



**Helping individuals and companies  
break out of their comfort zones  
to become more successful**

**Training | Coaching | Speaking**  
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## **Practice, Practice, Practice**

When I was in high school, I played clarinet in the school band. Every afternoon, I climbed up the hill from the bus stop carrying my clarinet case and every morning, I trudged back down the hill carrying my clarinet case, still unopened and untouched.

My performance on the clarinet failed to improve because merely carrying the clarinet was not enough to help improve my skill at playing it.

The same is true for presentations. When you're preparing to speak to a group, no matter how small or large, it's not enough to *think* about what you're going to say or flip through your slides while you're sitting at your desk. That doesn't count as practice.

Practice means that you actually open your mouth and say the words out loud in as close to the real environment as possible. So, for example, if you're going to stand while presenting, stand while practicing. If you're going to present while sitting around a conference table, then practice while sitting around a conference table. The purpose of practice is to become comfortable enough with your material and the mechanics of presenting it in the environment that you will be able to deliver your presentation naturally and effectively.

You should practice going through your presentation at least a few times. Memorizing it may make you more anxious since you'll be worried about forgetting the exact words you memorized. Instead, become familiar enough with your key ideas and message that you can use different words and phrases to express them each time you practice. If you choose to use notes, practice how to use them effectively without clinging to them or reading from them.

There are three major areas of content that you should focus on during your practice:

### **Introduction**

This is your opportunity to engage the audience and also to build your confidence. You should be so comfortable with your introduction that you can deliver it effortlessly, with full eye contact, a strong voice and few pause words (like "um" or "ah").

### **Transitions**

Presenters often get lost between points or slides. You want to practice how you will move smoothly and logically from one idea to the next. Having a well-organized presentation makes transitions easier because you can say something like, "the second reason we need a new process for handling customer complaints is..." or "the next phase of the project involves testing the software against the requirements..."

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### **Conclusion**

This is your last chance to remind the audience of your message. Don't just let your voice trail off with "well..... that's it, I guess...." You should end with a powerful conclusion such as a call to action or a strong reiteration of your message and its importance to the audience.

I learned the hard way – it's not enough to carry the clarinet around and think about practicing. To improve, you actually have to open the case and play it. So the next time you have to give a presentation, make the time to practice the right way by saying the words out loud in as close the real environment as possible. As a result, your actual delivery of it will be smooth and effective.

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