



## Pre-Speech Confidence Checklist

Feeling confident as a public speaker doesn't just happen.

Confidence takes time – and builds over time! – starting with the moment you get an invitation to speak.

So when it comes to confidence? **Be intentional!**

Use this **Pre-Speech Confidence Checklist** every time you speak to set yourself up for success on stage.



### 5 Confidence-Building To-Do's in the Months or Weeks Before You Present

#### Step into the moment

Someone inside or outside your organization **invited** you to present. You will be on stage for a reason. Celebrate that! Choose confidence by reflecting on that truth and that affirmation. Value the platform you've been given to be heard.

#### Accept imperfection

Human beings – even the most seasoned public speakers – are imperfect. Yes: You will give 100% as you research, plan, script, design and rehearse your presentation. But perfection is unattainable. Realize this fact, and accept it upfront. Release the thought that everything will go 100% according to plan. Believe that you are already enough.

#### Play your own highlight reel

Visualize yourself being successful every step of the way: as you walk on stage, deliver your presentation and leave the stage. Tell yourself a positive story; let your mind see a positive outcome. If you can see it, you can believe it.

#### Frame your talk as a gift

During executive speech coaching sessions, way too many speakers at first tend to shine a spotlight on themselves – “How will I do? What if I make a mistake?” – and then suffer because they fret, freeze and feel like an imposter. Instead? Turn that spotlight around and shine it on your **audience**. What you have to say they have not heard before! In fact, what you have to say is a **gift**. So present your audience with that gift, which in turn releases in you a plethora of positive emotions – anticipation, connection, excitement, pride, happiness, joy and fulfillment – and boosts your confidence.

#### Own your content

To feel confident on stage, you must feel confident in your content. Anything less is unacceptable. If you feel confident in your content, you feel pride of ownership: empowered and excited to share what you have come on stage to share. As a result, self-judgment and nervousness fall away, replaced by energy and enthusiasm.

To own your content, start with a plan: **AIM for impact** to build a talk with intention and change the way your audience thinks or behaves.

- **A:** Analyze your **audience** to connect with your audience so you can change your audience in some way.
- **I:** Identify your **intentions**. What outcomes would you like to see?
- **M:** Commit to a solitary **message**.

Then follow your plan, and flesh out your content. Tell the story only you can tell. **Own it!**



## 4 Confidence-Building To-Do's in the Weeks or Days Before You Present

### ✓ Add visual speaker cues to your manuscript

To make sure your words match your delivery, format your speech to make it easy to deliver. Add these visual cues as starters to increase your confidence in your delivery:

- **Green bold text** for lines introducing new sections (so you can see the structure of your speech in your head)
- **Red bold and underlined text** for key words (helps you put emphasis in all the right places)
- **Yellow highlighted text** for words to contrast – like “here” and “there”
- **Up arrow symbols** – for questions and exclamations, when your voice needs to go up
- **Down arrow symbols** – for firm statements and the concluding line in a series
- **Emojis** – for example, a happy face for delivering with enthusiasm
- **# # #** – for intentional pauses that allow the audience to process what you said
- **Slash marks** to separate words that are easily slurred
- **Intentional line breaks and page breaks** that allow you to breathe and deliver conversationally – not robotically

### ✓ Rehearse independently

Recreate your experience as a presenter by rehearsing at a lectern – standing up and speaking out loud – with a microphone and any slides projected on a screen. Record yourself; does what you say match how you say it? Time yourself; are you right on time, or over the mark? (A confidence buster!) Can you nail your opening and closing lines? (Big confidence boosters!)

### ✓ Tap a coach

After you've rehearsed for a long while on your own, ask a trusted (but frank!) colleague, or work with an executive speech coaching professional, to identify any trouble spots with your delivery. Are you:

- Using eye contact, smiles, facial expressions and purposeful gestures to connect with your audience?
- Talking too fast or too softly?
- Forgetting to breathe?
- Pausing in all the right places?
- Defaulting constantly to filler words like “ah,” “um,” “so,” “like” and “you know”?
- Slurring words together?
- Trailing off at the end of a sentence?
- Anticipating tough questions and unexpected distractions – and addressing them professionally?

## ✓ Get your voice in gear

Practice pronunciation and articulation – as well as tone, pitch, inflection, pacing and pausing – by reading Harvard Sentences aloud as a warm-up routine. These sentences, used for testing technologies that deliver the spoken word – like telephone systems and hearing aids – provide a wide range of speech sounds. Think of [Harvard Sentences](#) like calisthenics for your voice ahead of your speaking event.

## 3 Confidence-Building To-Do's in the Days Before You Present

### ✓ Take mindful breaths

If you practice deep breathing (and get good at it!), you will feel calmer, your voice will sound stronger and you will be perceived as a more confident speaker. Here's how to take mindful breaths:

- Sit or stand up straight – relaxing your chest and shoulders
- Inhale deeply through your nose and count to four – letting your belly expand
- Hold your breath and count to four
- Exhale slowly through your mouth and count to four – releasing the air from your belly
- Pause and count to four
- Repeat four times



### ✓ Preview the venue

At least a few days before you arrive at the venue, ask for photos of the room setup: the stage, podium, lectern, lighting, backdrop, screens and seating. Will you need any adjustments: a classroom setup instead of a horseshoe setup, for example, or a side table to hold certain props or materials? Find out what equipment is on-site (a clicker? the proper cables?) and what you will need to provide (a laptop?). Ask for what you need to succeed and feel confident heading into your event.

### ✓ Choose to dress for success

Pick an impeccable outfit that makes you feel like a superstar! The better and more comfortable you feel in your clothing (don't wear anything that restricts your movement or distracts the audience from what you have to say), the better impression you will make and the more confidence you will portray.

## 3 Confidence-Building To-Do's the Day You Present

### ✓ Rehearse on-site

Before you go onstage – ideally the day before or a few hours before – visit the room and do a modified dry run with your content, any slides and the site's AV. (If you can squeeze in one quick rehearsal with your trusted colleague or executive speech coaching professional, even better.) Will you need to adjust your voice based on the microphone you are using and the acoustics? Who is your contact for tech support, and what's the protocol – especially if the technology fails? How will you get on and off stage? Take a moment to practice your entry and exit – noting any potential impediments like taped wires, steps and carpet – so you know exactly what to expect.

## ✓ Arrive early to center yourself

Find a quiet, people-free space nearby – an empty room, hallway or alcove will do – and clear your mind. Practice the controlled breathing exercises you mastered earlier. Tell yourself **you've got this** because after all: You've prepared well!

## ✓ Move your body

Release any remaining tension by stretching, standing tall, touching your toes, moving and shaking your arms and legs – even running in place for a moment. Get the blood flowing by squeezing and releasing your fists and rolling your head, shoulders, wrists and ankles. Show up like Superman or Superwoman – strike that pose! – and get pumped to deliver your presentation (your gift) to your audience.

## 5 Confidence-Building To-Do's Right Before You Go on Stage (Do Again What You Did Months or Weeks Ago)

### ✓ Step into the moment

### ✓ Accept imperfection

### ✓ Play your own highlight reel

### ✓ Frame your talk as a gift

### ✓ Own your content

**Remember:** This Pre-Speech Confidence Checklist is an executive speech coaching resource that you can pull out and apply every time you get an invitation to speak.



So keep it handy.

Be intentional.

And choose confidence – practice it! – one intentional action at a time.