

This book made public speaking feel genuinely accessible to me. I had always assumed the topic wasn't relevant to my life as an introverted translator, but it showed me that communication in everyday situations is its own form of public speaking. Interviews, professional conversations, and even personal interactions all benefit from the same underlying skills, and the book reframed the whole subject in a way I hadn't expected.

It demystified public speaking in a way nothing had before. After working with Stewart and reading his book, I felt more at ease in myself, and I walked into my latest job interview more confident and relaxed than ever before. It helped me connect better with others and with myself, and the impact was both practical and personal.

The book captures the essence of his caring, highly skilled, and practical teaching style. "Be yourself – on purpose" isn't just a tagline; it reflects the book's approach to presence and authenticity. There are no gimmicks here – only clear, actionable guidance on body language, storytelling, and purposeful communication. His bold, slightly twisted sense of humor isn't decoration; it makes the lessons memorable and surprisingly enjoyable, and many of the examples became running gags that helped the ideas stick.

This is a book for everyone, not just those who give formal presentations. Anyone who wants to communicate with more clarity, confidence, and intention will find something valuable in it, and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to feel more at ease in their own voice.

EDINA C., FORMER CLIENT

Stew's method is a game-changer! For years, my approach to public speaking was defined by self-doubt, inferiority complexes, and a terror of looking like a fool or getting stumped by a question. I couldn't even imagine that this could be enjoyable. I used to watch TED Talks with baffled admiration, wondering how on earth they did it. Now, thanks to Stew, I finally get it.

When I tried to improve on my own, the best I could do was force myself into speaking situations. Sometimes it went well, sometimes not, but mostly I walked away thinking, "That could have been so much better." I realized back then that practice was key, but Stew taught me something else: whether you're facing a handful of people or a huge crowd, they aren't the enemy. They actually want you to succeed.

Follow his advice (without obsessing), and both your delivery and your confidence will improve by light-years. You'll learn the basics of storytelling from a truly authentic expert who's worn many hats, and you'll finally stop just trying to survive your presentations—you'll start wanting to do them all over again.

ADRI B., CLIENT

Natural Presenting

Mastering the Art and Science
of Public Speaking



Stewart Hay

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Why Public Speaking Is an Essential Skill

Whether we realize it or not, public speaking is one of the most valuable skills we can develop, affecting both our personal and professional lives in countless ways.

People often associate public speaking with formal occasions—work presentations, business proposals, or maybe even speeches at weddings. But if you stop and think, you’ll realize that you’re actually “presenting” ideas all the time. Whether you’re in a team meeting, introducing yourself at a gathering, pitching an idea, interviewing for a job, or just sharing a story with friends or family, you’re constantly conveying information. Each of these moments is an opportunity to bond, influence, communicate effectively, and engage people in your ideas.

As renowned MIT Professor Patrick Winston¹ once noted, “Our success in life is largely influenced by three things: our

ability to speak well, our ability to write well, and the quality of our ideas. In that order.” Speaking is also one of the oldest forms of influence; the ability to articulate ideas clearly and persuasively is one of the foundations of human progress.

He also describes quite accurately how the quality of your communication is determined by first, how much knowledge you have, followed by how much you practice with that knowledge, followed distantly by how much “natural talent” you might possess.

I liken this to playing a musical instrument. If you hand me a violin and let me practice it for a year, I’ll probably figure it out, and maybe even be okay at it. However, if you teach me various techniques and give me half the time to practice, I’ll most likely be much better. And I’ll definitely be better than a “natural” who’s trying it for the first time.

Speaking well doesn’t mean you need to have innate talent or the “gift of gab.” Like any skill, it can be learned. The more knowledge and experience you gain, the better you get. The secret is knowing why you’re doing what you’re doing and practicing to build your confidence and skill, allowing you to bring your best self forward whenever the need arises.

Public Speaking in the Age of AI

They say the robots are coming. Correction: *they’re already here.*

AI can write your emails, plan your meetings, draft your pitch, summarize your research, and even mimic your voice. But here's the thing it can't do. It can't do these things with heart, with warmth, and certainly not with conviction. It can't stand in front of a room full of breathing, blinking, skeptical human beings and connect with them.

In an era where machines are devouring jobs like popcorn at a matinee—customer service reps, paralegals, entry-level analysts, even some coders—it turns out the oldest skill in the book has become one of the most future-proof: the ability to speak powerfully in person.

Yes, AI can *help* you prepare. You can use it to organize your thoughts, practice your timing, and anticipate tough questions. It's your rehearsal partner, your outline generator, your feedback mirror. But it is not your substitute. The applause doesn't ring out for ChatGPT.

People trust people. Especially now, when so much sounds pre-programmed. In a 2024 Pew study, 67% of respondents said they trusted a *human speaker* over AI when it came to persuasion, leadership, or emotional communication.² In moments of crisis, celebration, or change—moments that matter—audiences crave *realness*.

And let's not sugarcoat it. The rise of AI means a fall for many traditional roles. What's left? What's *irreplaceable*? Presence. Storytelling. Charisma. The ability to walk into a room and, without a single algorithm, light it up.

Kurt Vonnegut once said, “A writer is someone who makes a reader feel less alone.”³ A speaker? A great speaker is someone who makes a room *come alive*. In a world of cold data and perfect grammar, your stumbles, flaws, and imperfections are gold.

This isn’t the end of human communication. It’s a renaissance. The more the world automates, the more we’ll value the authentic. So, speak up. Speak often. Speak like it matters—because now, more than ever, it *does*.

The Perks of Presenting

Presenting itself brings several key benefits:

1. You Become a Better Communicator in All Aspects of Life: Effective public speaking improves your everyday communication skills, from casual conversations to sharing stories in settings. It also improves your ability to listen actively as you become more attuned to what interests and involve others.
2. You Control the Narrative: In a presentation, you control the message—what to say, how to say it, and in what order. Without interruption or distractions, you can craft a narrative, guide listeners through a topic, build toward the conclusion you want them to take away, and have them leave with your message in mind.

3. **You Have Your Audience’s Full Attention:** In a public speaking setting, the floor is yours. Unlike a casual conversation, where interruptions and digressions are common, here, the audience is focused on you. This gives you a rare opportunity to connect deeply and convey your message clearly and powerfully.

4. **Stage Effect:** The powerful attraction that performers experience when they deliver great content to an audience. You might not become a rock star, but you’ll gain a confidence and status that you’ll naturally carry into other areas of life.

Even at a personal level, you may notice an increased ability to tell stories, hold people’s attention, and make an impression.

Overcoming stage fright, gaining poise, and understanding how to tailor your message to your audience’s needs are tools that serve you everywhere—whether in a professional pitch, a social setting, or even just a lively conversation at the dinner table.

The Goal of This Book

The book is designed to help you gain a comprehensive understanding on all aspects of public speaking and provide actionable tasks to help refine your skills and abilities. By reading, practicing simple exercises, and reviewing what you need most, you’ll gain useful knowledge and lasting skills to feel ready and take the stage with confidence. You’ll learn

how to be at ease with your audience, involve and engage with them, and ultimately leave them with the lasting impression you aim to make, whether in a classroom, a boardroom, a conference stage, a festival stage, or any space where you're called to share your voice.

By understanding what's essential to your audience, practicing techniques that support you under pressure, and learning how to embrace your unique voice and presence to simply *tell your story*, you can transform public speaking from a dreaded ordeal into the natural, enjoyable experience it can be.

CHAPTER 4

The Art of
Storytelling

STORYTELLING ISN'T JUST A TOOL for entertainment or teaching, it's an essential part of human experience. From the moment we began communicating, stories have been how we interpret, remember, and connect with the world. When we think about it, almost everything we enjoy in life revolves around stories. Movies, TV shows, songs, poetry, fairy tales, and books all carry stories that convey meaning, emotion, and memory. But stories also shape our everyday lives—in casual anecdotes, in the way we explain our day to a friend, in the advice we give a child, or in the lessons we pass down across generations.

At the core, storytelling is about much more than sharing information—it's about sharing a perspective, an experience, or a feeling. Each time we recount a memory, describe an experience, or explain our lives to others, we use storytelling to bridge the gap between our individual experience and our listener's understanding. As humans, we're wired to respond to stories not only because they capture facts, but because they carry emotion, which is far more memorable. Stories don't just entertain us; they teach us, persuade us,

connect us, and even help define who we are as families, communities, and cultures.

Why Stories Matter

Think about the stories you consume daily: the movie that made you laugh, the TV show that gripped you with suspense, the book that transported you to another world, or the song lyrics that seemed to say exactly what you were feeling. Why do we love these stories? Because they give us a lens through which we can see new perspectives, understand different lives, and experience emotions we might not otherwise encounter.

This isn't just a modern phenomenon. Long before the written word, humans were sitting around campfires, passing down knowledge, values, and survival tips through fables, myths, and legends. These stories were more than entertainment—they were memory devices, teaching tools, and the way communities preserved their collective wisdom. Storytelling has always been how we make sense of the world, and it remains the building block of how we connect, learn, and grow.

Stories are the emotional anchors of your presentation. They're how we make abstract ideas concrete, how we help logic land, and most importantly, how we make our audience *feel* something. As Dale Carnegie wisely noted, when you're dealing with people, you're dealing with creatures

of emotion—not logic.¹⁷ And nothing stirs emotion like a well-told story.

But a story isn't just a sequence of events. A *resonant* story is a carefully constructed emotional experience. It's not about everything that happened—it's about what *matters*.

The Five-Part Anatomy of an Effective Anecdote

Here's the gold standard framework for telling anecdotes (short stories about a real incident) that land—whether you're giving a speech, delivering a pitch, or giving a toast:

1. The Title (aka the Point)

A good story has a purpose. It's not just something that happened—it's something worth sharing. Clarify your point before you begin. Think of it like naming a chapter: it sets the expectation.

2. Background (aka Scene Setting)

Your audience needs context—not a full backstory. Where are we? Who's involved? What's at stake? Set the stage quickly and move on.

3. The Story (aka The Action)

What happened? Tell the events in chronological order. This makes the story easier to follow and helps avoid confusion or unnecessary tangents.

4. The Ending (aka Stick the Landing)

When the action is over, end. Do not linger. Do not add extra footnotes. Respect your audience's attention and let the silence carry weight.

5. The Moral (aka The Aha Moment)

Tie it all back to the point. What insight, lesson, or emotional beat should your audience walk away with? Let them connect your story to their world.

TASK: THE 90-SECOND DRILL

To refine your stories, try this:

Tell the story in ninety seconds. Set a timer. Go.

This forces you to identify what actually matters—and what's just noise. Once your story is clear and concise, you can always expand it if time or context allows. But now your audience is listening *because* you earned their attention, not despite the distractions.

The Classic Emotional Arc: Hollywood's Secret Weapon

For maximum resonance, use the classic three-act emotional arc—the same one Hollywood screenwriters swear by:

- Pity – We start by empathizing with the main character. We feel for them. They’re struggling, flawed, relatable.
- Fear – Stakes are raised. We worry about what might happen. There’s uncertainty and tension.
- Catharsis – A release of emotional energy. Relief. Laughter. Triumph. Clarity. Something satisfying wraps the experience.

Kurt Vonnegut once said, “Every character should want something, even if it’s just a glass of water.”¹⁸ If your story lacks a desire, a drive, or a risk—it won’t grip anyone. Your audience is looking for a reason to care.”

How to Lose an Audience: The Rambling Story

We all know that person. The well-meaning storyteller who corners you at a party and begins recounting an experience that, if told well, might’ve been funny or profound or even memorable—*if only* they hadn’t gotten lost in a forest of side roads, detours, and timestamp debates.

You brace yourself as they begin:

“So, this was... hmm, let me think... 2014? Or was it 2015? I had that Honda Civic back then—no wait, it must’ve been the year I got rid of it—but that haircut! I remember my barber told me—”

Take It Further

Reading about public speaking is the first step. The real transformation happens when you do the work.

If this book sparked something in you—a desire to speak with more confidence, more presence, or simply more of yourself—there are several ways to continue that journey with direct support.

INTENSIVE TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS

Group Training

Structured, performance-based courses designed to turn knowledge into presence. Through focused, practical sessions, you'll learn to manage stage fright, refine your vocal and physical delivery, structure ideas for maximum impact, and communicate with clarity and authority when it counts most.

Ideal for professionals preparing for high-stakes presentations, keynotes, or interviews—and equally valuable for anyone who wants to show up with greater confidence in meetings, classrooms, or everyday conversations.

PERSONAL, PRECISION-FOCUSED SUPPORT

One-to-One Coaching

For those who have a specific moment on the horizon—a major presentation, a high-profile address, a professional transition—individual coaching offers targeted refinement at the level you need it.

Sessions are diagnostic and structured, addressing presentation anxiety, vocal control, message clarity, body language, and executive presence. You'll leave each session with techniques that are reliable under real pressure, not just in the practice room.

CUSTOM PROGRAMS FOR TEAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

For Organizations

Communication training that integrates into your leadership development, onboarding, or professional education initiatives. Programs are built around your people, your context, and your goals—whether you're a corporate team, a university, or a professional association.

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