

Competitive Public Speaking- A beginner's guide

By Debate Rubix

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Abstract

It is difficult to speak in public. That is why so many people are afraid to do it. It is also very important to speak in public, which is why so many people HAVE to do it. Bridging the gap between the will to excel and the fear to disappoint is the purpose of this guide. If you have never spoken in public, how do you do it? How do you learn? How do you practice? How do you excel?

The guide is based on the tried and tested method of public speaking training- doing it. Actually speaking in public. Consistently. Progressively.

The guide is broken down into 10 weeks. That is, one concept per week. Ideally, these will be conducted communally with a coach, some judges and some practice exercises. The training would be 15-30 minute sessions including the practice speeches. There are many platforms where you can do so and you are encouraged to find one that is convenient to you. A debate society, a toastmasters association, an interact club, a public speaking workshop... you must find your voice and an audience ready and willing to listen to it.

About the Author

Valentine Makoni is a seasoned adjudicator and public speaker. He has been to the finals of local, national and regional competitions including Pan African Debate Championships (PANS 2016), South African National Debate Championships (SANUDC 2015, 2017) and Africa University Invitational (AU Ivy 2016). He was the Chief Adjudicator for the Nust Webb High Schools Public Speaking competition for 2017 as well as an independent adjudicator for various high school competitions. He has some coaching experience at all levels including at the National University of Science and Technology, Mzilikazi High School and St Marcellin Primary School.

His ambition and goal is to equip all people with basic communication and creative skills through the medium of competitive public speaking.

i) **About Debate Rubix**

Launched in November 2018, **Debate Rubix** has been a passion project of its founding partners: **Valentine Makoni** and **Providence Shumba**. A passion for competent speaking and eloquent speaking as found in the disciplines of Debate and Public Speaking.

Debate Rubix is a commitment to learning, competing, networking and sharing debate and public speaking skills. We engage in the processes of speaking, adjudicating, training, organizing, administrating and commentating within the global debate landscape. Debate Rubix seeks to serve with a special focus on the needs of Zimbabwean based debaters from primary school, through high school, through tertiary institutions like Teacher's Colleges, Polytechnics and Universities. Our ambition is clear: **From Novice, to World-class.**

ii) About the Authors

Competitive Public Speaking- A beginner's guide is co-authored by Valentine Makoni and Providence Shumba. They draw on their wealth of experience in speaking, adjudicating and coaching debate within the Southern African Region.

You may find the Debate and Public Speaking CVs for the founding partner Valentine Makoni on www.debate.co.zw as brief summaries of key competencies and speaking highlights.

Competitive Public Speaking- A beginner's guide

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Engage The Author



Facebook: www.facebook.com/debaterubix

Web:

www.valentinemakoni.co.zw



Email: valentinemakonibiz@gmail.com



Whatsapp: +263 773 659 429

Competitive Public Speaking- A beginner's guide is available to download on

www.debate.co.zw

Week 1- Speaking in Public

Why do you want to do public speaking?

Many different people will have different answers to the question. It matters almost very little what the actual answer would be. There is no right or wrong answer anyway.

Virtually all responses share one common idea- that there is a purpose to the exercise.

You must ask this question first, in all its complexity or simplicity. Do you want to practice for a class presentation? Are you concerned about personal development? Do you want to change the world? Do you want to win trophies at the local tournament? Is it for another reason? Is it a combination of 2 or more reasons? On a personal level, **you** must define for what you intend to accomplish.

Competitive public speaking provides 3 key things in serving that purpose

- A platform to practice,
- An audience to listen, and (importantly),
- Feedback on your performance.

So, whether competitive public speaking is a means to an end or an end in itself, it is a vital medium.

How do you do public speaking?

Because speaking in public is both a science and an art, there are no consistent rules on how the actual format will be like. Inquire from your society / association / competition the following;

- How long do I have to prepare?
- How long should my speech be?
- Will there be time signals or not?
- Are there themes or topics I should adhere to?
- What are the scoring criteria?

These responses will vary depending on the objectives of the chosen platform. You must not be intimidated however as the general principles and guidelines in this book will make you adequately prepared to handle multiple scenarios. *

EXERCISE: **START!**

*NB IN WEEK 5 AND 6 YOU WILL LEARN THE NUANCES OF IMPROMPTU SPEECHES AND PREPARED SPEECHES.

Week 2 Finding Inspiration

What do you speak about?

The best place to begin preparing for your speech is asking yourself what you will speak about. The reason why this is so is because when you have something that you like or believe in or know about, you will have confidence in speaking about it. It makes actually speaking about it easier.

The obvious first place to start is if there is a topic or theme that you have to speak on. Maybe there is a general theme of “Women in Power” and you must speak on such a subject. Other times, it will be an open platform and you may speak on any topic or idea of your choice.

In any case, **know** your content.

Read about it. Listen to the radio. See what other speakers have spoken about before. Go online. Open the newspaper. Ask friends. There are many places to really discover and understand almost all topics of public speaking. Doing the preparatory research into your subject will make your speech richer in content.

More abstractly, immerse yourself in media about the content that will help you be in touch with the emotion, history or controversy of such content. Listen to music, conscious music. Attend poetry, emotive poetry. Gaze at paintings, colorful paintings. In subtle ways, this will enhance your ability to speak with authority.

Secondly, be *creative* with your content.

Do not just repeat and rehash what someone else did. Copying makes your speech dull and uninteresting and usually means you cannot do it as well as the person you copied. It is ideal that you *write* or *prepare* your content yourself. If you cannot do it from the start, at least be involved in the process of it adding your own twists and ideas to it.

Further, speaking your own view or truth on a subject is the best way to be creative. Your opinions and perspective about a subject will make your speech unique and engaging. Your audience is listening to you. It *wants* to listen to you. So, be brave enough to showcase yourself in the ideas you present.

Tip: Speak your honest truth in your content. This is a lot more persuasive to your audience and a lot more meaningful to you as a speaker

Exercise: Come up with a list of topics that people could speak about. Assess whether people can come up with unique and interesting ideas for their subject matter.

Week 3- Speech Approach

What is your approach to this subject?

There's more than one way to dive into a pool. Well, there are many ways to deliver your content too. In this section, we will speak of 4 common public speaking approaches. You are encouraged to see them in use, learn them and practice using them. You may also expand your skills by adopting or innovating new approaches. Specifically these are; Storytelling, Descriptive, Persuasive and Emotive.

Storytelling- Personal anecdotes are some of the most powerful speeches. Here, you take something that they saw or experienced and retell that scenario to your audience. This could be your first day at school, your first kiss, or the happiest day of your life. Through your words, you make your audience live that same experience through you.

But, they don't all have to be personal stories. You can tell stories about things you have heard. You may even speak on imaginary stories. A good example is as is done traditionally with "Ngano dzaTuro naGudo." By definition, a story is a series of events, following a certain path and getting to some of conclusion. You may say your speech as if you are telling a story.

Descriptive- You may choose to describe a subject that interests you. It could be a place that you travelled to, an item that you bought or a person that you are attracted to. Try to make your audience see, touch, feel or taste what you

are describing. Engage their sense by use of vivid details. Generic words and phrases such as it is “good” are not so engaging. For example, with food, you may say it tastes sweet. Or sour. Or tangy. Or like a dog’s belly. Be specific.

Persuasive- Here you try to convince your audience to do a specific thing. You may speak directly to your audience (say a group of undergraduate students) or you may imagine an audience and deliver to them (say a rally for a political party). Regardless, the persuasive approach must tell your audience **what to do** and **why they should do it**.

Again, different people are convinced by different things. Some are convinced by logic and you must prove that whatever action you want to take makes sense. Yet others are convinced by morality. You must show that the action is in service of a worthy cause. Etc. In any case, find what persuades your audience and use that to move them in a direction that you want.

Emotive- Here, the purpose is to make your audience feel something. Emotions are an important part of our humanity that is why we laugh, cry, scream, mourn, et cetera. For this to work, choose an emotion you want your audience to feel. Adopt that emotion. Embody it. If you want people to feel sad, using a low tone and unpleasant content can work.

Exercise: Choose a single topic and give various approaches to people and see if they use them.

Week 4- Style

How will you present this content?

People have different personalities. Some people are serious and grave and project an air of authority. For example, your residence matron could be one of those people. Other people are goofy and jokey and funny to be around. Maybe there is a person like that in your class.

Style in public speaking is about your personality in the delivery of your speech. The various components listed below are each individually important, but it is how they work **together** in presenting an overall feel to your speech that is important.

Volume of voice- It is annoying to strain to hear someone who speaks so lowly that they are whispering and you don't get what they are saying. It is also grating to listen to someone shouting, especially if the person is shouting in a small classroom with an echo. Learn to moderate your voice projection so that it fits the room that you are speaking in.

Tone of voice- you may use a loud pitch tone, almost like screaming. Or a low pitch that is like a bass. It is usually recommended that you use your normal speaking voice in an even tone unless you want to vary it for effect. In any case, listen to how your voice sounds and whether it is good for your style.

Speed of speech- How quickly someone would talk at an auction selling goods will be different to how slowly someone will read a eulogy at a funeral. The speed of your speech must be a reflection of your character. In any case, you must speak at an **audible** speed. If you speak too quickly, your audience will not be able to keep up with your ideas and they will not be able to understand. Until you master the techniques of speech variation, use a normal and audible speed.

Gestures- Too much movement from a speaker distracts an audience. As such, it is advised that you use understated gestures. For example, do not walk up and down a stage. Move one step in either direction if you have to for emphasis. Your hands must enhance what you are talking about. You may point up if talking about flying or you may shake your fist when making a threat. If it does not add value to your content, it is best to keep your gestures minimal and allow your words to communicate.

The do's and don'ts of Humour

- ❖ Do's
 - Do use humour, if you can.
 - Do aim to use humour in a way that makes your audience think. That is, employ satire.
 - Do have pauses and breaks that allow your joke to be understood, processed and reacted to.

❖ Don'ts

- Do not be offensive in your humour. For example, avoid using rape jokes.
- Do not use humour, if you can't. Find another stylistic approach if you think you can't be funny.
- Do not tell people that you are about to tell them a joke. Just do it

Exercise- Ask participants to deliver two similar speeches with two stylistic approaches

Week 5- Speech Structure

Is there a good structure to a speech?

There is a tried and tested method to structure your speech. It is deceptively simple but immensely effective. Have an Introduction, a Body and a Conclusion. In other words, begin well and end well.

Introduction

The first few words or phrases of your speech are meant to capture the interest of your audience. Ideally, your introduction must be short, precise and effective. This can be anywhere from 10 seconds to 30 seconds of your speech depending on its length.

In any case, the purpose of an introduction is to tell the audience **what** you will tell them and/ or **why** you are about to tell them your subject. You must propose something of value. Here you show that your speech could be informative, entertaining, important or humorous.

Body

In your body will be the bulk of your speech. Just like we use paragraphs and chapters in written work, you must order and group your ideas in your speech. They must have a certain flow to them. One can choose to give subtle headlines to sections of your speech. For example, you may start each section by asking “What is Harare?” “Where is Harare?” “Who lives in Harare?” etc

The use of pauses adds to the flow to your speech structure. That is, at the end of an idea you may pause before you begin the next idea. In any case, the body of your speech must be understandable to your audience.

Conclusion

Exit on your own terms. Have the final word.

Many people just stop speaking abruptly, in the middle of an idea, a sentence or even a word. Or they speak too long that they end up speaking over time and being banged off stage. In these and other cases, your unsatisfactory ending will sully the way people view your speech.

Think of your conclusion before hand. What do you want people to take away from your speech? Why is it important? Then, decide **how** you will package that proposition of value.

Optional structure techniques- Preview and Summary

It is not always necessary to tell people what you are going to tell them (a preview), or tell them what you just told them (summary). Many times this is repetitive and does not add much to your performance. However, especially when speaking on complex, abstract or difficult subjects, a preview and a summary may deliver the idea in a more digestible way. Don't do it unless you have to.

Exercise- From a list of topics, and ask participants to deliver ONLY introductions and conclusions.

Week 6- Prepared Speeches

What are prepared speeches?

In public speaking, prepared speeches are speeches that have a substantial amount of preparation time. This could range from 30 minutes to 5 days depending on the competition. In spite of the variation, they give you a chance to think about your speech, its content and delivery and, possibly, write down your notes.

First, be clear as to the subject of your prepared speech. That is asking, what is your topic? You may even get a list of topics to choose from. This might be practical or abstract. For example, your topic may be “Selling sand to the Sheik.” Be clear about your subject matter.

Sometimes, you may be asked to simulate. Simulation is when you are given a scenario and asked to pretend to be someone or speak to a particular audience, or use a certain mode of communication. For example, you may be placed in the following simulation

Suppose you are Jose Mourinho and it is half-time of the Champions League Final. Your team is losing 1-0. What will you say to your players?

Zimbabwe Debate Championships (ZiDC) Public Speaking Final scenario 1 (2017).

You must adhere to the conditions and guidelines of your prepared speech. Not doing so reflects poorly on your ability to adapt to situations that your oratory skills are needed in.

How do you prepare for prepared speeches?

Research on the topic, especially if there is a part that you do not understand. Look up key terms in the dictionary or on google. Choose your approach and the main subject of your content. Will you tell a personal story? Will you describe a place of poverty?

Write down these ideas and practice giving your speech. It is advised that you do not write down your speech verbatim. It reflects poorly when a speaker is reading from his notes word for word because it is not engaging to the audience. Instead, write down some pointers for yourself that will help you remember what you are going to say. You may use cue cards to improve your presentation.

In any case, be flexible in your delivery. Engage your audience; have eye contact. Adapt your style to their mood or reaction. For example, you may choose to insert a subtle reference to a previous speaker's speech.

Exercise: Give participants one speech topic and 15 minutes preparation time. They must deliver 3 minute speeches at the end of this period.

Week 7- Impromptu Speeches

What are impromptu speeches and why should you master them?

An impromptu speech is a speech where you will have minimal preparation time. While some may give you 15 or 20 seconds to prepare, you will often be required to begin speaking immediately after you receive your topic.

Impromptu speeches are important because they give you the skill to think and execute unforeseen situations well. For example, you may be randomly prompted to give an address at your uncle's wedding without notice. As such, impromptu speeches are a common and vital element of public speaking.

How do you execute impromptu speeches?

Do not panic.

Take a deep breath, relax and think through your content. Try and follow the guidelines of the speech structure given in week 5 as many people fail to do so. By doing these speeches consistently you will gradually improve in your execution.

Impromptu Speeches template

One way to improve your impromptu speech is by coming up with a few speech templates. These are skeletal parts of your speech that you can always merge and morph with various topics. This method is an effective cheat-code to doing

impromptu speeches as a bridge to delivery without preparation.

For example, one may choose to assume the role of a radio DJ. Regardless of the topic, one would begin with “This is Harare’s hottest station where we engage the hottest issues. Today our topic is....” And hence they can practice being a DJ with the restrictions and opportunities of such a character.

Tip: Fill out your impromptu speech time. As you are speaking, continuously think of new ideas, extensions that will allow you to use your allocated time.

Exercise: Ask participants to write a topic on a piece of paper and place them in a hat. Pick out one topic and begin to deliver a 1 minute speech with no preparation time.

Week 8- Word Choice

How should you say what you want to say?

The truly exceptional speakers have exquisite word choice. They infuse a sense of personality, gravitas and impact onto the words they speak. To master the art of appropriate word choice is a continuous iterative process. You may record your own speeches and play them back or you may ask your audience to tell you of words or phrases they liked or disliked.

Expand your vocabulary.

Periodically and consistently learn new words. What are they and what do they mean? There are pocket books that teach you new words or applications on your phone with “Word a Day” functionality. You may choose to go the traditional route and consult a dictionary. Or you may learn them from other speakers you see, articles you read and songs you hear. In any case, make a deliberate effort to learn new words, phrases and idioms.

Avoid Long Quotations

If you are going to quote the words of another speaker or writer, take only the part that has impact.

Literary Devices

A metaphor is imagery that equates meaning to words/ phrases with that imagery. An example of a metaphor is “He

was feeling blue.” A Simile likens two objects. For example, “He was as pale as a ghost.” Learn how to use metaphors and similes and sprinkle them into your content. Other literary devices include Euphemism, Sarcasm and Irony. They enrich your delivery and can compliment your style to better project your personality.

Phonics and Word Association

Phonics is concerned with the sound of words. Certain words sound good together. Learn and try new word associations with this impact. Alliteration, similarity, opposites and oxymoron’s are examples of word association techniques that can enhance your delivery.

Avoid Filler and repetition

Avoid repeating yourself or saying things that do not add value. For example, do not overuse the expression “Ladies and Gentlemen.” When unsure, a pause will usually assist you to find the right words.

Be direct. Be deliberate

People generally prefer a more direct phrase or word. Instead of saying “My appetite for food is high,” it is better to say, “I am hungry.” This is a common mistake of budding public speakers- mistaking complexity or difficulty of words and phrases with good word choice.

Exercise: Do the exercise to 1 minute

Week 9 – Feedback

How are you judged in public speaking?

There is no consistent method or criteria of judging public speaking especially in the Zimbabwean circuit. It is actually quite common that you may be judged by people with no previous public speaking experience.

However, instead of looking at it as a disadvantage, one must see the opportunities that lurk in such situations. By speaking to an audience of lay people, it becomes less important to focus on technical aspects (such as referral quotations) but actually to focus on the impactful side of your content and delivery. How does your audience understand, feel, and react to your speech?

Here is a sample rubric extracted from the Nust Webb High School Public Speaking Competition 2017

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Content and Creativity	40 %
Style	30 %
Audience Rapport	10 %
Relevance to the Topic	20 %
Total	100%

Individual Feedback

The vast majority of judges are willing to give individual feedback to speakers, with personalized assessments of the

individual's strengths and weaknesses. You are encouraged to seek this feedback consistently with an open mind. Do not be defensive. Even if you disagree with an adjudicator, attempt to understand why they saw your speech differently.

This is critical because, public speaking is about conveying an idea or message to your audience. The true test of your quality is not how you see it but how your audience received it. Note any patterns of strength or weaknesses and rectify accordingly.

Personal Growth

Rome was not built in a day. As such, you will not be able to master all elements of public speaking instantaneously. It is advised that you choose specific areas you want to focus on improving (by using your individual feedback or this book as a guide).

Speech testing

Sometimes it helps to test your speeches to a smaller audience of friends or associates before delivering in a large hall. However, you must trust your own judgement about its quality or appropriateness. Word of warning: Do not under-deliver your speech because you have done it too many times in testing.

Exercise: Have 3 speeches delivered and the rest of the participants being adjudicators. Allow each judge to give feedback on the speakers.

Week 10- Public Speaking in Practice

Why is it important to learn public speaking?

The Skills and techniques that you learn in public speaking can be of use to you in non-competitive spaces. One must only learn to adapt to the different needs of each particular setting.

For example,

In a business interview

Focus on projecting confidence and being open and direct to the people asking questions. Have moderate speed in your speech and a measured tone. These are traits of a professional individual.

In a mass address

At a rally, a worker's union or any other public address platform, it is key to keep your message simple and succinct. The use of chants and gestures become more relevant as they can more easily communicate to multiple people.

As a Director (or Master) of Ceremonies

Tailor your content to fit the interludes where you may fill in time between activities. It is bad form for the master of ceremonies to hog the spotlight and distract from the purpose of the function. Use humour sparingly and be crisp in your content.

Presentations (business and academic)

Be factual. Ensure that the content that you are delivery is true and relevant to your presentation. Use slides as cues to guide your presentation only not as a dump of all the points (see prepared speeches). Keep your gestures and movement minimal to project a professional image.

Stand Up Comedy

Humour can be delivered in various doses. Some lines elicit belly laughs while others lead to a smile. Control the energy of your audience, ramping it up or bringing it down depending on the desired effect.

Keynote Address / Plenary sessions

Allow the progression of your content from areas that are widely known to the more obscure. Ensure that you explain any unnatural logical links. Tailor your content to the competency of your audience. For example, if you are presenting on computer programming, the technicality of your presentation to high school pupils would differ to that of Microsoft Developers.

Exercise: Simulate public speaking scenarios

Appendix A: List of Public Speaking Topics

1. Selling Sand to a Sheik
2. Black Milk
3. What is your cause
4. Communicating in Silence
5. My School colours
6. I am proud of....
7. I am afraid of....
8. If I was a boy
9. Music
10. If I ruled the world
11. Zimbabwe
12. What it means to be young
13. Desire
14. Excite Me
15. A single rose on a concrete wall
16. My style
17. Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder
18. He was homeless
19. 1,2, 3
20. In the book of John

Resources for further reading;

www.debate.co.zw

Art of Public Speaking by Dale Carnegie

Tswane Knights: PUBLIC SPEAKING HANDBOOK Prepared
by: Mello Khobe and Mokgabo Thobega

A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking by Dan O’Hair; Hannah
Rubenstein and Rob Stewart