appeal to the right side of the brain, projecting an underlying urgency that says justice must be done.

**2. Use Emotion.** Many attorneys are so focused on the law and presenting a strong case, they miss out on communicating the emotion appropriate to the story they're telling. Don't tell emotional stories in an impassive way. It will undercut the power of the story—and your case.

**3. Anticipate Objections.** It's important to anticipate objections. That's not just the case in litigation, it's also important when you're meeting with clients. Ideally, you should be able to answer questions like "Why are you so expensive?" in a way that strengthens rather than weakens rapport. Or if you want a particular action to be taken by someone, what objections are they going to have? How can you bring them on board? Consider and prepare.

**4. Frame the Agenda.** A powerful thing about framing the agenda, or whatever portion you can control, is that you can avoid things going off the rails. In a meeting, someone may speak too long, then "suddenly" time is up. Or you may be focused on one point and someone takes off on a tangent. You can say "Yes, Bob that's true, but let's keep the focus on this topic for now." Keeping language simple and explanations brief puts you in a position of power.

**5. Use Understandable Language.** If you're speaking with non-attorneys, be aware they might not understand legal jargon. Keep your language simple and easily understood, and your explanations brief. It's always good to be as brief as possible.

**6. Know Your Objective.** Know your objective whether you're speaking in public or you're meeting with a prospect for the first time. Everything you're doing should work towards that objective.

**7. Ask Questions.** Engage the audience and punch up the rhythm of your presentation by punctuating what you say with questions. Most people don't like being lectured at. It doesn't mean they don't want to listen but they want more than that. Be aware of how long you're talking without engaging the audience. You can ask things like "Does that make sense?" to give yourself a reality check and touch base with your audience. Invite them to give you feedback and ask questions.

**8. Listen.** You may have heard that a good salesperson spends 80% of their time listening. If you're trying to persuade someone, you need to know where that person is coming from. What are their concerns? Sometimes they may not even express their concerns explicitly, and you may need to define what's important to them, but you can only do that by listening.

**9. Stress Common Goals.** If you're at odds with someone, a good way to get closer to working in harmony is to stress what both of you are aiming for.

**10. Imagine.** It is a communication best practice to use analogies, similes, and metaphors to make things more understandable and also appeal to emotion. Metaphors are powerful. There's a big difference between "our company has a negative cash flow" and "we are hemorrhaging money." They're both accurate, but the metaphor gives it power.

**11. Use Stories.** Whenever you can, engage with stories. People love stories, and they make your point come alive.



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