Section A, Part 9: Stage and Podium Etiquette

Student leaders often have the opportunity to make presentations, give remarks or for other reasons speak to groups from podiums or stages. When speaking from either position, on stage or behind a podium, how you present yourself as much what you say will impact how the audience connects with and responds to your message.

**Appearance**
1. Stand up straight. You'll be more believable.

2. Wear something you know you look good in. It will boost your confidence.

3. Wear loose fitting comfortable clothing and footwear. Restrictive clothing can amplify psychological symptoms associated with anxiety.

4. Stand comfortably. Try having your feet positioned shoulder width apart for more stability and comfort if the talk is longer (1/2 hour to hour). This braced stance will also help you if you are prone to getting so nervous that you will faint.

5. For podium stand presentations, speakers are usually only visible from chest up. Avoid unusual necklines and bulging ties that can cast disturbing shadows onto your face (especially if you are speaking at a lighted podium stand).

6. Avoid wearing numerous or clunky tie clasps, sleeve studs, bracelets, long necklaces, or "badges on a rope" that can get caught on the microphone or podium, or "jingle-jangle" disturbingly throughout your presentation. This also goes for those who distractingly jingle all the coins in their pockets as they sit or speak. Empty your pockets before your talk if you are the fidgety type. Likewise, leave the pens (clicking on and off, pulling the caps on and off) at your seat. That noise is picked up by the microphone and will be heard by the audience!

7. If you have glasses that you must push up constantly, tighten them. If you have hair that falls over your eyes, fix it. Some audience members are really distracted by repetitive or similar movements.

**Time**
1. Be brief. It's better for people to want to hear you speak longer. If your talk is too long, do some editing.

2. Be considerate of time limits. Always stay within your allotted time, do not go over. To run over your time is unfair to the organizers, other speakers and the audience. Keep a watch with you or have a friend in the front row to signal you when your time is almost at an end.
**Speaking at the Podium**

1. When you first step up to the podium, take a moment to lay out your papers, or simply to take a deep breath and pull yourself together. A brief pause while your prepare will not phase the audience.

2. Speak slowly and enunciate. If you get caught up in your own words, slow down and simplify. Say the same concept in smaller, more familiar words.

3. Identify words you have difficulty pronouncing and use alternative words. For example, words that get caught on your tongue (e.g. "similarly") can be replaced with synonyms e.g. "likewise").

4. Practice foreign words and difficult names until you can say them easily.

5. You don't need to fill every available second with the sound of your voice. Take your time. Pauses may seem like millennia to you, but they help the audience keep up with you and digest what you're saying.

6. Let the silences BE silent. "Um" and "Uh" and other noises to fill silence are distracting. You can use silence to emphasize important points.

7. Take a sip or two of water before going on stage to speak.

8. Talk into the microphone. When you turn your head to look at the audience or a screen it is difficult for the audience to follow you when you are alternately LOUD and soft. Remember not to blow into or tap on the microphone when you first reach the podium. Assume that it is working. Also, when speaking, be careful not to get so close to the microphone that it picks up your breath as you speak.

9. If you have a prepared script, fold back the upper or lower corner of the pages so they will be easily turned. Loose sheets or cards should be numbered lest you drop them, or, better yet, hole-punched and attached with a metal or plastic ring. You can also staple the left edge of pages of a prepared text like a book and pre-fold it open. This is easier and quieter than trying to flip pages over the top as with a pad, jostling the podium and hitting the microphone in the process.

10. If you are a nervous type who forgets your own name once on stage, always prepare a script with cues for yourself: "break here" "change slides" "smile!" "pause here" "drink here" etc. Put the cues in a different font to remind yourself not to include them in your presentation. Try to avoid using a highlighter only since you probably won’t see it in a darkened room. After the first few minutes your major nervousness will probably recede and you won't need to refer to your cues as much.

11. If you have a prepared script, practice so that you do not sound as if you are simply reading from a text. Know your presentation and rehearse it so well that you can speak it with your head up.

12. If you have to read from a piece of paper then organize it into discrete two to three sentence groups. This way you can quickly look down, scan what you have to say, say it, and go on - all in a very natural and deliberate manner.

13. **Stop apologizing for information, visuals or examples you don’t have!** Work with what you do have or leave it out. You can state a known problem without apologizing for it.
14. A common mistake of inexperienced presenters is to rely too heavily on the microphone. In a large room, gym or auditorium, you need to make both your voice and presence fill the room. You can do this by looking at and speaking to the back wall. This projects your message more clearly and you aren't disrupting your focus by recognizing people. Try it! Nobody out there can tell that you're not looking at them! *Remember that even with microphones, you must project your voice for it to be heard in a full and clear manner.*

15. Keep yourself "open" to the audience at all times. You can do this by keeping your belly-button facing the audience. If you are active when you speak and you point to something always use the arm closest to the object or screen. Never-ever cross an arm to point, and never-ever turn your back!

16. One technique to make your talks more intimate is to speak in a friendly, relaxed manner, as you would to a friend standing next to you. The audience is your friend, they want to like you and to hear what you have to say. People want to hear the new information, resources, or ideas that you are giving them, they are interested...so keep their interest! Right?

17. If people are coughing excessively or rustling in their seats, you're beginning to lose them. Change the pace, interject an attention grabber, and wrap it up.

18. Have fun with it and your audience will too. Enjoy it and they will.

19. Long armed folks, take note: If speaking without a podium, keep your hands about waist high if you tend to gesture. It reduces the possible distraction that having a large ‘wing-span’ can cause.

Sources:
WAAC Newsletter Volume 19, Number 2, May 1997
Dana Bristol Smith, SpeakForSuccess.net, published on http://hodu.com/meeting-host.shtml