

## **The Next Time You are Asked to Speak**

by Ethel Lee-Miller

You can't avoid it. You've been asked to "say a few words," Next week you **have** to give a presentation at work.

You feel a range of physical reactions from a tight throat, rubbery knees, to a racing heart. Words like *anxiety, fear, and panic* flash through your mind. Knowing this is fear doesn't carry you to the microphone with confidence. It simply makes you an aware, yet anxious person. What can you do?

There are tools that can save you from being a victim of panic.

One tool is an acronym called **S.P.E.A.K.** Each letter is a part of a speaker's preparation.

**SPEAK** is useful for prepared speeches which include research and visuals. O.K. I know some savvy reader is thinking, *Yeah but, how about when you're put on the spot— impromptu explanations or speeches—you know, when your boss turns to you and says, "Helen, tell John about your new plan for this department."*

Remember **S.P.E.A.K.** and you will be prepared for sneak speak attacks too.

### **S.P.E.A.K.**

**S- Speech**

**P-Posture**

**E- Environment**

**A Attitude**

**K- Kudos**

Do some preparation in each area and you will be ready!!!

**S is for Speech.** There are 3 parts.

1. **The Actual Speech.** Know who you are speaking to, when, where, why. Be prepared with a beginning, middle, and end for your talk. Memorize your opening sentences and the conclusion. Make it a memorable ending with a humorous anecdote or quotation related to the topic. Then practice, practice, practice. Visualize being at the podium as you practice. It's OK to have a cheat sheet as long as it's on small numbered cards.

2. **Your Ability to Speak Correctly.** Use correct pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Say the words correctly. If you are not sure, ask a teacher or friend how to say words correctly. Speak clearly. Look up words if meanings are not clear to you. Tape your speech. Listen to it on the way to work as practice. People may understand you with errors but if you are presenting yourself as an expert, your credibility goes way up when you speak correctly.

3. **Using Voice Characteristics.** **Timing** is how quickly or slowly you speak. Usually speakers need to slow down, pause at the end of a sentence. The period at the end of each sentence is a good reminder to breathe. Speak conversationally as if talking to a friend. **Pitch** is how high or low your voice is. Lillian Glass in [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Verbal Self-Defense](#) recommends that women lower their pitch in conversation. Lower pitch equals easier listening. Speak in a kind, respectful manner as if to a new *best friend*—you know how careful you are in those situations.

**P is for Posture.** This is how you stand; how you present yourself. Body language sends a strong message. Stand tall, relaxed without slouching. In first impressions, “55% of that first impression is delivered in appearances.” So say Michael Aun and J. Slutsky in [The Toastmaster's Guide to Successful Speaking](#). Thomas Mira in [Speak Smart](#) says this first impression occurs within the first

*three seconds* that the audience sees you. That translates to they're watching you as you sit or stand during the introduction. *You're on!*

Body language involves your body, head, facial expression, and arms. Use self-talk words like *confident, assertive, and compassionate*, as you get ready for your talk.

Speak with a smile in the back of your mind and it will come out in your appearance.

Dress appropriately for the occasion. As a presenter this means one notch above the audience. Is it the employees at a corporate office, small business, or formal affair? Always know what the audience is like beforehand so you and they feel comfortable. This includes dress and culture, especially the informal culture of a corporation. Are they "hey guys," hand shakers, back thumpers, huggers, bowers?

When you practice before the event date, get best friend feedback. *Hey, how do I look?*

Having eye contact is a great connection. It means to look at the people you are speaking to and watch them when you listen. Look at your audience, people on the left side of the room, right, and those in the back. Don't look or stare.

**E is for Environment.** Increase your comfort level by knowing what the room or speaking area looks like. Size of the room? Are the chairs in rows? Circle? Will you be seated around a table? Even if others are seated at a table, as presenter, stand, unless it is a very informal discussion.

Large room means large gestures. Is there a microphone? Podium? Steps? Air conditioning? Other equipment? Get there at least 15 minutes early to set up. Find out who's in charge. Remember their name. Thank them later.

Have water available. No ice—it constricts your vocal cords. Skip the coffee with milk—this can make you want to keep clearing your throat. Never alcohol.

**A is for Attitude.** This combines your speech, posture, and eye contact with what you believe about your topic. If you are prepared and know your topic, you'll have confidence and enthusiasm! A sincere attitude is a match. Watch people to see if they seem believable. *Hmmm, this person looks like they know what they are talking about; they sound like they know; they believe in it too. Their words, values and body language go together. It's a match!*

Award-winning speakers use humor. Never at the audience. Never racial, ethnic, no knock-knock jokes or funny stories *unrelated* to the topic. The best kind of humor is in stories poking gentle fun at yourself.

A well-known acronym for FEAR is False Events Appearing Real. Repeating this silently can reduce negative thoughts prior to speaking.

Toastmasters International is also a proven antidote to fear. Clubs meet in Tucson every day during the week and at various times of the day. Each meeting is devoted to building effective communication and leadership skills, which reduce fear and increase self-confidence. We don't go to Toastmasters to attend a class. We show up. We participate. It's practice—valuable practice.

Other ways to fight FEAR are with good nutrition, enough sleep, and exercise.

**What If You're a Loser?** The FEAR acronym still applies. If you lose your notes, write down what you remember beforehand. Do not apologize. The audience does not know you had five typewritten pages at home. They only see and hear you now. Continue anyway.

If you lose your train of thought simply say so. Ask the audience for help. *"Help me here. I'm experiencing brain freeze. What did I just say?"*

Don't apologize. People are on your side. They didn't come to see you make a fool of yourself. They came to get your information. Move on and give them what they came for.

**K is for Kudos.** Kudos means praise or credit. Give praise and accept praise. We all need compliments for a job well done. Even the audience. Be specific in your praise. *“I appreciate your attention, feedback, and enthusiasm as an audience.”*

If you say, “Oh, I wasn’t prepared enough” to the praiser, this is false modesty of deflecting praise, and also says to the person who gave you a compliment, “I’m not so great and neither is your judgment.” So accept praise. Smile. *“Thank you, I thought it went well too.”*

Praise the event planner both during your talk and after.

Keep these 5 points of **SPEAK** with you and *you’ll* be a star in public speaking!

### **Books to Enhance Your Public Speaking**

Brewer’s Quotations by Nigel Rees.

Communicate with Confidence by Dianna Booher.

Communicating at Work by Ronald B. Adler.

Don’t Panic by R. Reid Wilson.

Dealing with Difficult People by C. J. Keating.

Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway by Susan Jeffers.

How to Speak Like a Pro by Leon Fletcher.

How to Say It by Rosalie Maggio.

Public Speaking for College and Career by Hamilton Gregory.

Speak Like Churchill, Stand Like Lincoln by James Humes.

The Complete Idiots Guide to Verbal Self-Defense by Lillian Glass, Ph.D.

The Penguin Book of 20th Century Speeches by Brian MacArthur

The Toastmasters International Guide to Successful Speaking by J. Slutsky and M. Aun.

Treasury of Women’s Quotations by Carolyn Warner.

You Can Negotiate Anything by Herb Cohen.

Ethel Lee-Miller, MA DTM has spent over three decades in the public speaking field as educator, public speaker, workshop presenter, personal coach, and author. An active member of Roadrunners Toastmasters Club, Ethel is now speaking and writing about her life experiences.

Enhanced Life Management [www.etheleemiller.com](http://www.etheleemiller.com) [etheleemiller@me.com](mailto:etheleemiller@me.com)

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