

Public Speaking for Public Historians

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At work, public speaking might not be a major job duty, but it is something everyone is called upon to do from time to time. Staff meetings, introducing yourself to new board members, and answering visitor questions on your way to lunch are all opportunities for those of us that are normally in the background to shine. Effective public speaking is a great way to get others to share your and your organization's values. As a member of your organization, it is your responsibility to make public interactions interesting and informative.

The internet is full of tips and tricks to be a better public speaker, but speaking is a skill that is best honed by practicing with other people. Here are three simple and low stress ways to become a more effective public speaker:

1. Go old school: *Enroll in a public speaking class at a local community college. These courses offer an opportunity to learn or relearn the fundamentals of speech writing and presentation. They often include techniques to lessen speaker anxiety and how to effectively use PowerPoint or other visual*

aids. Many classes are designed so that students present planned speeches, as well as receive peer and instructor feedback on effectiveness in a non-threatening environment, all with the goal of providing the basic principles needed for effective speaking.

2. Act out: *Many local theaters and playhouses have improvisational, or "improv," workshops and classes. Improvisational theater really started to take off in the 1990s and has helped participants with communication in a less-rigid environment than a traditional classroom setting. It is a form of performance in which the plot, characters, and dialogue are made up on the spot. Improv emphasize teamwork, active listening, and spatial awareness for the actors involved. There are many types of improv for all preferences and skill levels.*

3. A toast!: *Toastmasters International is an organization whose goal is to make you a better communicator and leader. This organization, founded in 1924, has over 15,000 members in 142 countries. There are many local Toastmaster clubs throughout Ohio. Each club has scheduled member-led meetings in which members take turns presenting speeches. Club membership is open to all people ages 18 and above, but you do not have to be a member to attend most meetings.*

On top of practicing your public speaking, all three of these options provide networking opportunities for you to communicate the mission and ideals of your organization to new audiences. Each offers a different approach for you to become a stronger communicator and each a new audience.

Dale Carnegie has said, "A book may give you excellent suggestions on how best to conduct yourself in the water, but sooner or later you must get wet..." Public speaking is a skill that one must perform regularly to improve. By being a strong public speaker you will help your organization and yourself better engage with your community. ■