

Speaking Skills

We all know what makes a good or a bad speaker. Think of the good speakers you know and what made them so good. Usually it was just three things: clarity of voice, being interesting and relevant, and confidence. The first two of these are easy to acquire or improve. Confidence can only increase with experience.

1. Empowering yourself

- Feel confident about your right to talk about climate change - it is something you care about and your commitment to the issue will immediately come across when you speak.
- Don't feel inadequate or apologetic about your lack of scientific expertise- scientists all agree that there is a vital role for people like yourself to spread information about their findings. Scientists are often very bad communicators and you are doing what you know best - talking to other people like yourself in ways that they can understand.
- Don't worry if you are not a fluent slick public speaker. People will be impressed and praise you for trying. The fact that you are doing something that is hard for you will empower them to do something themselves.

2. Speaking

The most important thing is to **speak clearly**. You will almost never have a microphone and so it is vital that you speak clearly and loudly enough for everyone in the room to hear you. If you have a quiet voice, ask if people can hear you at the back and be careful to avoid situations with loud background noise (eg pubs)

When you speak, don't sit down, playing with your notes. Stand up and hold your head up, speaking to people rather than at them. Take your time to say things clearly.

It's very easy for nervousness to spill over into strange body language, so try not to twitch, pace up and down, jiggle your leg or jangle the keys in your pocket!

Take your time and pause when you need to collect your thoughts.

Basic format for a talk

Beginning of talk

Who I am. I'm here to talk about... because...

Middle: 3-4 key points

- What the problem is
- What the impacts are
- What we have done
- What you can do

End of talk

Summarise main points and finish up-beat with one thing that everyone can do.

Group discussion

End event

Thank people for coming. Sign-up sheets for further info and getting involved. Announce future events.

3. Organising The Talk

Length and sections

Find out ahead of time exactly how long you have to speak and ensure that you are not trying to say too much for the time available.

Break down the talk into distinct sections which lead people through the arguments.

We suggest that you divide your time into four equal sections: **the problem and its causes; the impacts; the solutions** - then stop talking and allow the final quarter for a **group discussion**.

In a one hour slot, this means you should spend no more than 15 minutes on the background science. Carefully plan this section to make sure that it doesn't take up too much time.

Key points

Remember that you cannot cover more than a tiny part of this vast area, so **stick to a few key points**. It's far better to make a few points well than to overwhelm or confuse people.

Notes

It's a good idea to have your talk mapped out in note form - even the most experienced talkers do this - but be careful not to let the talk depend on shuffling through pages of notes. Notes are like a map to guide you, not rail tracks to determine every minute of your time. A few bullet points and figures should be all you need.

Some people find it helps them if they write out some of their talk in full. However, if you just read to an audience from a long script, it will sound like a dull lecture. It's best to practice from your long script a few times and then write bullet points from it for the actual talk.

4. Content

Keep it simple

Avoid getting into too much scientific detail on the causes of climate change. It's more important for people to understand the impacts and the solutions to the issue.

Make it relevant

Tailor your message to your audience, using language and arguments that are appropriate for their interests, life experience and age. Think what message will be most motivating to each particular audience. Some audiences may be deeply concerned about the Third World Impacts, some may be more concerned on the impacts on their own lives, some may be motivated by the moral arguments, some by the economic arguments.

Speak from the heart

Speak from the heart about what makes you angry, sad, active. Draw on your own life experience. **This is what you really are an expert in**, and it's this emotion is what will inspire and move people.

Refer to recent weather, news from the tv or newspapers, things you've seen recently that make you angry.

Go visual

Visual aids such as flip charts photos, power point presentations, slideshows and videos help focus attention and illustrate your point.

Videos

A good video can be a great help, especially for covering basic information on the causes of climate change. Try to keep any video short (10 minutes or less). After all, people can watch documentaries on tv at home, but it's meeting face to face that really changes people.

If using a video, make sure that you warn people ahead of time to provide a video machine, television or projector.

Caution!
Always check equipment works well before talk starts!

5. Preparing The Room And Starting

Arrive before the start time. Bring leaflets and materials if you have them, and lay them out on a table for people to collect or look at.

Remember:

Take your campaign materials with you and to put them out somewhere visible.

Encourage people to leave contact details on a sign-up sheet for your group or for more info.

Arrange seats so that the chairs are close to the front- ideally in a slight horseshoe shape.

If there are only a few people, arrange the chairs in a circle to encourage interaction.

If there is a source of background noise,

ask the hosts if they can reduce it.

People rarely sit in the front row. If people are scattered and sitting too far back, start your talk by asking them to move to the front and bunch up.

Things rarely start on time and often no one takes control to start it going. Catch the host organiser's eye and suggest that it gets moving.

6. Questions And Discussion

It's best to avoid questions during the talk and ask people to wait until the end. The final questions and discussions section should allow the audience the chance to speak. So try to keep your answers short. You may like to say that this is a discussion section rather than just questions, and encourage people to express their own views.

If a real discussion starts between people in the audience don't break it up (unless it is just between two of them and is preventing other people from speaking).

7. Trouble Makers

True trouble makers are rare - the vast, vast majority of people are polite and respectful.

Trouble makers are usually people with egotistical personalities, who love the sound of their own voice. Occasionally they are people with psychological problems. Anyone with this kind of personality (you'll soon spot them!) will try to interrupt early on.

Be strong willed in asking them to hold off until the discussion section. If anyone dominates the discussion, cut them off and say that other people need to have a turn- say that you're happy to talk further with them after the talk.

In the very, very rare occurrence that you cannot control a trouble maker, stop the talk and open it up to the audience, saying that you can't talk with constant interruptions and asking them if they want to hear the rest of what you have to say. They will then intervene with the trouble maker.

Never get into an abusive argument with a trouble maker. Keep cool.

8. Feedback

All good speakers constantly work on their skills to become better. Don't just depend on your own perception- many people become very self conscious and needlessly self critical. So

ask a friend in the audience to give you detailed comments and criticisms after the talk and use these constructively to improve your material.

You can also use feedback sheets to collect comments from the audience.

Mistakes To Avoid

The worst mistake people can make is being unclear - too quiet, mumbling, disorganised, or gabbling too fast trying to say too much.

The main danger for everyone including experienced speakers is getting too bogged down in the detailed science and technicalities. Avoid acronyms such as IPCC, CO2 etc. Best to use the longer form whenever possible.