

# The Secrets of Successful Speech Making

For the First-Time Presenter



Scott Topper

with Patrick McHugh, Ph.D.

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At IMproSolutions™, we help you resolve your public-speaking challenges...one step at a time. Our goal is to increase your confidence and creativity by further developing your public-speaking technique with our exclusive DVD seminars and this book.

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# **The Secrets of Successful Speech Making For the First-Time Presenter**



**Overcome Your Fear of Public Speaking!**

**Scott Topper  
with Patrick McHugh, Ph.D**



## Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in IMproSolutions™, an Interactive Public-Speaking System. We'll give you the presentation tools and knowledge you need, plus improve your confidence...guaranteed! IMproSolutions™ keeps you in the moment and stimulates your creativity. This theatrical approach utilizes improvisation, visualization, body movement, and stage technique to help you to become a better presenter.

### About the Authors:

**Scott Topper**, three-time Emmy-nominated television show host, is a professional actor and speaker who has dedicated his life to helping others become passionate public speakers. Scott is the founder and creator of IMproSolutions™, an Interactive Public-Speaking System developed in 1999. With over two decades of public speaking, improvisation, and acting experience, Scott offers public-speaking seminars to corporate executives, business owners, entrepreneurs, and various organizations worldwide, including China, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

Scott's goal is to empower people to achieve success in their personal and professional lives by discovering and exploring the true colors of one's own unique personality. Scott strives to increase individual confidence and creativity by providing useful and practical public-speaking tools and techniques. As an entertainment industry expert, Scott is a member of Meeting Professionals International, Screen Actors Guild, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, and International Special Events Society.

A consummate entertainer, Scott co-hosted "The Local Show" with Cheryl Ladd from "Charlie's Angels," hosted "Way Back Weekends" radio program for Cumulus Broadcasting, played an alien "Kantare" guard for Paramount TV's "Star Trek: DS9," and co-starred in "Hypnotalk" on E! Entertainment TV. Scott was recruited by Twentieth Century Fox in Hollywood, CA to play the United States touring role of "Night Guard Scott," promoting the DVD release of the movie *Night at the Museum*, starring Mickey Rooney, Robin Williams, and Ben Stiller.

Scott also hosted “American Top-40 On-tour,” a two-year, 50-city U.S. excursion for ABC Radio Networks. He served as reality field producer for MTV’s “Taildaters,” and later became show runner for MTV’s “Burned.” Scott received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Rutgers University majoring in Broadcast Journalism and Theatre Arts. He lives with his wife in Los Angeles, CA and he enjoys cycling, singing, dancing, playing guitar, fundraising for charity events, and performing improvisational comedy.

**Patrick McHugh** received his doctorate in Comparative Literature and Masters in Philosophy from Binghamton University. He has taught at Boston University, Iowa State University, Drake University, and the University of Cyprus. He currently teaches writing at the University of California, Santa Barbara, with a dual focus on humanities and business communication, including public-speaking.

In addition to speaking in front of his classes on a daily basis, Dr. McHugh has delivered dozens of professional presentations in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, on topics ranging from literature and philosophy, to environmental rhetoric, to business communication and the craft of teaching. He has published more than twenty academic articles, contributed opinion pieces to on-line websites, maintains two blogs, written a screenplay, and is currently writing a novel about the American conquest of California.

He lives with his wife in Santa Barbara, where he designs and builds custom furniture for family and friends, especially his three grown daughters. He enjoys hiking, bicycling, live music, and hosting poker nights.

### **About the Book:**

Stage fright, also known as public-speaking anxiety, or performance anxiety, is the number-one fear among adults. This practical, self-help manuscript for young people and adults provides readers with the tools and strategies necessary to becoming a better presenter. Sharpen your skills, increase your confidence, and improve your performance.

Eventually you will be asked to make a speech, whether it’s a wedding-day toast, accepting an award, or a business presentation. People judge us and the companies we represent on how we present ourselves. This book is filled with helpful secrets and insights into the public-speaking challenges that trouble the novice speaker. Complete with a contemporary approach, the reader is encouraged to step up to the microphone and deliver a compelling speech with confidence.

*"Success is a state of mind. If you want success, start thinking of yourself as a success."*

**- Dr. Joyce Brothers, psychologist and TV personality**



The IMproSolutions™ technique is highly effective for many people, professions, occasions, and events, including:

Academics  
Actors  
Artists  
Attorneys  
Birthdays  
Business  
Ceremonies  
Chefs  
Coaches

Entrepreneurs  
Funerals  
Hobbyists  
Instructional  
Introductions  
Medical Field  
Meetings  
Musicians  
Pageant Winners

Photographers  
Politicians  
Religious  
Scientists  
Social Clubs  
Students  
Teachers  
Weddings  
Writers

**Be prepared for your next speech!**



## Chapter One: Your Inner Public Voice

*"According to most studies, people's number-one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."*

**- Jerry Seinfeld, comedian**

Chances are, you're reading these words because public speaking makes you uncomfortable, or highly anxious, or even scared. Perhaps you feel something bad will happen when you get in front of an audience. Maybe you're afraid you'll make a mistake, or freeze up and forget what to say, or ramble on aimlessly. Despite the fact that you know more about the topic of your speech than anyone in the audience, you can't think of anything to say that anyone wants to hear. You can't imagine being funny, or poignant, or inspirational, or informative, or persuasive, or engaging, or even audible. You have no idea how to prepare for, write, or deliver a speech, even though you must speak, you agreed to speak, and everyone expects you to speak, soon.

Chances are, you needn't be so hard on yourself. You are certainly not alone. What you think of as your own personal and private obstacles, anxieties, or deficiencies are quite common. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld makes a joke out of it in the quote that begins this chapter, but he is quite right. Several surveys show that, of all the things that Americans fear, public speaking ranks number one. (We're number one!) This fear can be socially debilitating at weddings and funerals, office parties, and even small family gatherings. This fear is also a primary reason why many people are unable to advance in their career, since nearly every profession involves substantial public speaking, especially at advanced levels. So relax. If you are uncomfortable speaking to an audience, you are normal.

## Turn Nervousness to Your Advantage

- *Take the focus off of yourself and put it on your audience.*
- *Prepare your mind and body to transform nervousness into engaging the audience.*
- *Create a speech you believe your audience will appreciate.*
- *Rehearse to the point of confidence.*

Chances are, in fact, that the reasons you think are keeping you from success in public speaking are not nearly so bad. Imagine, for example, a teenage boy full of the usual insecurities particular to that age, except that this boy has much more to deal with. He is sickly, has never been able to play sports, or exercise, or engage in any physical games of any kind. The other boys, as boys often do, shun him, taunt him, call him names: “weakling,” pansy,” “coward,” and so on. What’s more, the boy is an orphan since the age of seven, and his guardians, rather than protecting, nurturing, and preparing him for adulthood, are busy stealing his inheritance. If all that weren’t enough, the boy is chronically short of breath, has difficulty raising his voice beyond a whisper, and stutters.

Chances are, this adolescent boy’s obstacles to success in public speaking dwarf yours. And yet these are the early beginnings of the life of Demosthenes (Dee-MOSS-Thee-Nees), the greatest orator of ancient Greece, whose public-speaking skills inspired and persuaded not only those who heard him when he was alive, but also millions more in the 25 centuries since his death. His oratorical power came not just from his ideas about democracy or justice, but, more importantly, from his speaking style, his training to overcome his obstacles, and his emotional, intellectual, and physical preparation to deliver a speech. Indeed, other great orators, Plutarch, the influential Roman historian, and Henri Clemenceau, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century French statesman, to name just two, found in Demosthenes’ success a model for their own. So can you.

Chances are, by now, you can see where this idea is going. Success in public speaking is not a matter of chance. Public speakers are not born; they make themselves. Public-speaking skills are not innate in a few rare natural-born talkers. Rather, public-speaking skills are born in all of us, and we can all, like the best public speakers, beginning with Demosthenes, discover, nurture, and develop our own, unique, natural-born talent. You included!

## **The Keys to Public Speaking: Five Steps to the Podium**

Demosthenes travelled to greatness as a public speaker by forging his own path. Fortunately, we have an easier time than he did, if only because we can follow his skills. Times and technology have changed considerably since his day, of course, but the best path still is the one laid out by Demosthenes (or perhaps by the legend of Demosthenes, since scholars debate some of the details). This path consists of five major segments or areas that he focused on in order to improve. They are the five key topics of this book, corresponding to the following five chapters.

### ***1. Harmonize Your Mind***

The first and most important thing that Demosthenes did was recognize and accept the necessity that he needed to speak. Public speaking was his destiny, because his world demanded it in general and his circumstances demanded it in particular. The same is true for you and all of us, each in our own modern and uniquely personal way. Understanding and accepting the uniqueness of your circumstances, your own necessity to speak, is the key to finding your passion.

Ancient Greek society, especially in Athens where Demosthenes lived, placed great emphasis on the public-speaking skills of its citizens. Their democracy and their contentious courts demanded highly skilled orators. Public speaking became the most important skill one could have. The amount of social mobility possible was unprecedented and depended, in large part, on one's ability to be a persuasive speaker. Citizens could gain office, prevail in lawsuits, and aid in the adoption or rejection of a proposed decree. It was in every citizen's interest to learn the art of public speaking.

Our world today, in America and elsewhere, is no different in its emphasis on public speaking. True, we have a representative rather than direct democracy, so our voices are more typically written in newspapers and blogs and the like. Naturally we will almost always hire lawyers to speak for us in court. Yet very few, if any of us, get through school, or advance far in a career, or even live a full social life of friends and family without at least occasionally speaking in front of an audience, and most of us do it regularly. After 2,500 years of changes in societal institutions, not to mention advances in technology, the occasions and the forms of public speaking have changed, however the necessity to speak publicly and the advantages of doing it well, have not.

Recognizing and embracing this fact is the crucial moment for each of us to find a passion for public speaking (as it is for passion in any aspect of life).

Demosthenes faced more compelling personal reasons than most of us. His guardians had been stealing his inheritance. He had to take them to court to recover what was left of his money, or he would have been not only without family but without the means to survive. The only way to respond was by making a case in court, a daunting matter for anyone, but especially for a teenage boy who was required to address the jury himself and convince citizens older than himself. But that's the way it was. He could either accept the reality and put himself in a position to succeed, or he could lose everything.

He of course accepted his destiny, embraced it, and thereby found the motivation, the passion, to succeed. He needed to learn how to speak in public, and so he did. It wasn't easy. He learned public-speaking skills, practiced them, and, at first, often failed, but he kept at it, learned from each failure, and became better and better. So, when he came of age, barely 20 years old, he pled his case before a jury of citizens, all of whom were undoubtedly older than he, and against his guardians who were themselves lawyers. And he won.

### **Common Myths that Cause Public-Speaking Anxiety**

- 1. Thinking you need to be brilliant or perfect to succeed. In fact, a little fallibility or fumbling or any sign of being human endears you to your audience.*
- 2. Imagining a hostile audience. In fact, your audience will almost certainly want you to succeed.*
- 3. Understanding nervousness as a bad sign. In fact, everyone gets nervous, which is a good thing, a sign that you care and that you have some energy.*
- 4. Believing that good public speakers are born. In fact, public speaking is a learned skill, which the best public speakers must learn and practice and improve.*

Public speaking may not be a matter of life and death for you (even if it feels like it), but you almost will encounter the need to speak publicly—and have your own reasons to do it well. You’re probably required to make some kind of presentation at school or at work, most likely multiple presentations with varying topics, audiences, and purposes. Perhaps you are expected as the best man or maid of honor to toast the bride and groom, and expected to make people laugh and feel good in the process. Perhaps you would love to honor your beloved grandparent with a few poignant words at the funeral, if only you could get past your anxiety or fear of failure. In short, you will almost certainly have the need and the desire to speak well in public.

Chapter Two of this book, “Harmonize Your Mind,” will help you to recognize and, more importantly, to accept, that public speaking will be your reality, your destiny, your present, and your future. It also offers ways for you to let your nerves enhance—yes, enhance—rather than debilitate your public-speaking skills.

## ***2. Harmonize Your Body***

Understanding and accepting his need to speak in public, Demosthenes then faced the need to overcome his various physical shortcomings—a sickly constitution, a weak voice, a stutter. When speaking to a jury, when addressing the 500-member governing council, or when speaking before thousands in the Assembly of Citizens—long before the technological innovation of voice amplification—a strong physical presence, a loud voice, and clear enunciation were essential for success. Since none of these came naturally to Demosthenes, he famously devised a training program. To increase his strength and endurance, he climbed steep hillsides while speaking aloud. To improve the volume of his voice, he stood seaside and made himself audible over the crashing surf. Most notably, he put pebbles in his mouth and forced himself to speak clearly. Clearly, his will to succeed drove him through this rigorous training program.

## The Vocabulary of Body Language

- **Stance:** People who stand on both feet, tall and relaxed, head held high, chest exposed, and arms by side say that they are confident and open to the audience.
- **Gestures:** Movement of arms and hands can relate to your content, reinforcing what you say rather than distracting your audience.
- **Eyes:** Looking at your audience, making eye contact with one person briefly, long enough to know you have made contact, then moving on to another, may be the best way to tell an audience that you want to engage them.
- **Smiling:** Your smile communicates ease and confidence, lightens the mood, and breaks the barrier between you and your audience.
- **Face:** A relaxed yet animated face communicates engagement. Focus on your topic, and let that, not your anxiety about yourself, animate your face.

You will not face the physical demands of speaking without amplification in ancient Athens, nor will you likely confront such severe physical challenges as Demosthenes. Yet public speaking is nonetheless a physical activity, and being fit can make your job as a speaker easier and more effective. Thus an improvement in your public speaking skills will be among the many benefits of the good habits of healthy eating and exercise, advice you've heard from any number of sources, from your mother to magazines to the Food Network. You can also practice physical training specifically focused on your ability to engage audiences—your voice, your posture, your movements.

In addition, and perhaps more to the point, if you get nervous about public speaking—and we all do, every one of us, even the best public speakers—you might experience a range of uncomfortable and potentially debilitating physical reactions, beginning with sweaty palms and a dry mouth and possibly including, in the worst case, the shakes. The common anxiety associated with public speaking is similar to the fight-or-flight response, and may be a manifestation of that defensive mechanism deeply ingrained in our nervous system. Fortunately, you can also train yourself to manage these symptoms of nerves and refocus that nervous energy in service of your success.

Chapter Three, “Harmonize Your Body,” offers a program of simple physical exercises to help you prepare for, manage, and channel your nerves and thereby get your body in the shape you need in order to excel in public speaking.

### ***3. Know Your Stuff, But Speak to Your Audience***

Demosthenes probably didn't need to study much about the facts of his legal case regarding the pilfering of his inheritance by his guardians. He knew his stuff. After he won his case and recovered what little was left of his money and property, he needed to make a living. Based on his success in court, he became a speechwriter for others, but he never took on a project unless and until he was fully knowledgeable of the facts. Again, he knew his stuff. More importantly, he needed to learn about his audience. He needed to understand the jury, what they were thinking, how they interpreted Athenian property laws, where their sympathies lay, and so on. Indeed, no matter how well he knew the details of his case, he needed to articulate these details in terms of the law that his audience understood. Successful public speaking comes first from knowledge of the subject, but requires especially good knowledge of the audience's knowledge, perspective, and values.

## A is for Audience

*First, consider what the audience knows, thinks, feels, and expects.*

*Second, consider what you want the audience to leave knowing, thinking, and feeling.*

*Third, draw upon your knowledge, perspective, and experience to move the audience from where they are to where you want them to be.*

Most of us will be asked or expected to speak, and will agree or volunteer or even remotely think to speak, in public only if we are already knowledgeable about the topic. In school or at work, you may be working on a project, a paper, or a report that you need to present to the class, to colleagues, or to clients. No one else knows this stuff like you. Other people want to know and it is your job to tell them. In social occasions, you already have personal and unique knowledge about or a relationship to an honoree—bride or groom, graduate or awardee, a late loved one—and the whole point is to share your knowledge, your stories, your feelings. Knowing your topic is crucial, but it's probably the easy part.

Much trickier, and too often neglected by inexperienced speakers, is the more important need to know your audience. Indeed, when you are thinking about what to say in your talk, especially when you are blocked with anxiety and can't think of anything to talk about that anyone will want to hear, make sure to ask yourself the right questions in the right order.

- First questions: What does my audience know? What do they want to know? What do I want them to know?
- Second questions: How does the audience feel about what I will say, my topic? Positive or negative or neutral? Passionate or bored?
- Third questions: Why am I speaking? What is my purpose? To inform? To persuade? To impress and entertain? If I have more than one purpose, which is primary?

You'll probably know the answer to these audience analysis questions yourself, but maybe not. You may have to do some research, ask people, go online or to the library, whatever it takes.

Chapter Four, "Know Your Stuff, But Speak to Your Audience," encourages you to immerse yourself in the details of your topic, or more

likely, recognize that you are already an expert, or expert enough, because you probably already know more than your audience. The emphasis, then, will be on knowing your audience, because that's really the more common source of anxiety, and the way to relieve that anxiety. Remember that it's not about you. Answer the question about what to say by thinking about your audience. Let your audience be your guide.

#### ***4. Select and Organize the Content of Your Speech to Achieve Your Purpose***

As an orator in ancient Athens, speaking to audiences in legal courts and in democratic politics, Demosthenes' public speeches were almost always persuasive. He won his own legal case and many—but not all—others. He has become famous mainly for his “Philippics,” a series of speeches defending Athenian democracy against the imperial aims of Philip, King of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. From his quite personal beginnings to historic heights, Demosthenes engaged in contests to win the hearts and minds of audiences, contests with high stakes and highly motivated opponents who also aimed to win.

Your public speaking will almost certainly be less demanding, with a purpose more easily achieved and with less at stake. The vast majority of the time, the purpose of your professional speeches will be to provide people information that they want to hear and will find useful. For family and other social occasions for public speaking, your purpose is usually ceremonial—to honor, to thank, or perhaps to entertain. If you are in law or politics, marketing or public relations, or another field whose purpose involves persuasion, or a professional actor with the charge to entertain, you'll have more demanding public-speaking occasions, but you'll also receive extensive training to succeed. The rest of us face less pressure, but we can still follow the lead of Demosthenes.

To succeed, Demosthenes immersed himself in the techniques of crafting a speech, also known as rhetoric. He attended speeches by well-known orators and studied them, noting their logical organization and linguistic flourishes. He hung around sophists, professional public speakers in ancient Greece, who were part philosopher, part teacher, part spin doctor. In this way, he learned to put his knowledge of his topic and his audience together with the power of language to create effective speeches. Then, as now, rhetoric was a complex and difficult area of study with a very long tradition, but its basics boil down to the relationship between three simple elements: topic, audience, and purpose. Crafting a good speech involves thinking about what, from among all the things you know, will work to achieve your purpose, based on your knowledge of the audience.

## **Top Ten Occasions for Public Speaking**

1. *Presenting information at work*
2. *Making a sales or fundraising pitch*
3. *Making a toast at a wedding, birthday party, or other celebration*
4. *Delivering a eulogy or words at a memorial service*
5. *Running a meeting*
6. *Welcoming an audience or group of guests*
7. *Introducing a speaker*
8. *Presenting an award*
9. *Accepting an award*
10. *Giving thanks*

Chapter Five, “Selecting and Organizing Content to Achieve Your Purpose,” helps you craft your speech by laying out guidelines for basic rhetorical strategies. It also offers specific guidelines and templates for numerous common public-speaking occasions, both for work and for social events.

### ***5. Engaging your Audience Through Your Performance***

When Demosthenes was still young and struggling against his guardians, he trained himself in part by speaking in the public areas of Athens. He typically failed miserably to be engaging or convincing. After one failure, Satyrus, an actor, struck up a conversation with the youth, during the course of which he asked Demosthenes to read a speech from one of the great Greek plays. When he finished, Satyrus read the same passage, and Demosthenes understood instantly. Public speaking is performing in voice and pauses, gestures and timing. Based on this one lesson, Demosthenes dedicated himself to learning the art of performance. He practiced in front of a mirror, which he brought into a grotto or small cave to rehearse. He even, the story goes, shaved one side of his face and head to prevent himself from going out in public until he had rehearsed extensively.

Much has changed since the time of the ancient Greeks, but public speaking is still performance: harmonizing of mind and body, the knowledge of topic and audience, the crafting of a speech, all of which enhance the performance. You thus need to learn and practice techniques to orchestrate your voice, your body, and whatever technological equipment you use. The basics of good public-speaking performance involve:

- Your voice: How fast to speak, when to pause, and when to raise or lower the voice
- Your body: When to move, when to stay still, and how to use gestures and eye contact, posture, and position
- Your equipment: How to get microphones, videos, slides, and other audio-visual aids to enhance your performance

Learning the basics means, of course, practice, practice, practice, or better yet, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse your performance. In fact, consider your actual speech itself as a rehearsal for the next time. As with any skill, you'll keep getting better with more experience.

*"It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech."*

**- Mark Twain, author**

Like Twain, the most effective speakers prepare themselves to improvise. Practice and rehearse, and know your speech so well that you can stop thinking about it. Trust your preparation, your harmonizing of mind and body to channel nerves, your immersion in topic and audience, and your careful crafting of the speech; all of it allows you to enter into the moment and simply communicate with the audience. The best speeches are not read, nor are they memorized and recited; they're improvised. Not completely, of course, since you need to cover topics in a certain order, as well as stay focused and on time. But truly great speeches have an element of the spontaneous, of an unmistakable interaction with the audience. Craft the content and organization of your speech, memorize the outline, and then trust yourself and your knowledge of the material to let the words come naturally as you interact and connect with the audience.

Chapter Six, "Engaging Your Audience through Your Performance," offers you multiple tips for making your voice, your body, and your equipment work to engage an audience in your speech. It also offers an extended glance at the art of improvisation in public speaking.

## **IMproSolutions™ : From Fear to Confidence**

Stage fright, also known as public-speaking anxiety, or performance anxiety, is the number-one fear among adults. Eventually you will be asked to make a speech, whether it's a wedding-day toast, a retirement farewell, or a business presentation. IMproSolutions™ gives you the tools and strategies you'll need to become a better speaker, and focuses on sharpening your skills, increasing your confidence, and improving your performance.

The five steps outlined above and detailed in the following chapters are designed as an integrated system to help you overcome your fear of public speaking, to give you the confidence to perform, and to set you on the path to success with audiences. Understanding how the parts of the system work together will help you travel the path from fear and panic to confidence and success. This comprehensive method aims to help you turn your nerves to your advantage by helping you:

- Accept the necessity to speak in public and embrace that necessity as an opportunity to achieve your goals.
- Harmonize your mind and body to accept and embrace your nerves as normal and necessary, to transform your nerves into positive energy, and to avoid or mitigate the physical effects of nerves.
- Shift your focus from yourself to your audience, and so begin the process of channeling your nervous energy into a dynamic, interactive performance.
- Craft a speech that meets your purpose and enables you to forget about yourself as you focus on your audience.
- Learn, practice, and improve the techniques of impromptu performance in order to engage your audience and find success.

With each step, each rehearsal, each speech, your confidence in your public-speaking skills will grow. You will find more enjoyment in your professional and social life, build strong relationships, and even begin to understand that, as entertainers always say, being in front of an audience can be great fun.

 **IMpro Solutions**<sup>TM</sup>

An Interactive Public Speaking System

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