

Fearless Public Speaking: A Final Year Dental Student's Top Tips

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Whilst public speaking may not be something that every dental student is currently involved and engaged in, it does present a great opportunity to connect with and spread your opinions and experience with other members of the dental community.

In my experience, many more members of the dental profession are beginning to connect with and engage with organised dentistry events, and the support for getting involved is immense.

I began my journey through public speaking as being quite an anxious public speaker, and four years on, I'd never have imagined being able to address professional dental audiences at events around the world.

When we see some of the best public speakers on the planet talk, we automatically assume that they are born that way. Whilst it may be true that some individuals are born with a gift for being more vocal, the art of public speaking is not a gift, but an ongoing and developing characteristic.

I am not an expert in the field, but I have been privileged to put on talks with some of the high profile dentists in the UK, and I have represented the UK on two occasions at international conferences, as well as having taken to the stage several times at national conferences.

I don't believe there is any secret to public speaking, but having a few tips and tricks in mind will definitely help, as well as having experiences; the more you take to the stage, the more effective you can be at calming your nerves.

As a final year dental student, I look back proudly at the personal and professional transformation I have just had during the four years I've spent at dental school. The overarching learning point is that the study

of dentistry is more than diagnosing oral diseases and performing treatments.

You are, for the most part, in an environment packed full of helpful tutors, supportive colleagues and receptive patients. Being a student allows you to ask others for help. Surround yourself with positive mentors and tutors and ask questions. Familiarise yourself with the changes taking place in the profession, and try your best to master the additional skills that'll help you stand out from the pack upon graduating.

For me, I analysed what I was weakest at, and this was public speaking. I then religiously sought mentors and speaking opportunities, and took part in numerous speaking events, before giving oral presentations to professional dentists at conferences, and even organising my very own events at King's College London.

The major learning point of mine through public speaking was that if you're on that stage, your audience will make the assumption that you're the top dog and will treat you as an expert.

Public speaking can be scary, but for those individual who want to learn to take to and own, the stage, the benefits are huge!

In my experience, people trust fluent and connectable/relatable speakers more than honest ones, even when the powerful speaker isn't telling the whole truth.

Even if you aren't a natural, and I was definitely not at first, you can improve your public speaking skills with practice. Every time I approached a public speaking event, I learnt my script word for word and this enabled me to feel more confident and less anxious.

Once you push past your anxiety, you'll realise that public speaking has very many merits about it. I met several of my largest



Kishan (second from right) with the other speakers at the King's College London charity fundraiser for Evelina Children's Hospital, from left to right: Dr Alun Rees, Dr Anoop Maini, Dr Raj Ahlowalia, Dr Helena Lewis Greene, Mr Kishan Sheth and Dr Subir Banerji.

mentors after speaking with them after a speaking opportunity.

They say that 'practice makes perfect' and I've learnt that if you invest a bit of practice into your speaking skills, you'll find that public speaking can help you meet new people, mentors and strengthen your presentations and build up your professional brand, helping you attract new clients and customers. This may benefit some students who have entrepreneurial endeavors at school but it will be sure to aid us all as dental professionals upon graduation.

Listed below are several of my top tips to help you become a fearless dental student speaker:

Be yourself

In the normal, day-to-day conversations we have every day, we have absolutely no problem being ourselves, but when the time comes to stand up and deliver a speech, something dramatically changes! We shift our focus from our content and our selves, to the public audience.

I believe in order to engage an audience effectively; we must focus on the speaking and let go of the "public." There are several tricks my mentors have shared, such as imagining the audience are all 'naked', but I find that

imagining I am talking to myself without anyone listening works best.

By doing so, I feel much more relaxed and able to deliver a great speech. Don't ever be put off by the size of your audience, be yourself and you'll form a direct connection with the people to whom you speak.

Don't aim for perfection

Even the best public speakers occasionally make mistakes at some point. And after all, remember that as the speaker you will notice any mistakes more than anyone in your audience, you are the only one who really knows what you're supposed to say.

I've made many mistakes on stage, from forgetting the next line to incorrectly pronouncing a certain word, but I think it is of vital importance that you don't stop and never apologise to your audience for a minor slip up – keep going. Even when I've 'urmmmeeddd' or left a word out, it has occasionally acted in my favour, because it allowed me to connect with my audience.

Get researching

Don't just wait until the day of the event to get to know your audience, be sure to research them beforehand. How many people are expected to come, what are their age demographics and how does your topic fit in with what they currently do/ want to do?

Simplify your delivery if you're speaking to a group of laypeople, and avoid medical/ dental jargon and complex information – get to the key points quickly and efficiently. Only get technical in certain circumstances when your audience consists of dental professionals. It is also important to be able to recognise that simply knowing your topic isn't enough; you have to be able to progress further and find out why your audience cares about this topic right now.

Does the topic have an emotional impact on your audience? For example, if your topic is all about periodontal disease, put an emotional spin on the topic by perhaps introducing a case study of a patient who has lost all her teeth and who is emotionally

challenged when it comes to prosthetic replacements – your topic is going to help dental professionals prevent similar stories.

This is what critically engages professionals. The more engaged they are, the more they will listen and connect to you as a speaker.

Prepare well to confidently tackle any question the audience may have.

Get familiar with the environment

Find out well in advance about whether you will have video screens and a projector? The more information you know about your speaking environment, the better prepared you will be for the encounter, and it is clear which presenters feel most at home on the stage, they are usually the ones who perform the best.

Ensure that you are suitably dressed for the occasion. You can never be over dressed for a public speaking performance. But above all, ensure you feel comfortable in whatever you do plan to wear.

Practice, practice, practice

A trick, which I found to be very helpful, was to practice in front of a mirror, and then practice in front of my family and friends. Make it clear beforehand that you want critical constructive feedback, as this is the only way you truly can improve. Accept any opportunities that present themselves to speak at smaller engagements to build your confidence.

Find TED talks and other videos to see how masterful speakers own the stage, pay attention to the way they walk, how they minimise any fidgeting on stage and how they vary their pitch and tone to keep the audience interested and entertained.

Former TEDx speaker Brooke Warner said, "There are countless videos to study, books to read and online resources from those who've walked before you. I consumed everything, and voraciously. I watched close to 50 talks, read two books and read many posts."



Kishan (left) with fellow colleague after his speech to an audience of dental professionals, specialists and students at the University of Sharjah annual dental conference, United Arab Emirates.

Start strong and finish stronger

Spend some extra time crafting and molding the beginning and end of your speech, as these are the critical parts of any public speech. A strong start will boost your confidence and allow you to connect directly with your audience, and a strong finish will drive your key points home and leave a lasting impression on the crowd.

When you feel uncertain, your first instinct may be to apologise to your audience for your mistakes. But I would never apologise to my audience, instead I'd take a deep breath, smile and continue. Any mistakes or sudden hesitation due to forgetting your lines is to be expected with new speakers.

Enjoy your time on stage

Even if some members of the audience don't seem interested, there will always be people who see value in you and your messages. The audience is more likely to connect with you if your speech evokes emotion, through storytelling, or if you appear to be enjoying yourself. Imagine there is no one in the audience, and that you're in a little, dark room. Pretend you're speaking to yourself, and simply enjoy the moment.

You don't have to wait for audience members to approach you. Make clear that you'll be available to talk and connect in person after the speech and via your social media platforms and emails. ■

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