

How to Establish Your Credibility

Brief: To establish credibility, public speakers should earn the audience's trust and respect by presenting themselves as authorities on the topic.

Learning Objective: Demonstrate how to establish credibility and authority with an audience.

Key Terms:

- **Credibility:** The objective and subjective components related to the believability of a source or message.

Establishing Credibility

In the realm of public speaking, the message is inseparable from the messenger. If audiences don't trust you, they won't listen to you. The hard truth is that your audience will begin to judge you before you even have a chance to introduce yourself. First impressions are hard to overcome!

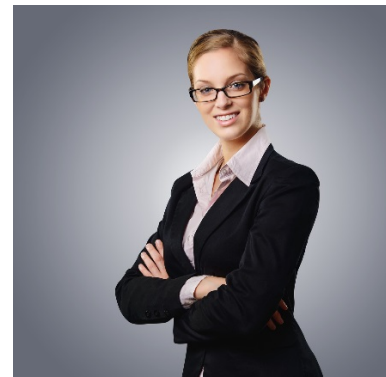
To gain your audience's trust, simply preparing a good speech is not enough—you also have to prepare yourself. How do you prepare yourself to make a strong first impression? Fortunately, public speakers can rely on a set of general guidelines to put their best foot forward and establish credibility in a variety of situations.

Impression Management

To effectively manage how others perceive you involves learning a set of skills. These impression management skills are critical to developing your public speaking credibility:

1. Dress the part.

Find out how formal the occasion is and style yourself accordingly. Keep it simple: loud patterns, bright colors, flashy jewelry, and revealing styles may distract the audience from your message. When in doubt, err on the side of formal professional attire.



2. Maintain eye contact.

Speakers who make eye contact with the audience appear more open, trustworthy, and confident. Even if you're consulting cue cards or working from a PowerPoint presentation, look directly at your audience frequently to maintain your connection with them.

3. Speak loudly, clearly, and confidently.

Confidence is contagious—if you have confidence, the audience will catch it easily.

4. State your credentials.

Trust is contagious too—audiences will trust you more readily if you can prove that other people value your expertise. Credentials include relevant degrees, certifications, testimonials, recommendations, work experience, volunteering experience, and other types of personal experience.

5. Reveal a personal connection to your topic.

Let your audience know why your topic matters to you. How has it affected your life? If appropriate, share a personal anecdote that illustrates your relationship to the topic.

6. Establish common ground with your audience.

Rapport is an essential ingredient of trust. To establish credibility, your audience needs to feel that they have a genuine connection to you in some way. What problems do you have in common? What goals do you have in common?

Gaining Credibility with a Skeptical Audience

If you are speaking to a skeptical or hostile audience, begin by finding common ground. Appeal to shared beliefs and values, and identify a goal that you can all agree on. Refer to this shared goal throughout your speech to remind your audience that—ultimately—you want the same thing.

Why should the audience listen to anything you have to say? The burden of proof is on you, so you need to make a case for the value of your experience, training, or research. Show skeptics that you are motivated by a sincere desire to present them with the most up-to-date information and that you also have the wisdom necessary to assess the quality of that information.

If you're attempting to persuade your audience to your point of view, you will lose credibility if you dismiss opposing views offhand. If you can demonstrate that you understand why opposing views are attractive, you will have more credibility when you make a case for your own position. If you fail to address common points of contention, your audience will have a perfect excuse to resist your argument.

From Concept to Action

Even if the actual delivery date for your speech is weeks away, it's not too soon to start considering your attire. Take some time to conduct a wardrobe review. Do you currently have a job that requires you to dress professionally? Or is your closet full of jeans and t-shirts? What's

your go-to outfit for a formal occasion? Is it formal enough to be appropriate for your upcoming speech? Or is it perhaps too formal? Do you currently have clothes that will be “just right?” If not, can you borrow a few items from a family member or friend? Remember, you only have one chance to make a first impression. Make your first impression count!

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

“Business Woman Professional Suit Elegant Female.” Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/photos/business-woman-professional-suit-2697954/>. Accessed 4 May 2019. [CC0]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

“Introduction.” Lumen Learning. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-communications/chapter/introduction/>. Accessed 4 May 2019. [CC BY-SA 4.0]