



**At a Glance:** Present ideas persuasively to diverse audiences both visually and orally. Develop skills and confidence in public speaking.

## Understanding Public Speaking

Presenting to an audience goes beyond verbally communicating ideas to include visual aid components. Such components include slides, posters, or videos that serve to clarify the presenter's ideas, animate the presentation, and captivate the audience.

### Why does it matter?

It is typical for all students to be expected to deliver oral presentations at some point, whether as part of a course, in a department seminar, or at a conference. In addition to promoting your ideas in school, presenting skills are as essential during your professional life. Beyond academia, mastering strategies of persuasively communicating information, opinions, and arguments boosts your interpersonal skills, thus facilitating [teamwork](#), from discussions to collective decision making. Moreover, this skill set allows you to captivate the interest of others (e.g., colleagues, investors) and to establish collaborations and partnerships. However, employers claim that graduate students often lack the experience and skills to “sell” their ideas to a general audience.<sup>1</sup>

## Cultivating Public Speaking Skills and Confidence

As graduate students move to the professional world, they carry over many of the communication skills that they've built over years of practice (e.g., in class presentations, group discussions, research seminars). Give oral and poster [presentations at a conference](#) or a Research Day in your department or institute; it is an opportunity to improve your verbal communication skills, network, and get feedback from peers and experts.

Today, a slideshow is a given in any type of presentation to the point where screens dictate how classrooms and conference rooms are set up. While visual elements are crucial for clarity and entertainment purposes, presenters can be overly dependent on them for cues and information. Explaining your ideas without a slideshow is a real test of your knowledge and communication skills. Try practicing an [Elevator Pitch](#), where you need to explain who you are and what you do to a general audience in a short period of time (usually between 30 seconds to 3 minutes). Another example is the [Chalk Talk](#) where the presenter uses a chalkboard or whiteboard to explain his ideas. In fact, Chalk Talks are common practice during the hiring process of academic researchers.<sup>2</sup> In Law schools, [moot competitions](#) are popular and involve a simulated court where students practice argumentation and advocacy in front of an experienced judge.

### Consider your Audience

Imagine a surgeon trying to explain what pancreaticoduodenectomy is to a group of economists. Presenting your work to your peers is a simpler task that grants you the freedom to use the language you are familiar and comfortable with. But like any specialist, you face situations where you need to explain your work to peers who, while being in the same field, may not be familiar with your specific subject area (e.g., behavioural economists may not speak the same language as development economists).

Other instances may involve you explaining to non-experts such as your parents or your curious eight-year old daughter. Explaining what you do to someone you know is a stress-free strategy that allows you to formulate and simplify your ideas while not worrying about public speaking (don't worry, your mom has likely seen you at your worst!). Presenting at public forums or conferences tailored for a broad audience is an alternative, professional way to practice (e.g., [ACFAS](#) conference).

## Building Public Speaking Confidence

Are you stressed before giving a presentation? Is “stressed” an understatement? You are not alone. Fear of public speaking, or glossophobia, is highly prevalent and considered one of the top social phobias, with only 8% of affected individuals seeking professional help.<sup>3 4 5</sup> Developing strategies to manage this fear is an important step in cultivating the ability and the comfort to speak in front of a small or large audience. This is especially important if you aim to work as part of a [team](#) or have a [leadership](#) role within an organization. To work through your fear of public speaking, practice speaking to a group in a non-formal setting where expectations are not too high. For example, join a student club at your department and participate in group discussions. You can also sign up for classes where you perform in front of others (e.g., improv class).

### The “Four Vs” Communication Model

The “Four Vs” communication model (a modified version of the “Three Vs” model by psychologist Albert Mehrabian<sup>6</sup> was conceived following a behavioral analysis of 100,000 public speakers including politicians, corporate executives, and keynote speakers.<sup>7</sup>

This model emphasizes four practical elements to be a persuasive, confident, genuine, and articulate speaker:

1. **Verbal elements:** Be succinct, choose audience- and context- appropriate words, and avoid hedging language (indirect language that conveys hesitation such as “just” or “sort of”).
2. **Vocal elements:** modulate the volume and rate of your speech according to content, and avoid disfluencies (non-lexical sounds such as “Um” or “uh”) by monitoring your inhalation and exhalation patterns.
3. **Visual element**, i.e., body language: Audience often equates competence with their perceptions of a speaker’s confidence. Take a confident stance by squaring your shoulders and hips and using broad and extended gestures (in moderation); maintain eye contact with your audience as a whole, instead of a particular person.
4. **Vital elements**, i.e., authenticity: Let your energy and enthusiasm show your true passion for the topic. Use words and actions to connect with your audience and to show an understanding of their needs and concerns.

## Quick Guide to Public Speaking

- Demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the topic of your presentation: use specialized vocabulary, know gaps in research, and anticipate questions<sup>8</sup>
- Break down and summarize complex ideas to non-expert audience<sup>9 10</sup>
- Develop agility in producing refined arguments in various situations and to a wide audience (e.g. investors during request for funding presentation vs. peers during conference keynote presentation)<sup>11</sup>
- Engage in diverse verbal interactions such as discussions, interviews, lectures, or debates<sup>12</sup>
- When using slides, keep them simple with the clarification of information being their main purpose.

# Taking Action

## Professional Development & Training

- Courses - [McGill School of Continuing Studies - Effective Public Speaking Course](#): In-depth course designed to help you relate your ideas clearly and improve your public speaking skills.
- Workshops - [McGill Counselling Services - Skills for Public Speaking](#): Part of the Academic Success Workshops series to improve your public speaking skill.
- Workshop - McGill Graphos - [Refining Poster Presentations](#).
- Course - McGill Graphos - [Fundamentals of Academic Presentations](#).
- Workshops - [Mitacts Training Workshops](#): Training workshops for graduate students. Topics include Practice Your Presentation Skills and Communicating Your Research.
- Check [myInvolvement](#) for upcoming workshops and programs under “Communicate: Presenting”

## Gaining Experience

- Participate in the [Three-minute Thesis \(3MT\)](#) training and competition - McGill SKILLSETS.
- Participate in [The Elevator Pitch](#) - McGill SKILLSETS.

# Resources

## Websites & Apps

- [Quantified Communications](#): analytics platforms to measure, evaluate, and improve individuals’ communication skills. Many research studies on public speaking use this type of platform.
- [Effective Presentation Skills](#) - Massachusetts Institute of Technology: presentation slides covering self-evaluation, public speaking fear, presentation structure, and useful tips.
- [Presenting at seminars and conferences](#) - McGill Supervision: Practical advice, ideas and evidence on how to present at seminars and conferences.
- [The mechanics of presentations: A step-by-step guide](#) - Queen’s University.
- [Presenting with Confidence](#) - Queen’s University.
- [TED video playlist of talks about Public Speaking](#).
- [Smartphone Public Speaking Apps](#) - Fast Company.

## Groups & Associations

- [McGill Toastmasters](#): A club offering public speaking-related training and education.

## Books, Articles & Reports

- [TEDx Speaker Guide](#): guidelines for speakers selected to give a TEDx talk.
- [How to give a dynamic scientific presentation](#) - Elsevier Publishing company.
- [Bring your presentation to life - strategies for effective communications](#) - McGill SKILLSETS.
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## References

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- <sup>1</sup> [Professional Development: Shaping Effective Programs for STEM Graduate Students. Denecke, D. \(2017\).](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Interviewing for Academic Jobs. Office of Career & Professional Development, University of California.](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Current status of knowledge on public-speaking anxiety. Pull, C.B. \(2012\).](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Social phobia in the general population: prevalence and sociodemographic profile. Furmark, T. \(1999\).](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [Help-seeking patterns of anxiety-disordered individuals in the general population. Pollard, C.A. \(1989\).](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Silent Messages. Mehrabian, A. \(1971\).](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [Abraham 2016](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Targeted Competencies in Graduate Programs. ADESAQ \(2015\).](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Vitae Researcher Development Framework \(RDF\) 2011.](#)
- <sup>10</sup> [Targeted Competencies in Graduate Programs. ADESAQ \(2015\).](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [Vitae Researcher Development Framework \(RDF\) 2011.](#)
- <sup>12</sup> [Defining Twenty-First Century Skills. Binkley, M. \(2012\).](#)