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When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.

Audre Lorde

**T**elling YOUR personal story is the most effective way of convincing other people about any issue you care about. In fact, being able to effectively communicate your personal story is one of the most important skills that you can learn in life.

Whether interviewing for a job, interacting with family and friends, or advocating for expanding education opportunities, knowing how to competently communicate your story through key facts and opinions can mean the difference between success and failure.

Using effective body language, well-thought out arguments, and speaking with clarity and confidence will transform your personal story into a strong persuasive argument that can make a real impact.

In this section we will delve into some of the most effective ways to prepare for advocacy communication including:

- **Crafting a 30-second elevator speech**
- **Developing a three-minute testimony**
- **Tips to help you prepare for and overcome anxiety over public speaking**
- **Techniques for using body language and vocal variety**
- **Guidance for staying on message**



## THE FIVE C'S

### OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

01

#### BE CLEAR

If people can not understand what you are saying, then there is no point in trying to communicate. Say exactly what you want to say in simple language.

02

#### BE CONCISE

Time is valuable. If you take too long to get to your point, people will move on. Respect the people you are talking to. Get straight to the purpose of what you are trying to say.

03

#### BE COMPELLING

You have to care about what you are saying if you expect other people to care about it as well. Be energetic and transmit that enthusiasm to the people you are talking to.

04

#### BE CANDID

Tell your personal story with heart. Share your personality and voice. Be authentic and honest, because if you lose credibility it is hard to regain.

05

#### BE COMFORTABLE

Being an effective communicator requires you to be comfortable while communicating. Properly prepare so that you are confident about your communication.

**W**hen you start delving into the world of education policy, you quickly learn that there are a lot of organizations, policies, and measurement systems that are constantly referred to only by their acronyms. Navigating that complex maze of jargon can be difficult, so here is a quick list of some of the most commonly used acronyms:

**AFT** - American Federation for Teachers

**APR** - Annual Performance Report – score for schools and districts

**CEAM** - Children's Education Alliance of Missouri

**DESE** - Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**ESSA** - Every Student Succeeds Act – Federal act that replaced No Child Left Behind, gives states more autonomy

**ESA** - Education Scholarship Account – Tax credit scholarship for K-12 students that gives parents \$6,000 per child to customize their child's education including private school, therapy, tutoring, books, or anything education related

**IEP** - Individualized Education Plan – given to students with special needs

**LEA** - Local educational agency – school district or in the case of charters their operator

**MASA** - Missouri Association of School Administrators

**MCPSA** - Missouri Charter Public School Association

**MCPSC** - Missouri Charter Public School Commission

**MSIP(5)** - Missouri State Improvement Plan, version 5 – Complex formula that rates schools and accredits districts

**MSTA** - Missouri State Teachers Association

**NEA** - National Education Association

## Learning by example:

On the next two pages we will work on developing a 30-second elevator pitch which is one of the most important and useful tools to get other people interested in your personal story. Below are two effective 30-second elevator pitches developed by other CEAM parents to use as an example.

My name is Alison Mason. I am a first-year parent of two at a St. Louis charter school.

My oldest daughter attended her previous school for two years prior to attending her current school. Those two years she had several "behavioral issues" and wasn't making progress. We taught her from home mostly. We chose to move her because her academics were improving. We put her and her sister, who was entering kindergarten, in their current school. They have both excelled academically and socially at there. The teachers care and it's obvious.

I encourage all parents to visit our current school and consider them for their children's academic career. It's the best choice I've made for both my girls.

My name is Krystal Kitchen and my current school was exactly what I was searching for in education for my children.

My children and I had to move abruptly from the county to the city, and I had no idea they could attend mid school year. A parent at my current school referred me and the school helped me each step of the way with steady communication and I was able to enroll both of my children. My current school is amazing with academia at the forefront.

Every community should have the opportunity for their child to attend.

**FACT: THE ATTENTION SPAN OF THE AVERAGE PERSON IS JUST 30 SECONDS BEFORE THEIR MIND STARTS WANDERING.**

You have a great idea to offer more tutoring opportunities at your school, but have had a hard time getting an appointment with the school administration. Luckily, you just got in an elevator and realized you are standing next to the principal but you only have until the elevator doors open to convince them to consider your idea. How do you do it?

The 30-second elevator speech, or pitch, is a key skill for quickly and effectively communicating a persuasive idea that can be used for everything from selling yourself



to a potential employer, to convincing parents in your neighborhood to get involved in the fight for better school options.

An elevator speech is a clear, brief message or “commercial” about what you care about. An elevator speech should quickly communicate who you are, what issue you

are talking about, and why someone should care about that issue.

Once you have crafted your elevator speech it is very important that you memorize it and practice it out loud frequently so that it rolls off your tongue in a natural and friendly way.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A POWERFUL ELEVATOR SPEECH

### CONCISE

No more than **30-60 seconds**.

### CLEAR

Language that **everyone** understands.

### POWERFUL

Words that are **powerful and strong**.

### TELL A STORY

A **success story** or **current hardship**.

### GOAL-ORIENTED

What is your desired **outcome** or **call to action**?

## BUILDING YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH

## 1 INTRO

Introduce yourself and include an emotional statement to grab the attention of your audience. This should be short.

## 2 STORY

In 200 words or less tell your story? What do you want people to know about what you have gone through?

## 3 CALL TO ACTION

What would you like to see accomplished?

## CREATING A PACKAGE

You want your message to stay true to your values but be presented in the most effective way possible. The message should never be dishonest.

The value/content always remains the same. Considering whom your audience is, will help determine the package you're putting your message in.

## YOUR MESSAGE SHOULD CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING:

### 1. INTRODUCE YOURSELF

- a. Name
- b. Where you live
- c. Kids and where they attend school and what grade
- d. Value statement, emotional tug
- e. Why are you here?

### 2. NARRATIVE OR STORY OF SELF

Example: I have lived in \_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood all my life and now I am a parent of a child in this district.

### 3. POLICY/AGENDA/CALL TO ACTION

Example: I am asking you today to support more school options for parents and families.

## WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF "STAYING ON MESSAGE?"

**A** When you stay on message, you communicate exactly what you want your audience to know. You keep consistency and harmony between your words, visuals, and actions to deliver a clear, powerful, and irresistible call to action.

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

# Practice, practice, practice.

Whether speaking before a local school board or testifying in Jefferson City, public comments are usually limited to three (3) minutes. That is why it is so important to prepare your testimony in advance and time it at home to make sure you hit all of the points that you want to make.

When practicing at home, try having someone take a video recording of your testimony so you can see how you sound and look while giving it and focus on areas you need to improve on.

## OTHER TIPS:

Repetition is your friend. Don't repeat word-for-word but find different ways to say the same thing.

Don't give them anything but your message. Media can only work with what you give them and if you give them more than your message, your message is that much less likely to be accurately conveyed or picked up.

# Practice, practice, practice.

## 10 TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS

FROM HARVARD'S DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1. NERVOUSNESS IS NORMAL. PRACTICE AND PREPARE!**  
 All people feel some physiological reactions like pounding hearts and trembling hands. Do not associate these feelings with the sense that you will perform poorly or make a fool of yourself. Some nerves are good. The best way to overcome anxiety is to prepare, prepare, and prepare some more.
- 2. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE. YOUR SPEECH IS ABOUT THEM, NOT YOU.**  
 Before you begin to craft your message, consider who the message is intended for. Learn as much about your listeners as you can. This will help you determine your choice of words, level of information, organization pattern, and motivational statement.
- 3. ORGANIZE YOUR MATERIAL IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE MANNER.**  
 Create the framework for your speech. Write down the topic, general purpose, specific purpose, central idea, and main points. Make sure to grab the audience's attention in the first 30 seconds.
- 4. WATCH FOR FEEDBACK AND ADAPT.**  
 Keep the focus on the audience. Gauge their reactions, adjust your message, and stay flexible. Delivering a canned speech will guarantee that you lose the attention of or confuse even the most devoted listeners.
- 5. LET YOUR PERSONALITY COME THROUGH.**  
 Be yourself, don't become a talking head—in any type of communication. You will establish better credibility if your personality shines through, and your audience will trust what you have to say if they can see you as a real person.
- 6. USE HUMOR, TELL STORIES, AND USE EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE.**  
 Inject a funny anecdote in your presentation, and you will certainly grab your audience's attention. Audiences generally like a personal touch in a speech. A story can provide that.
- 7. DON'T READ UNLESS YOU HAVE TO. WORK FROM AN OUTLINE.**  
 Reading from a script or slide fractures the interpersonal connection. By maintaining eye contact with the audience, you keep the focus on yourself and your message. A brief outline can serve to jog your memory and keep you on task.
- 8. USE YOUR VOICE AND HANDS EFFECTIVELY. OMIT NERVOUS GESTURES.**  
 Nonverbal communication carries most of the message. Good delivery does not call attention to itself, but instead conveys the speaker's ideas clearly and without distraction.
- 9. GRAB ATTENTION AT THE BEGINNING, AND CLOSE WITH A DYNAMIC END.**  
 Do you enjoy hearing a speech start with "Today I'm going to talk to you about X"? Most people don't. Instead, use a startling statistic, an interesting anecdote, or concise quotation. Conclude your speech with a summary and a strong statement that your audience is sure to remember.
- 10. USE AUDIOVISUAL AIDS WISELY.**  
 Too many can break the direct connection to the audience, so use them sparingly. They should enhance or clarify your content, or capture and maintain your audience's attention.



## COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN JUST THE WORDS YOU ARE USING TO COMMUNICATE YOUR MESSAGE

### DEALING WITH ANXIETY

Everyone gets nervous, especially when it comes to public speaking. Thankfully there are a variety of proven techniques that can help!

- Preparation is a major factor in preventing anxiety. If you know your message and your key points by heart, then you will not be as worried about talking about them.
- Breathing before speaking can really help to calm nerves, slow your heart rate and steady your voice. One popular method is to breath deeply for 15-30 seconds, hold it for 15-30 seconds and then exhale for 15-30 seconds. Repeat until you are ready!
- Visualizing success in your mind before talking can make a major difference.
- Listen to your favorite music before speaking.
- Practice makes perfect! The more you put yourself in speaking opportunities the more comfortable you will be.

### BODY LANGUAGE

How you present yourself in any situation has a major impact on how your communication is perceived.

Your body language and facial expressions broadcast your mood, thoughts and emotions whether you want them to or not. Here are some key aspects of body language to consider:

- **POSTURE** Stand tall but be relaxed. Standing straight presents a open and friendly impression.
- **BREATHING** Maintain relaxed and deep breaths to aid in projection. Make sure you pause to emphasize points.
- **GESTURES** Use gestures as you naturally would. They can help to emphasize points.
- **EYE CONTACT** The eyes are the window to the soul. Maintaining eye contact is key to holding interest and establishing trustworthiness.
- **FACIAL EXPRESSION** Be aware of what your face is doing. A simple smile can make all the difference when first meeting someone.

### VOCAL VARIETY

Just as the way you present yourself can have a major impact on what you are trying to communicate, the tone and quality of your voice plays a major role in how your message is perceived. Here are some key things about vocal variety to consider for a variety of communication situations:

- **PREPARATION** Loosen your jaw and throat before speaking by moving your jaw from side to side. Practice breathing before speaking. Avoid cold water, dairy and caffeine.
- **VOLUME** How loud or quietly you speak frequently depends on your location, but varying your volume can help emphasize points (loud) or draw people in (quiet).
- **PACE** How quickly you talk has a major impact on how easy it is for people to understand you. Faster speech is usually more motivational while slower speech encourages people to think more.
- **PITCH** How high or low your voice sounds can impact your perceived authority. Lower pitch usually connotes authority and leadership while high pitch indicates excitement and fun.
- **TOPE** The emotional tone of your voice can really make a difference in how your message is perceived. Try to avoid letting your passion lead to an angry tone and maintain a friendly and inviting tone.