

WELLBEING

Speech Therapy

You may never have to accept an Oscar on the world stage, but speaking in public is still one of our greatest fears. But don't be afraid – here's how to deliver a winning speech, whatever the occasion

Oscars night regularly puts the issue of public speaking in the spotlight. Sadly, some of the most memorable acceptance speeches in Academy Award history have been so for all the wrong reasons. Who can forget Gwyneth Paltrow's tears in 1999 or Matthew McConaughey's introspective ramble in 2014 – not to mention all the stars whose speeches went on for so long that they had to be drowned out by the orchestra...

It goes to show that even the world's greatest actors can mess up the art of delivering lines. So what hope is there for the rest of us when we are called upon to speak in public for work or for a social occasion like a wedding? If you find yourself in that position, don't be afraid. Follow these simple tips – and speak out with confidence.

- 1 Admit your nerves** Nothing wins people over more quickly than an opening line that says, "Oh, I am nervous; I hope I don't mess this up..."
- 2 Remember you have support** The audience is on your side. Nobody wants you to fail.
- 3 Smile** Clichéd it may be, but a smile can win people over. So stand up straight, smile and take a second to get everyone's attention.
- 4 Be prepared** Don't write out your full speech, but do think through what you want to say and jot down key points on a prompt card. TV presenters have been doing this for years; it jogs your memory and only takes a second to look at.
- 5 Search YouTube** For inspiration, watch some of history's greatest public speakers – anyone from Winston Churchill to Steve Jobs. Or take a look at Meryl Streep accepting her Oscar in 2012. Full of self-deprecating humour, warmth, smiles and confidence – but not overly rehearsed or word perfect – speeches do not get any better.
- 6 Practise makes perfect** The more public speaking you do, the better you will become at it. So practise in front of a mirror, or test your speech on a really good and honest friend.
- 7 Know your audience** Even if you do not know them personally, find out what they do for a living and why they are coming to listen to you.



Gwyneth Paltrow breaks down in tears



Matthew McConaughey ponders life



Meryl Streep gets it just right

That way, you can give them what they want. It's also a good idea to answer questions as they come up. It breaks the ice, means that your audience is listening and helps build a connection.

- 8 Look up** Always make eye contact, even if the room is large and people are a long way away. Looking down and mumbling means you cannot be heard. So look up, smile and speak directly to people. The chances are, they will smile back.
- 9 Kick off with a question** Even better, make it one you do not know the answer to. See if someone else in the audience does, knowing that you are the expert and that this is unlikely. Admit that even you do not know the answer before going on to share the insights that you do have.
- 10 Don't expect perfection** You might fumble over your words, the microphone might be faulty, the slide show might not load – Jennifer Lawrence tripped over on her way to the Oscars stage and it could happen to you, too. Just laugh it off, acknowledge the mistake and move on.
- 11 Keep it short and sweet** Do not go on and on, or risk repeating yourself. Instead, try

to keep your speech short. Remember the golden rule: always leave your audience wanting more.

- 12 Be the messenger, not the message** The best public speakers keep the focus away from themselves and concentrate on the information they are trying to impart.
- 13 Offer practical advice** Give people 'something to take home', in other words, useful information or a tip they can utilise in their work or personal life. It could be something as simple as a quick, calming breath exercise.
- 14 Devise a routine** Many athletes have a lucky charm or a pre-game ritual, often simple mental exercises that help control stress. So make your own and follow it every time you speak in public. It could be reciting a personal mantra or wearing a favourite piece of jewellery. If it gives you control and comfort then use it.
- 15 Fake it until you make it** Even the very best public speakers were once afraid. Feeling totally at ease takes experience, so in the meantime, just act confident – the more times you speak in public the easier it will become. ■

HEALTH NOTES



➤ **Brush up your act** With tooth decay now the top cause of hospitalisation in young children, the British Dental Health Foundation has launched a school programme, Brush Time, to help staff teach their pupils the best oral health techniques. Teachers can visit dentalbuddy.org/brush-time for free advice.



➤ **If the shoe fits** If you want to create the best women's sports shoe then it makes sense to consult with female athletes. Adidas has done just that – and the result is PureBoost X, £90, a running shoe specifically designed for women.



➤ **Team work** L'Occitane has been supporting the female shea butter producers of Burkina Faso for over 30 years. To mark International Women's Day on 8 March, the brand is releasing a shea butter Ultra Soft Balm, £4, and will give 100 per cent of profits from sales to projects in the African nation.