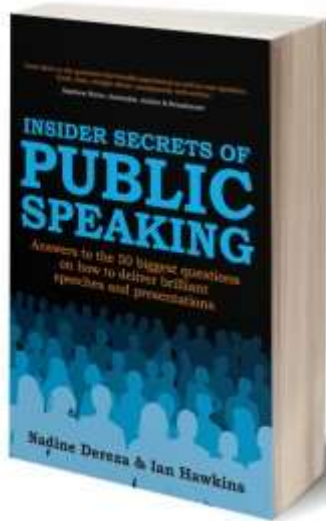


Quick Tips: Public Speaking for Authors

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*As authors, we are often asked to speak about our work, our books and ourselves in a variety of settings. We often wish we had some professional advice about presenting ourselves, rather than our books, to the world. **Nadine Dereza and Ian Hawkins**, authors of [Insider Secrets of Public Speaking](#). (Rethink Press, 2014) have kindly given us some key tips, specifically for authors, about public speaking.*

As a boy, Charles Dickens entertained his family with a toy theatre. As a young man, he often said that if he hadn't been an author, he would've been an actor. By the time of his death, he was the pre-eminent novelist of his day, making a fortune touring theatres and reading from his works.

Public appearances are regarded as one of the most effective ways of selling your book, but what if you're not a frustrated actor like Dickens? What if you got into writing because you liked keeping out of the limelight? What do you say? How do you say it? How do you avoid making your sales pitch sound like, well, a sales pitch?

We wrote our book in response to clients who came to us for public speaking advice and coaching. Speaking in public is about individuals finding their authentic voice – it's not about the 'one size fits all' approach – and we like a challenge. Our format is answering the specific problems of people with real dilemmas. Imagine if you were one of our clients. What tips might we give you when a public event is looming?

Understand expectations

Before you turn up, you should know what is expected of you. Are you expected to speak for a minute or an hour? Are there other people speaking at the same event? Figure out what the audience wants.

If there are other speakers before you, think about how you can be different. If the audience has just come from something heavy-going, think about how you can lighten the mood. Alternatively, if they've been laughing at someone else, you can be more reflective and

thoughtful. Always stick to time limits – ask the event organiser to give a clear signal when you should be wrapping up.

What to say

One of the quickest ways to build a speech is to answer the questions you are often asked. Why did you write the book? How long did it take? How did it change from the original idea to finished product? We've seen professional speakers adopt this approach, and it's effective: you can change the mood, shorten or lengthen your answers according to your time slot, and it creates the feeling of dialogue. If you really don't want to be alone onstage, consider having your appearance moderated by someone else until you have more confidence. They will introduce you, feed you questions, and be responsible for keeping the session together. They can even field questions from the floor. You won't have as much control over the event, but you will be free to be spontaneous.

Connection

Audiences like to feel an authentic connection with a speaker. It doesn't matter where you are shy, bombastic, serious or naturally funny so long as the audience thinks they have seen the 'real you'.

Eye contact is very important: try to give all parts of the room equal attention. One particularly effective technique is to direct the end of a sentence to one person in the audience. This 'anchors' your eye contact, and stops you looking like you're scanning the whole room.

If you are reading from your work, you risk losing the audience while your attention is focused on the page. To avoid this:

- Give a bit of exposition before you read: tell the audience where we are in the story, who the characters are, why we care about them (or not).
- Choose a short passage with a dramatic or intriguing twist, or one that ends on a good joke. Avoid an excerpt with too many characters or confusing action.
- Do edit your work for public reading – Dickens did. Cut extraneous description or references the audience won't get.
- Use tone of voice and body language to differentiate between characters. You don't have to 'act', but it should be clear who is speaking (so you can cut 'he said', 'she said' etc.).
- Remember it's the first time your audience has heard this, so keep it lively. If you feel yourself getting bored of a particular passage, do a different one.

- The better you know a piece, the less you have to look at the book, and the more you can look at the audience.
- If your book has particularly strong illustrations or photographs, consider using these in a PowerPoint presentation.

Final thoughts

Remember there is no such thing as a natural born speaker. It is definitely a skill that you can develop. Shy people have transformed themselves into world-class speakers, and they have done it by being brave and giving it their best shot.

Once you have found your voice, you will find that audiences become a lot less scary – and a lot more interested in what you have to say. When you are selling your book, you are really selling yourself: the proof of your success is a long line of readers, waiting for you to sign their copy of your latest masterpiece.

Best Wishes,

Nadine Dereza and **Ian Hawkins**



Get your copy of [Insider Secrets of Public Speaking](#) [here](#)