

## **FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin – 2013 - February**

### **Guidelines for Public Speaking**

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The following public speaking rules were developed after attending the FBI's Employee Assistance Program in April 2000. Updated in May 2012, these guidelines are not intended to guarantee absolute success in all aspects of public speaking. They are, however, calculated insights based on lessons learned.

1. When giving a presentation, speakers should not display mobile phones, pagers, or other electronic devices. These objects signal to the audience that the attention is not entirely devoted to them.
2. Presenters need to remove lanyards, badges, and large jewelry. These are very distracting.
3. Lecturers can enhance their appearance by wearing small pins on their lapels. This gives the impression that they are larger than just a single individual—they are part of an organization or group with a bigger cause.
4. When speaking, orators should avoid using phrases like “As Mr. X (the previous speaker) just said. . . .” The audience may wonder why the presenter is speaking when Mr. X already said it all.
5. If an individual is not the primary speaker and a colleague is making a presentation, it is important to avoid jumping in and adding commentary. Input should only be given if

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Public speaking rules can help increase a speaker's chance for a successful presentation

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asked for or if the presenter is saying something blatantly false or misleading. Interruptions undermine credibility.

6. Presenters should repeat questions before answering, especially if the room is large. This allows time to think about the response. It also helps frame the question, displays listening skills, and ensures that the audience hears the question.
7. It is essential to avoid saying “good question” or “excellent question.” It can appear insincere. If it is not said after every query, the person will not focus on the answer but will wonder whether the question was not good.
8. When asking questions, audience members should raise their hands, speak loudly and clearly, and present their query in less than 15 seconds. Ensure that questions are not rambling monologues. Speakers who are audience members should follow these rules and ask their listeners to do the same.
9. No matter how good speakers are—or think they are—they must never go over the allotted time, including the question-and-answer period. This is especially critical if speaking right before lunch.
10. After the presentation, it is important to ask if there are any questions, stop talking, and remain silent for about five seconds. During this time, the speaker can scan the audience and ensure no hands are raised. Presenters must avoid asking for questions, then continuing to speak.
11. It is imperative to engage the audience with genuine and direct, but non-aggressive, eye contact for two to four seconds. Orators should not glance from one side of the room to the other or look at people’s foreheads or chins.
12. Presenters must avoid speaking in continuing, run-on sentences. They should not give a 20-minute speech in one sentence. It is important to break word flow into distinct, separate segments and is acceptable to pause for a few seconds.
13. When presenting, individuals should vary their pace of delivery, pitch, volume, and tone. They have the stage and should not worry that someone is going to interrupt.
14. It is imperative for speakers to avoid any unconscious, nervous behavior—such as clicking a pen, jiggling coins, or playing with keys—that would make noise or distract the audience.

While not all-inclusive, these tips are valuable and may improve a speaker’s ability to undertake a successful presentation.

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