

Patricia FRIPP®

8 Common Pitfalls to Avoid When You Speak



Frippicisms®: Nothing will position you ahead of the crowd as much as becoming a powerful, persuasive presenter.

8 Common Pitfalls to Avoid When You Speak

By Patricia Fripp®, CSP, CPAE

Whether your audience is one person or a thousand, whenever you open your mouth, you want to get a specific message across. Perhaps you are leading a training session, delivering a formal presentation, or want your opinions heard at meetings. Possibly your sales team needs to improve its customer communication, or you're in a position to help your CEO design an important speech.

Anyone who sets out to present, persuade, and propel with the spoken word faces eight major pitfalls.

1. Unclear Thinking

If you can't describe what you are talking about in one sentence, you may be guilty of fuzzy focus or of trying to cover too many topics. Your listeners will probably be confused, too, and their attention will soon wander. Whether you are improving your own skills or helping someone else create a presentation, the biggest (and most difficult) challenge is to start with a one-sentence premise or objective.

2. No Clear Structure

Make it easy for others to follow what you are saying. They'll remember it better, and you will, too, as you deliver your information and ideas. If you waffle, ramble, or never get to the point, your listeners will tune out. Start with a strong opening related to your premise; state your premise or central theme; list your ideas and Points of Wisdom that support your premise, illustrating each point with examples of stories, statistics, and case histories. Review what you've covered, take questions if appropriate, and then use a strong close.

3. No Memorable Stories

People rarely remember your exact words. Instead, they remember the mental images that your words inspire. Support your key points with vivid, relevant stories. Help your listeners see your message by using visual words, engaging situations, dialogue, suspense, drama, and natural humor that is within your example. A good example can simplify the complex, get your audience emotionally involved, and transport them to another time and place.

4. No Emotional Connection

The most powerful communication combines both intellectual and emotional connections. Intellectual means appealing to the rational self-interest with data and reasoned arguments. Emotional connection comes from engaging the listeners' imaginations, involving them in your illustrative stories, and by answering their unspoken question, "What's in this for me?" Use what I call a high *I/you balance*. Not "I'm going to talk to you about . . ." instead "You're going to learn the latest trends in . . ." Not "I want to tell you about Bobby Lewis," rather "Come with me to Oklahoma City. Let me introduce you to my friend, proud father Bobby Lewis." You've pulled the listener into the story.

5. Wrong Level of Abstraction

Are you providing the big picture and generalities, when your listeners are actually hungry for details, facts, and specific how-tos? Or are you drowning them in data when they need to position themselves with an overview and find out why they should care? Get on the same wave length as your listeners. My colleague, Dr. David Palmer, a Silicon Valley negotiations expert, refers to *fat* and *skinny* words and phrases. Fat words describe the big picture, goals, ideals, outcomes. Skinny words are minute details and specific who, what, when, and how. In general, senior management needs a high-level overview, or *fat* words. Middle management requires medium words. Technical staff and consumer hot line users are hungry for *skinny* words. Feed them all according to their appetites.

6. No Pauses

Good music and good communication both contain changes of pace, pauses, and full rests. As counterintuitive as it may seem, your listeners connect to you more in the silence as they digest what they have heard. When you give your audience time to consider how your message applies to them, they are more likely to remember and repeat your key ideas and message. If you rush on at full speed to crowd in as much information as possible, chances are the audience will tune out. It's okay to talk quickly if you pause whenever you say something profound, proactive, or rhetorical. This gives the audience a chance to think about what you've said and to internalize it.

7. Irritating Non-Words

Hmm, ah, er, you know what I mean. How often have you been irritated by speakers who begin each new thought with "now" or "so"? It's certainly acceptable occasionally, just not every thirty seconds. The constant use of *right* at the end of your sentences kills the impact and lowers your credibility; it sounds as if you are looking for agreement. Record yourself to check for similar bad verbal habits. Then keep recording your side of conversations, rehearsals, and actual presentations. Be sure to listen, become aware, and rescript your phrases until such audience-aggravators have vanished. You will not improve what you are not aware of.

8. Not Having a Strong Opening and Closing

Engage your audience immediately with a powerful, relevant opening. It can be dramatic, thought-provoking, or amusing. Your goal is to break the distraction and hook your audience instantly with a taste of what is to follow. You have many options: a rhetorical question; interesting statistic; powerful quotation; personal story; critical explanation; or the tactic of transporting the audience to a different time or place by starting the sentence with the word “Imagine . . .” or the phrase “I wish you could have been there.”

Before you close, review your key ideas. If appropriate, ask for short specific questions, challenge the audience to take action based on the content of your presentation, and close on a high. Preferably, your close will tie back into your opening theme in a circular way. Remember, your last words linger.

When you can avoid these eight common pitfalls, you’re free to focus on your message and your audience, making you a more dynamic, powerful, and persuasive communicator.

About Patricia Fripp®

When your message must be memorable, your presentation powerful, and your sales successful, Patricia Fripp® can help.

As a presentation skills expert, *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance* wrote, “Learning presentation skills from Patricia Fripp® is one of the best ways to invest in you.” She is the author of three books and co-author of another three. Patricia’s latest is *Deliver Unforgettable Presentations* with World Champions of Public Speaking, Darren LaCroix, and Mark Brown.

Her coaching clients include sales teams, engineers, executives, and professional speakers.

Her online learning platform—FrippVT® *Powerful, Persuasive Presentations*—is embraced as a “must-have” by speakers and companies worldwide.



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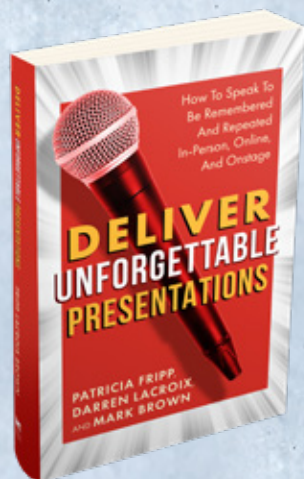
“Heartfelt thanks. As my teacher, your talents helped my story to the MDRT main platform 3 times and countless other stages around the globe. Always a raving fan.”

- John Nichols, President, Acrisure Insurance Wholesale Solutions

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“Patricia Fripp’s ability to hold an audience in the palm of her hand with a story is incredible. Her talent of turning speakers into champions in front of a packed audience is even more amazing.”

- Michelle Kabele, Channel Marketing, Zebra Technologies



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www.fripp.com | www.FrippVT.com | pfripp@fripp.com | 1 (415) 753-6556