

4.9.12: What is Public Speaking?

Learning Objectives

- Discuss key characteristics of public speaking

Public speaking is, simply, an oral presentation or speech delivered to a live audience. It is generally a formal or staged event—although impromptu speeches are a common occurrence—and can be a defining career moment. For example, you may think you’re attending a client meeting only to find yourself called on to explain a procedural or technical point being discussed. Or you may be sitting in a management meeting thinking you are just there to observe when you are asked to elaborate on an aspect of the supporting research and analysis or defend your recommendations.

Impromptu Speaking

Although impromptu speaking isn’t the focus of this module, it is worth noting that this type of speaking is something Toastmaster members train for on an ongoing basis using a technique called “Table Topics.” For more on this technique, read [A Table Topics Workout: The Power Packed Exercise for Stretching Your Brain](#).

Executive presentation coach Peter Khoury has reverse-engineered the characteristics of great speakers for over fifteen years. Combining his findings with scientific research on leadership, he’s distilled this research into the following 9 characteristics of effective public speakers:^[1]

1. Confidence
2. Passion
3. Practice, don’t memorize
4. Speak in a natural voice
5. Authenticity
6. Keep it Short and Sweet
7. Connect with your Audience
8. Paint a Picture through Storytelling
9. Repetition

Like computer failure and natural disasters, finding yourself in a situation requiring public speaking skills is not a matter of *whether* it will happen but *when* it will happen. Given the potential career impact, you need to prepare accordingly.

1. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/9-characteristics-highly-effective-public-speakers-peter-khoury/>

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