

Ten Effective Ways to Use Pauses in your Speech

A simple pause is one of the most versatile tools in your public speaking toolbox. Yet very few people perform it well. A pause, if used correctly, can add a great deal to your presentation or speech. Here are 10 ways you can use a pause effectively.

1. **Add emphasis to key points:** a pause before, during or after you say something you wish to emphasize can be a powerful verbal tool in a presentation. When preparing your speech, make a note of the important phrases and plan pauses around them. Try and spread these throughout your presentation and ensure you practice so you're not trying them on the fly. Don't be afraid to pause for up to 3 seconds and remember, time seems to pass quicker when you are on stage.
2. **Indicate a change in tone or topic:** pausing between two different parts of your talk can tell the audience something new is starting. You can also pause after an introduction or before a conclusion to help the audience understand the progression of your speech.
3. **Make sentences clear:** a brief pause every time your script has a comma between sections in a list, and a longer pause when there's a hard stop to a sentence, will slow you down and let the audience hear what you say. It also gives them time to process the information, particularly useful if your speech is on a complex topic or if the audience's native language isn't the same as your presentation.
4. **Recall what you want to say:** a pause lets you do so without the audience knowing or you having to apologize for forgetting what to say next, breaking your audience's concentration.
5. **Replace a filler or hesitation word:** there is nothing wrong with the occasional hesitation word, as long as it's not used too frequently. If you find yourself overusing certain words (common words include 'like', 'and', 'so') during your preparation, try a pause and a mental, not verbal, um. Recording your voice while practicing to help you identify your filler words.
6. **Distribute eye contact:** this again adds emphasis to the point you have or are just about to make. If the audience is large, spend 1-2 seconds making eye contact with several different areas of the audience before continuing. This helps keep the audience engaged and feel involved in the presentation.
7. **Let the applause finish:** if your speaking at a large venue, you'll most likely be applauded when you come on the stage. Make sure you pause long enough for the applause to finish – particularly if the event is being recorded, such as at a TED talk. This ensures clapping won't down out your important opening line.
8. **Wait for the audience to stop laughing:** if you've told a joke and it's gone over well (not always the case!), a pause lets the audience calm down before you carry on with your speech. Comedians are very good waiting a couple of seconds after the applause has finished to build suspense for the next section.
9. **Let others talk:** if you're in a conversation at a networking event, negotiation, or even giving a sales pitch, make sure you pause regularly to give the other person a chance to ask questions about the topic or to clarify what you have said. This way, you'll find out about the other person's interests so you can guide the conversation to a mutually positive outcome.
10. **Think of a response to a question:** there's a formula to answering questions: listen, understand (this is the pause), answer. The pause allows you to hear the complete question and gives you time to think of a suitable answer. Avoid interrupting the question; you may give an incorrect answer.

Adapted from:

Barnard, D. (2018, January 02). 10 effective ways to uses pauses in your speech. Retrieved from <https://virtualspeech.com/blog/effective-ways-use-pauses-in-speech>