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How To Improve Speaking Skills in 7 Simple Steps

None of us hairless monkeys are ever going to perfect the art of speaking. Granted, Tony Robbins, Eckhart Tolle, Jim Rohn and other well-known speakers are masters, but even they make mistakes.

In improving our speaking skills we're not looking for perfect, we're looking to make fewer errors.

Once we've leapt that hurdle we can elaborate our expressions with grand gestures and formidable prose.

TODAY I'd like to go over **how to improve speaking skills** with exercises, behaviours and the daily grind.

Below are 7 simple steps that I hope will benefit you greatly. I've included the How To Improve Speaking Skills in 7 Simple Steps Infographic as well as useful videos and a mailing list that will deliver one new speaking challenge to you every day.

Enjoy Irresponsibly.

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1. Speak Clearly
2. Develop Flow
3. Choose Your Mastery Topics
4. Become a Topic Master
5. Develop Style
6. Practice Daily
7. Practice at Events



William Zinsser is the author of the writer's bible, "On Writing Well." The biggest flaw that most writers have, he writes, is a lack of clarity. This is also true of speakers.

You might lisp or mumble or speak too quietly. But you might also be confusing your audience with slang, jargon or vague pop-culture references. Always choose the clearest way of sharing your meaning.

Slang: What you say is jokes unless they feel you, you dig?

Jargon: A woefully recondite verbiage is feckless.

*Pop-Culture References: English motherf***er, do you speak it?*

Speak clearly. Enunciate and choose a volume as if it were on purpose. Select the easiest words to get your point across. Only once you've mastered clarity should you begin to braid some silvery strands into your language.

Challenge: Third Time's the Charm

I'll give you a topic and the moment you see it you're going to speak for about 20 seconds. I don't care what you say. Once you've finished, you're going to think about what you just said, and express it more clearly.

Then, you're going to do it one more time. The third time's the charm.

Remember to start this challenge right away.

Your topic is: Pasta.



Imagine a river. The water is moving; it runs around rocks and over the ground beneath it. It's disturbed by the legs of a bridge. To you, though, it looks smooth.

I doubt that the river learned how to flow, but that doesn't mean that you can't.

With flow we're aiming at a level of comfort with speaking that lets you approach all topics with equal grace.

There are two aspects of flow that I'd like you to improve:

1. Pace
2. Pausing

Unless you're James Malinchak or Les Brown, you speak too quickly. A mentor told me that I spoke too quickly because I was worried that

someone else might speak over me—maybe that’s accurate for you as well. In any case, it is a truism that we.. should slow.. our pace.. down.

We also need to be comfortable pausing. If I had only thirty seconds of your time to help you improve your speaking skills, I would tell you to replace all of your filler words with a two second pause.

A filler word is “uh” or “um,” or anything you say that is equivalent. For example I like the word “like” but I shouldn’t. Notice whenever you use a filler word, pause for two seconds, and then continue.

Challenge: The Topic Game

For this challenge you’ll need a timer and a source for topics. Try using these conversation topics (sorted by quality), but also try to pick out individual words or use a random word generator.

Your challenge is to look at a word and speak about it for at least 60 seconds, focusing on your pace and pausing while you speak. You can tell relevant stories, relate it to your summer vacation, whatever works for you.

If 60 seconds is too easy, try two minutes or more. If you can't stop using filler words, restart every time you use one.



We've gone over how to improve speaking skills via Clarity and Flow. The focus was to fix some of the errors we were making and help us build a bit more confidence. The next steps let us build a stronger speaking strategies.

Let's start by choosing Mastery Topics.

Mastery Topics are subjects that you're interested in and passionate about. When you discuss these topics you naturally exude more confidence and excitement, and you're more likely to draw listeners into your world. And, since you'll be talking about your mastery topics so much, you'll have all of the speaking nuances of the topics covered as well.

I'm passionate about living abroad, running a social skills business, general success, learning and food. And if I can I'll pull our conversation over into one of those topics and blow you away.

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Challenge: Master Of...

Let's figure out what topics you're passionate about. Give me a simple answer to each of these 5 questions:

1. What do you think about most?
2. What do you most often spend your money on?
3. What do you spend most of your free time on?
4. If you could do anything without a chance of failure, what would it be?
5. Without worrying about money, time or skill, what is your dream-vacation?

My answers were: Success, Food, Learning, Running a Social Skills Business, Living Abroad.

First we'll sort them. Ask yourself, what is more generally interesting, Topic 1 or Topic 2? If Topic 1 is more interesting, ask yourself if Topic 1 is more generally interesting than Topic 3. Once you're at the bottom of the list, add the most interesting topic to the new list.

My ordered list is: Living Abroad, Running a Business, Success, Learning, and Food. You should think that you can make the first topic on the list the most generally interesting. If so, let's work on that Mastery Topic first.



So you want to be a topic master? No? Well, make it your temporary day-dream.

Take a second to think about your everyday conversations.

Generally you fall into a topic that you're comfortable with and your conversations follow similar paths. The why is fairly simple: we're programmed to pursue pleasure—the same positive reactions to the same topics and jokes—and avoid pain—the potential shame of expressing an opinion that makes everyone around you uncomfortable.

There's nothing wrong with this, but if we naturally do it all of the time we might as well do it on purpose. To add some flair to our speaking skills we'll need to add some sub-topics to our Mastery Topic.

With these sub-topics we can practice our clarity, flow and style.

Challenge: What's Interesting About...

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You've selected a Mastery Topic and now you're going to flesh it out. Ask yourself, "What's interesting about THIS," where THIS is your Mastery Topic. Keep going until you can't think of any more, and then add one or two anyway.

Here are some examples for my Mastery Topic "Living Abroad":

- Dream Life
 - I really want to live in Los Angeles
 - I thought of moving to Belize
- Why Live Abroad?
- Living in Toronto
- Living in China
 - I want to go back and study Mandarin
- Living in London
- Living in Sweden
- Living in Oxford



Droning on in a monotone will never be interesting, no matter the quality of the content coming out of your mouth. The trick is to express those same words in a more appealing manner.

To do this, I suggest you emulate somewhere better than yourself.

“Men nearly always follow the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation, even though they cannot entirely keep to the tracks of others or emulate the prowess of their models. So a prudent man should always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. If his own prowess fails to compare with theirs, at least it has an air of greatness about it.” – Niccolo Machiavelli

Consider these five skills and your ability to use them to create interest in conversation:

1. Volume
2. Pace

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3. Gestures
4. Humour
5. Story-telling

With all of those skills, you use them to emphasize the words that you're speaking. Sometimes they replace words. Instead of going on about these skills, let's go over the challenge.

Challenge: Stealing a Style

Choose one of these skills: volume, pace, gestures, humour and story-telling. Now choose a professional speaker, someone you'd like to emulate and watch a video of them speaking.

Ask yourself, how do they use this skill? What one aspect of the skill could I steal for myself? Write it down and keep the video.

Here are some suggestions for speakers to emulate:

[Jim Rohn](#)

[Eric Thomas](#)

Tony Robbins

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Be honest with yourself when you answer this question: do you think that you're going to have improved speaking skills when you finish reading this post?

I don't write that well.

But while reading won't improve your speaking skills, behaviour will.

There are two behaviours that you should build:

1. Practice Daily
2. Practice at Events

The next section will cover events.

Practicing daily is fairly simple. Every day, put aside some time to go over one of the exercises from this post. If that sounds too hard—and I understand that committing to anything is often challenging—ask

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yourself whether 5 minutes a day for 15 days is too much. If it is, then something else is on your mind and you need to handle that.

If not, I put together the option of receiving a challenge a day for fifteen days. The challenges are short enough that you can complete them in 5 minutes or less.

Challenge: The Daily Grind

Build your own program of daily speaking practice

or

[Sign up to Receive 15 Days of Speaking Challenges](#)



Weight Watchers has been using the buddy system technique for years. The act of losing weight is motivational, but losing weight and being celebrated for it is far more exciting. Not to mention having people to hold you accountable when you have a bad week.

Where were you? Watching the game? Canada's Next Top Lumberjack? Come on, this is important.

Attend an event that will let you focus on your conversational skills on a weekly basis. There are many events that you could attend, though my favourites are Toastmasters and professional networking events that you can easily find on Meetup.com.

I found this great clip of Jason McGarva, who attended Toastmasters to improve his speaking ability, giving an amazing speech:

Personally I attend meetup groups on a fairly regular basis and I have other social events that I use for the same purpose. The trick is to keep a short list of specific skills that you'd like to practice while you're there.

1. I will use a broad gesture to create interest.
2. I will try speaking much slower than I'm used to.
3. I will will talk about my best Mastery Topic.

Challenge: Creature of Habit

Find at least one speaking or networking event that you can attend for the next four weeks and put it in your schedule. You can worry later about whether or not you'll go.

Conclusion

I've told you to speak clearly and develop flow. I've introduced you to Mastery Topics and what they can do for you. I've asked you to emulate some pretty awesome public speakers. I've suggested that you practice, practice, practice and I've given you some great resources to do just that.

Now it's all you!

If you've had some other insights on *how to improve speaking skills* I'd love to see them in the comments below. Please share what worked for you and what you're currently trying out!