

## DYNAMICS OF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Presumably, legislative hearings are held for the purpose of collecting information that will help legislators enact laws. In reality, they are often “theater pieces” set up to realize a preexisting script in which each witness is a sort of guest artist, playing a role.

There are rarely any surprises. Staffers have usually determined the positions of the witnesses beforehand. In short, events at a legislative hearing are often staged and carefully choreographed for television coverage, down to details like choosing a room small enough that it will appear crowded even with only a few people present.

However, these constraints do not mean that you -- as a witness -- cannot succeed in conveying your messages to your real audiences. It does mean that when on the witness stand, you need a clear understanding of the rules and procedures and how these may restrict your ability to make your point. Above all, be prepared to bridge to your key messages when the opportunity presents itself.

If at all possible, avoid reading your detailed testimony and instead summarize your prepared statements in a couple of key points. Submit detailed comments for the record and use the time allotted for your testimony to bring emotional content to your message. Let your spoken words underscore the written statements you submit. Dramatize your testimony with anecdotes, stories and local flavor. Think about vivid, visual selling points.

If you'll be testifying as part of a panel, arrive early and introduce yourself to fellow panel members. Find out their point of view.

Begin your testimony with an effective opening statement that builds common ground with the audience while emphasizing your key messages.

Mark up your prepared remarks to indicate points of emphasis, points of departure for storytelling and pauses.

## TIPS FOR TESTIMONY

- Make good eye contact, especially during the opening, when delivering key points, and during the close.
- Address your remarks to all members of the committee, especially the chairman, in a respectful tone.
- When reading a prepared statement, work to project and animate your voice, and vary your tone, cadence and volume. “Scoop” your text so that you end your sentences with good eye contact.
- Use real life stories and anecdotes to emphasize your key points.
- Keep your language simple; if you have to use technical language, industry jargon or acronyms, explain them.
- In addition to your prepared testimony, bring a crib sheet with a summary of your key messages.
- Keep it short. Concise, well-delivered messages are preferred. And don’t be repetitive.
- In the Q&A, listen to the full question, pause and think, then answer.
- Answer the questions as directly as possible, and then bridge to your premise and at least one key support or anecdote.
- Sit up and lean in when you answer questions.
- Make note of names, questions, answers or comments. Use these details to lead to one of your messages.
- During the Q&A be ready to jump in and make your points based on other panelists’ statements.
- If you are testifying as part of a team, create openings for one another in the Q&A process. Build upon one another’s ideas and points of agreement.
- Don’t argue with other panel members or committee members. Legislators can interrupt you, but you should not interrupt them

## THE TESTIMONY PROCESS

1. Begin with an effective opening statement which includes a warm greeting and introduction followed by a summary of your key points. Be sure to acknowledge the concerns of the legislators and other stakeholders.
2. Deliver your testimony using personal stories and anecdotes to emphasize your point of view.
3. Close by thanking the panel and making yourself available for Q&A.
4. Manage the Q&A process so that you can bridge back to your key messages.
5. Be prepared to address the media which may be present in the hearing room or just outside the door.