

Winning in the
Public Eye

a **public**
speaking
Guide
for Actuaries



AMERICAN ACADEMY of ACTUARIES

Objective. Independent. Effective.™

"Winning in the Public Eye: A Public Speaking Guide for Actuaries"

American Academy of Actuaries, Washington, D.C. 20036

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Fourth edition

Effective
public speaking
 “ doesn't happen by accident.
 It happens by
 design.”

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The goal of this publication is to provide you with guidance to prepare for, and thus excel at, delivering in-person and webinar presentations. It outlines time-tested steps and techniques that, when followed, will greatly enhance your ability to effectively communicate your ideas in speech.

All of the approaches and techniques described herein will be very familiar to experienced speakers, who may read this guide as a refresher. Some approaches may seem unintuitive to less experienced speakers, so we've made efforts to describe in plain language the reasons and goals behind the approaches and techniques and to provide relatable examples. We urge you, when in doubt of an unfamiliar approach, to suspend your hesitation, give the approach a try, and judge it based on the results.

As a guide for actuaries, this publication also addresses specific speaking challenges and needs of the contemporary actuarial professional and especially the actuary who is speaking on behalf of the Academy or one of its sub-entities. An example is our discussion of the use of statistics when speaking. Another is our discussion of presenting complex, technical material to audiences who are not actuaries. The guide also refers to protocols for using material drafted or published under the auspices of the Academy and its sub-entities.

Some longtime Academy members may recognize parts of this guide from the 2011 edition of our publication, "Winning in the Public Eye: A Communications Guide for Actuaries." This new guide greatly revises the content from that earlier publication by removing sections on legislative testimony and communications with the news media, which are special forms of public communication requiring more advanced techniques. While leaner, this guide does also add material reflecting contemporary needs and approaches to public speaking. It emphasizes storytelling, urges consideration of using social media to enhance a presentation, and outlines public speaking techniques specific to the webinar format.

We hope that this updated guide helps you better communicate your ideas to opinion leaders, decision-makers, and the public.

Let us tenderly and kindly cherish,
therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us
dare to read, think, speak, and write.

— PRESIDENT JOHN ADAMS



Improving Your Public Speaking Skills

If you ever have been called upon to speak before an audience, large or small, you probably have experienced those all-too-frequent natural reactions: a surge of adrenaline and a mouth as dry as cotton. Even with a well-rehearsed speech or presentation at hand, it is not uncommon to feel somewhat unprepared the moment you are introduced.

Few people are born polished public speakers who ignite a message with vigor and conviction. Most people have to rely less on charisma and more on hard work. If you are new to public speaking, it is easy to imagine what could go wrong rather than what benefits could be gained—for the benefits may seem intangible at best and the potential for disaster all too real. There are ways to prevent mishaps, manage difficult situations, and overcome nervousness. With some diligent practice, who knows? You could begin to look forward to public speaking.

Successful Communication

Recall the last time you heard a speech that made you think about something afterward. It might have been a rare event. Your response during and after may have been laughter, empathy, agreement, or even disagreement, but whatever it was, the speaker was able to elicit a response from you and make you think about something.

How was the speaker able to accomplish that? It may have been due, in part, to his or her speaking on a topic that interested you. But even so, it is not likely he or she would have made much of an impression if his or her delivery had been dull and lifeless. It's likely the reason that you remember it is that the speaker told an engaging story.

Storytelling

Storytelling is at the heart of successful communication. Think about a good book you've read. Now think about what you had for breakfast 10 days ago. The reason that you remember the book is that it had an engaging story. By contrast, you're much less likely to remember facts in isolation, such as what you ate for breakfast on a random day in your life. Effective public speakers know that facts not couched in a logical and compelling narrative are difficult for audiences to retain, whereas stories command attention and bring facts to life. The first step in improving your public speaking is to start thinking of yourself as a storyteller. But what does that involve?

To create a story that others will remember, you must first *know your subject matter* and *know your audience*. Spotty knowledge of a subject matter makes it very hard to piece together ideas in a coherent and believable narrative. The good news is that, as an actuary, you already have specialized knowledge that will help you piece information together in a distinctive way. But, depending on the topic of your talk, you may need to perform additional research. A pension actuary, for example, may be perfectly knowledgeable about private retirement plans but not as familiar with the details of Social Security financing. If his or her talk is about Social Security financing, he or she will need to do some, perhaps even a lot of, investigation to be able to tell a compelling story about the topic.

You also need to know your audience to tell a good story. Consider the difference between how you would prepare a talk about actuarial professionalism to a group of college junior actuarial students versus preparing a talk on the same topic for a group of seasoned veteran actuaries. A talk peppered with fleeting references to ASOPs and professionalism institutions like the ASB and the ABCD might make sense to veterans but not to the students. The point is, how you tell a story depends from the outset on the intended audience.

Consider online and traditional broadcast (television and radio) news shows and segments. To viewers and listeners, they may be just information, but that is not how the producers think of them. Sure, they are there to report the news, but their success or failure in attracting viewers and listeners depends on one thing—how they *tell stories that entertain*. When viewers and listeners tune in, subconsciously they expect to be entertained. News consumers may want to get a synopsis of the news, but they will look for the most entertaining format and announcers, and it will be fast-paced and present lots of pictures and images. Radio is particularly colorful in its use of words and moves even more quickly. In neither case will you see a picture on the screen or a run of commentary lasting more than 15 seconds without a change. The same is true for commercials. Every aspect of a program or commercial is carefully calculated to prevent boredom and grab—and keep—your attention.

That is why those in mass communications have spent billions of dollars collectively on studies and surveys and on the testing of ideas, techniques, and theories about communication to discover how to make you, John/Joan Q. Public, remember their messages—what, in short, “entertains” you.

It pays to think of yourself as a storyteller. Plan to keep your talk fast-paced, to sprinkle it with colorful and descriptive phrases, to inject your words with vigor and conviction, and to refer to interesting audiovisual aids when possible.

Getting Your Messages Down

More often than not, you will have adequate time to prepare for a speaking engagement. Long before you rehearse a word of it, you will need to formulate the messages that are the building blocks of your story.

When you start writing your speech, script, or speaking outline, you should start by focusing on the central idea: one idea you want every member of your audience to take home. Write the message point you want to convey in one sentence. This is your main point, the reason you are speaking. This main point provides your focus, and from it you can organize the rest of your talk.

Technique tip

Focusing Your Messages

Whether you're a Twitter user or not, the short messages that its users compose, known as tweets, are instructive on how to develop a focused message. Tweets can be no longer than 280 characters, including spaces. The forced brevity of tweets can seem frustrating, especially to new users, but it also reinforces a critical technique for developing messages: Get to the point.

The writing technique needed to craft a successful tweet can help you develop a central message and then supporting points for a speech or presentation.

First, write down the major point you want the audience to come away with from your remarks. Use as many words, sentences, and paragraphs as you believe necessary.

Then imagine you have to send this message as a tweet. You have a total of 280 characters, including spaces, in which to do it.

The result of paring the verbiage will be your central idea, clearly stated and easily remembered. Before you get into the details of your talk, come up with one to three tweet-length points that communicate your central points. These 280-character—or fewer—messages should be the foundation upon which the rest of your remarks will be built.



Putting your ideas down as concisely as possible will help you to be a better speaker. You never want to *read* a presentation, except perhaps as a last resort, but preparing a written text (which later can be reduced to notes on index cards) will help you organize the information in your head so that the words will flow in an organized and natural way. And if you are called upon to speak extemporaneously on the topic again to another group, with a few friends, etc., you will have the information clearly planted in mind, with the illustrative anecdotes on hand.

Even with rigorous paring down, you may find that there are just too many facets of the topic to be covered comfortably. In that case, it is much better to select one area and build your presentation around it; save further discussion for other presentations.

Introductory Remarks

Your introductory comments are crucial. If you do not grab the audience's attention right off the bat, you may never gain it. Humor is a great way to entice people, for it helps set an easy atmosphere. If your topic is a solemn one, you may not have the opportunity to use humor, but if you can insert it safely in your introduction, do so. (But be sure to avoid lines that are cheap shots or potentially offensive to someone.) An anecdote can accomplish the same thing and set the stage for your story. If it is one from personal experience, so much the better—as long as it dramatizes your topic.

If you wonder where good speakers find some of those great opening lines, they often find them in books (of either the digital or printed variety) and websites that feature whole collections of one-liners, quotes, and anecdotes just for such occasions—but an original idea is preferable.

Remember: The purpose of the introduction is to make the audience interested in what follows. Keep it short, and work in a comfortable transition to the body of your presentation. Be sure at the outset to thank the person who introduced you, and acknowledge distinguished guests at the head table or in the audience.

Body of the Presentation

The body of your presentation is where you tell your story. Whether your goal is to inform or persuade the audience, you must reinforce your major points so they stick.

Repetition: Here you must “tell the people what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.” Repetition is highly effective in helping your audience remember your main points. So even while it can feel uncomfortable repeating information because we normally would avoid doing so in day-to-day conversation, it’s good to consciously break the habit and deliver key information multiple times during a talk.

Persuasion: For some presentations, your objective may be to persuade. If the audience is not likely to agree with your major point, you can greatly help to change the opposing view by establishing common ground. You may disagree with the audience on some point, or even the main point, but you probably share something in common with the majority and can exhibit some bond, such as residence in the same community or interest in the same goals. Keep in mind that no one likes to be told he or she is wrong. Any argument you make, no matter how clever the logic of it, will have a difficult time changing beliefs that are formed during many years of a person’s life. So state your opinions with conviction but gently and with empathy.

Relevance: If your listeners do not see a connection between themselves and your story, they will be less interested. Let us say you are asked by a community group to tell a little about what actuaries do. First, think of what aspect of the actuarial profession would most interest your general audience. You might discuss the problems facing Social Security, which affects just about everyone. Avoid overly technical descriptions; tell members of the audience how your topic affects them in their daily lives.

Credibility: You can enhance your story’s credibility by citing respected experts in the field. Statistics lend an air of validity but must be used sparingly. At the same time, your own credibility will be at stake. Verify your information and fact-check where applicable.

Technique tip

Using Statistics

As an actuary, you may be tempted to use an abundance of statistics. You will need to try to limit your use of statistics, especially if your audience is a general one. It can be quite difficult for some people to remember a lot of numbers, and numbers do not evoke images. Your presentation may require citing statistics and numbers, but do so as little as possible.

Here is a good exception to the rule: the startling statistic. An amazing statistic can grab your audience's attention and help you tell your story, but it must be a good one. A fictional example: "Last year, Americans drank 3 bazillion quarts of soda pop—that's the same as the amount of water in the Pacific Ocean." Notice in the example it is not enough to say "3 bazillion quarts." That does not say much; no one can visualize 3 bazillion of anything. When you use the analogy of the Pacific Ocean, your audience readily can appreciate just how much soda pop that is.



Interest: Evoke images whenever possible. Do not speak in abstractions; use words that conjure definite images in the minds of your listeners. "Red and yellow" has more impact than "various colors."

Simply Stated: Common mistakes of inexperienced writers and speakers are *padding* and *puffery*. Padding is saying something in five sentences that could be said in three. Puffery means using a big word when a small one could have been used. Language is most effective when it is direct and easily grasped.

Technical Terms, Information, and Definitions: A word about occupational jargon and technical language: As a rule, do not use it unless your presentation is before other actuaries or other professionals who are reasonably familiar with your subject matter. But keep in mind that actuaries outside your practice area may not be familiar with all the jargon and technical language that is part of your everyday work.

While technical terms may be helpful in quickly expressing a concept, if audience members do not understand crucial words in your remarks, they quickly will tune out your voice and allow their minds to wander to things they do understand. Using technical words without explanation also can be taken as a sign by the audience that you are attempting to show off your superior knowledge or that you do not have any idea who they are. Remember, the audience is there because they want to hear what you have to say. It is the speaker's job to make sure the audience can follow the remarks.

Technique tip

Choosing the Right Words

Technical jargon is useful to the working professional but can be confusing and confounding to a general audience. Consider the following example of technical jargon from an actual new car brochure: "The crush behavior was optimally synchronized with the response time lag of the front automatic seat belts. By means of the structurally programmed valley in the retardation curve for the front part, the motion sequence of the passengers during an accident has been exactly adapted to the retardation action and effectiveness of seat belts."

The text in the brochure could be appropriate for a conference of automobile safety engineers, but the meaning is totally lost for a casual reader (i.e., a customer). What the brochure could have said was: "By measuring what happens to someone in a crash, we are able to make seat belts that provide maximum protection in the event of an accident." This is concise and understandable.



When the use of a technical or occupational term is necessary, provide as understandable a definition as possible. Confine the definition to how it applies to the situation you are discussing. Avoid digressing into the history of the term or how it applies in other circumstances.

And, above all, define terms and concepts the first time they are used. Never say, “I’ll explain that later in my remarks.” That is tantamount to saying, “I know you won’t be able to follow me from now on, but after I’m done you can figure out what I was talking about.”

In short, remove every word and phrase that could add confusion to your presentation. The purpose of language is to communicate. Do not let the wrong words get in the way.

The Conclusion

The conclusion ties your story together. Its objective is to summarize the main points and stimulate the desired audience response, which could range from taking a specific action to just thinking about something. An inspirational quote, a challenge, or a solution to a problem may be given. State your main points again and close on an upbeat, positive note. The conclusion often relates directly or indirectly back to the joke, humorous anecdote, or personal story that formed the core of your introduction.

Review of Written Materials

Even the most highly acclaimed professional authors—whose names you might recognize from the *New York Times* bestseller list—make grammar, style, and content errors. They seek help from their peers and publishers to reduce errors and ensure that their final product meets quality standards.

Coordinating a review of a complete draft of your written presentation by others who will hold your work in confidence is a good idea. No matter how many times you’ve looked at a draft of your presentation and supporting materials, inevitably there will be errors. Others also can raise questions you may not have thought of that could help you improve your approach to a topic.

If you’re going to speak on behalf of the Academy, or one of its committees or other sub-entities such as a working group, or plan to use work product (whether it’s final or a draft) prepared within those entities, there is a mandatory review process outlined in the Academy’s [Guidelines for Making Public Statements](#), accessible on the Academy website. This review process helps ensure that presentation content is not only accurate but also appropriately reflects actuarial science, the actuarial profession, and the Academy’s values and brand.

Audiovisual Aids

In-person before a live audience, *you* are the main audiovisual aid. The minute you appear in front of them, everyone in the audience is forming impressions of you that will affect receptiveness to your story. You send out signals about yourself with your dress, voice, manner of speech, eye contact, and body language. You, therefore, will not gain credibility speaking to a roomful of dark-suited executives if you are wearing casual clothes. As a general rule, plan to dress conservatively but smartly: Business attire should be the default unless you confirm otherwise. You want to create an air of authority and confidence. Stand tall and move with assurance. In addition to yourself, there are visual aids you might use to illustrate and animate your talk. Some of the most common and effective are:

Slides: PowerPoint slides have become the standard audiovisual aid in most professional settings.

Flip Charts and Posters: Less common than slides, charts and posters are used in certain settings such as congressional hearings. Print your points neatly on poster boards, which also can be effective in small groups. When presenting slides or posters, make sure that the print is large and legible. The people farthest back in the audience should be able to read them without difficulty.

Do not punctuate every detail with a slide or poster; you will spend too much time with them and ruin the pace of your talk. Arrange your posters or slides in sequence and practice using them. Move to the next one only when you have reached that point in your talk.

Be prepared for foul-ups. If a breeze should blow a poster from the stand or a PowerPoint slide should appear out of order or with graphics or video that don't load properly, do not call more attention to the mishap. Calmly correct the mistake without comment or with a brief, humorous ad-lib and continue.

Video and Animations: In a media-savvy world in which business executives can become movie producers using desktop software, video is becoming more and more common as an audiovisual aid. Certainly a powerful tool in an entertain-me world, video should be used only to *aid* or complement your presentation—not the other way around.

Technique tip

Rules of Thumb for PowerPoint Slides

If you're preparing slides for your talk, be aware that too much content can both make them difficult to read and tempt you to "read" off the slides, which is a turnoff to audience members. A PowerPoint presentation should provide one or two simple, easy-to-read messages per slide, leaving plenty of blank space at the margins.

- One or two major points/concepts per slide.
- No more than seven lines of text per slide.
- Use bullet points and avoid full sentences and paragraphs.
- Use 24- to 48-point font—avoid any font that is smaller.
- Make sure the font color contrasts with the background color.

There are a number of different approaches you can use to flesh out details without cramming text (or graphics that are difficult to read) onto slides:

1. Break the details up across multiple slides.
2. Deliver the details verbally from speaker notes.
3. Provide the details to audience members in handouts or supplemental materials.



Storytelling With Social Media

Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are media channels that allow you to reach remote audiences with your story. If you'd like to extend the reach of your in-person or webinar presentation, consider using social media.

There are multiple options for supplementing your presentation with social media. A presentation may be broadcast on a social media platform via live audio and/or video through a "livestreaming" application. The presentation may be recorded and shared afterward in its entirety or in short clips on social media pages. Or, links to written materials, photos taken during the presentation, or major points within a presentation may be shared in short messages posted to the platform.

Discuss social media options with the meeting or webinar organizer. Keep in mind that social media platforms differ in the capabilities they offer for sharing messages, audio and video files, and pictures, and for targeting audiences. If you decide to supplement your presentation with social media, it's essential to work with someone who is proficient with the platform you choose. You'll want to develop a plan that describes the formats you'll be using (e.g., video, audio, images, text) and the exact timing, content, and cost (if using paid advertising) of producing the social media posts.

Practice, Practice!

Like any skill, presentation techniques must be learned and practiced. Organizations that promote public speaking, like Toastmasters®, consider practice absolutely essential to delivering a successful presentation. Why? The answer is simple. Experience has shown that it improves presentation quality, for presenters of all skill and experience levels.

Rehearse an in-person presentation in front of a mirror with your visual aids and before friends and associates. For webinar presentations, rehearse from the location and with the equipment you'll be using on the day of the live webinar. Commit your opening and closing remarks to memory. When you are practicing, be sure to keep the following in mind:

Make Good Eye Contact: For an in-person talk, continually scan the audience, stopping once in a while to direct your eyes and conversation to an individual. Although you will be speaking to a group, imagine that you are speaking to one person. You often will find individuals in the audience who respond to your eye contact with a gesture of agreement. Do not linger on those individuals but come back to them throughout your remarks to maintain the personal connection between speaker and audience. Eye contact promotes a sense of conviction and a desire to communicate. Be expressive.

In a webinar, you don't have direct eye contact with attendees, but you may be using a webcam. If you're presenting via webcam, pay special attention to your posture and expressions to ensure that you're projecting a lively, attentive demeanor for the duration of the program.

Gestures: They animate an in-person presentation and help burn excess nervous energy. Hand gestures can be effective in expressing differences, such as in relative size or speed. Practice gesturing smoothly, naturally, with your weight evenly distributed.

Speaking From a Manuscript or Notes: If you must read from a manuscript, practice to develop a spontaneous feel and rhythm. Delivery is extremely important in the effectiveness of the message. Inject a personable and natural character into your words. Notes help you remember where you are and where you are going. Practice glancing at them unobtrusively. When finished with a card, place it face down on the lectern or put it on the bottom of the stack in your hands.

Vocal Quality and Delivery: You are, of course, somewhat limited by nature regarding the color of your voice, but you can make it more pleasant sounding through conscious effort. Listen to a recording of yourself. Do you speak clearly? Do you enunciate and articulate? Is your delivery too fast or too slow? Do you allow pauses between points to let the audience digest your message? Most areas you would like to improve can be improved if, in your daily conversation, you practice changing for the better. The improvements soon will become natural. You do not want to force your voice into an unnatural sound, but a little conscious effort can improve your vocal delivery.

Timekeeping: Staying within the time allotted for your talk is an important point of speaker etiquette, and this requires timing your talk and making needed adjustments. Many speakers lose track of time while speaking, so keep time during practice and speak at a natural pace to determine whether you are short or long on material.

Technique tip

Posture Is Important

Whether you are speaking before a small group at the Rotary Club or testifying before Congress, body language is important. Good posture projects confidence and credibility; poor posture signals insecurity or maybe even evasiveness.

Whether you are standing or sitting, keep your back straight, your shoulders back, your body pointed toward the audience, and your head held high and ready to establish eye contact. When standing, do not put your hands in your pockets; rest them at your side. Even though you won't be putting your hands in your pockets, it's best to remove all objects from your front pockets before you speak—keys, change, eyedrops—anything you might fiddle with in a moment of nervousness.

When sitting, keep your hands on the table—elbows off!—and avoid fiddling with pens or paper. Your hands are valuable tools—do not let them become distractions.

A Question of Gravity

Standing in front of an audience can be stressful and fatiguing. To stay fresh, it is important to stay in a balanced, relaxed stance. As in sports and dancing, footwork is important. Your feet should be shoulder-width apart, pointing forward. Bend your knees periodically. Hold your hands and arms at your side. Do not lean on the lectern.

Podiums come in all shapes and sizes. Some are narrow, some wide. Some have small lights, many don't. Most are made of wood; some newer ones are made of clear Plexiglas. Be prepared for any type of podium. Or, in some informal settings, none at all.

Avoid gripping the sides of the podium or lectern. Some speakers, particularly those with a lot of nervous energy, tend to clutch the podium. It can upset your natural balance. It can cause you to focus your energy toward tightening your grip, not toward projecting your voice. Your audience often will notice your unnatural pose and focus on that—rather than on your words.



Questions and Answers With an Audience

Engaging the audience in a question-and-answer (Q&A) period after your talk is an effective technique to convey and reinforce your message. The Q&A allows members of the audience to concentrate on areas of particular interest to them. This also is a golden opportunity for you to demonstrate your knowledge and ability, thereby boosting your credibility.

It's also a good idea to discuss with the presentation organizer who will announce and conduct the Q&A. This will ease the transition to the Q&A period.

Sometimes the first question may be a little slow in coming. To help get the ball rolling, you can offer a question by saying, "Some of you may be wondering" When you do receive a question, identify questioners with precision. Identify them by name whenever possible. This provides a more comfortable atmosphere and says that you know and are known by some people in the audience.

During a Q&A at in-person presentations, do not point. You should not have to point if your eyes meet with those of the questioner and you nod in that direction.

You might be asked questions for which you do not know the answers. If so, state simply that the question lies outside your field of expertise. No one can reasonably expect you to know every aspect of the topic.

Keep the entire Q&A period to the time limit agreed with the meeting organizer. Near the end, tell the audience that you have time for one more question. Then, close with appropriate remarks; thank the audience or say you look forward to more discussion about the topic.

Preparation Pays Off

Feeling "nerves" or "jitters" on the day of your presentation or speech is not unusual. Don't let them become a source of undue anxiety; rather, understand that nervous energy is a sign that you want to perform well and can help you meet and even exceed your expectations. Take comfort in knowing that the steps that you've taken to prepare, and the time-tested public speaking techniques and tips that you've learned in this guide, will bring out the best in your public speaking abilities. Remember that the audience **wants** to hear your story, and that they'll be receptive to the key messages you've developed with them in mind. Use what you've learned in this guide and enjoy the success of being an effective, engaging storyteller.

Speaker Checklists

In-Person Presentation Checklist

BEFORE YOU START DRAFTING CONTENT

- Confirm the topic and how much time you'll have, including for Q&A.
- Verify what information you need to prepare and in what formats.
- Confirm who's expected in the audience.
- Confirm the room setup; visit the venue if possible.
- Confirm submission deadlines for the presentation, handouts, and any other materials.
- Check with your Academy staff liaison on:
 - The branding/templates that you should use for materials.
 - The due date for submitting materials for Academy review.

AS YOU DRAFT

- Tell a story. Don't just enumerate facts without context.
- Consider how flipcharts, animations, video or audio, polls, or other elements could enhance and enliven your presentation; check with the organizer whether the needed A/V and equipment will be available.
- Simplify the messages in presentation materials that will be displayed. Less content is better than more.

IF YOU ARE PREPARING SLIDES

- Limit yourself to a few main points per slide. Create bullet points on index cards or in PowerPoint Presenter View detailing how you will expand on the main points.
- Leave plenty of empty space at the margins.
- Record questions that you think the audience might raise to help you with Q&A preparation.

REHEARSAL

- Rehearse using exactly the same equipment as you will use during the live program.
- Practice transitions between your and others' speaking parts.
- If you are co-presenting or if there is a moderator, coordinate when and how long you will speak and how Q&A will be handled.
- Pay attention that your vocal quality and volume, pace, posture, and expressions project positive and clear messages.

DAY OF THE PRESENTATION

- Show up early and interact with the organizer and some audience members. Pick a few people with whom you will make eye contact during the presentation.
- Be polite. From the moment you engage with audience members, inside or outside the room in which the talk will be held, they are forming an impression of you that will affect how they view your talk.
- Check with the organizer whether there are any VIPs who should be recognized and whether news media are in attendance.
- Turn off or mute your smartphone.
- As you start, announce VIPs and the entity that is sponsoring your presentation.
- Track your time.
- Pay attention that your vocal quality and volume, pace, posture, and expressions project positive and clear messages.
- Stay engaged throughout the presentation. Make eye contact, stay animated, and correct any mistakes rather than apologizing.

Webinar Speaker Checklist

BEFORE YOU START DRAFTING CONTENT

- Verify what information you need to prepare and in what formats.
- Confirm who's expected in the audience.
- Check with your Academy staff liaison on:
 - The branding/templates that you should use for materials.
 - The due date for submitting materials for Academy review.
 - Whether, when, and in what file formats you need to provide a bio and a headshot for the Academy marketing materials.

AS YOU DRAFT

- Simplify the messages in your written materials. Less content is better than more.
- Use large fonts and simple, easy-to-read graphics.
- If you are preparing slides:
 - Limit yourself to a few main points per slide. Document, in personal notes, details that you will use during the webinar to expand on these points.
 - Leave plenty of empty space at the margins.

REHEARSAL

- Rehearse using exactly the same equipment as you will use during the live program. Use a handset or headset or microphone, not a smartphone or speakerphone.
- Download the latest version of the webinar software to your computer before the rehearsal.
- Verify that your handset or headset or microphone is working.
- If you're using a webcam, verify that it is working.
- Coordinate with the webinar moderator or leader the timing of when you will speak and how responding to questions will be handled.
- If you'll have control of the screen or slides at any time, practice controlling them.
- Pay attention that your vocal quality and volume, pace, posture, and (if using a webcam) expressions project positive and clear messages.

DAY OF THE WEBINAR

- Use a handset or headset or microphone, not a smartphone or speakerphone.
- Locate yourself in a noise- and clutter-free location with adequate lighting. Turn off or mute your smartphone. If using a webcam, make sure that it frames you as a headshot that is clearly visible.
- Before the live webinar starts, print out your presentation, notes, and the call-in/login information. Keep these with you during the webinar.
- Pay attention that your vocal quality and volume, pace, posture, and (if using a webcam) expressions project positive and clear messages.
- Stay engaged throughout the webinar.