



FactSheet

Extension

Ohio State University Fact Sheet

State 4-H Office

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Tools for Public Speaking

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David M. Farrell

Extension Associate, 4-H Youth Development

Learning to be a good public speaker is something that will be useful throughout a 4-H member's lifetime. Good public speakers are made, not born. The necessary skills associated with being a good public speaker have always been an important part of the 4-H experience and 4-H clubs are encouraged to foster a positive, learning-oriented environment for youth regarding this subject.

What Are the Benefits of Good Public Speaking Skills?

The degree of a 4-H member's public speaking skills is directly related to his or her leadership and social ability. Members who feel comfortable speaking in front of others have a greater sense of self-confidence, a feeling of respect for themselves and others, and generally have a solid feeling of accomplishment. Good public speakers are more apt to do well in a job interview or a presentation to colleagues at work.

How Do We Get Started?

The most important aspect of getting 4-H members interested in public speaking is making sure they are aware of their current strengths and weaknesses in the area of public speaking.

Step 1: Decide what is needed

Have the members answer a few simple questions to determine their current public speaking ability:

- a.) What scares me the most about the thought of speaking in public?
- b.) What situations are easier for me to talk about in front of others and what situations make it more difficult? (For example, it may be easy to tell friends about your vacation, but difficult to question a teacher in front of your classmates about a bad grade you received.)
- c.) What goals in public speaking would I like to set for myself this year in 4-H, in five years, and/or as an adult?

Step 2: Decide what should be done

If a member is going to give a talk, one of the first decisions needs to be what to talk about. Here are questions to ask yourself as you are selecting the subject for your talk:

- What topics am I interested in?
- Is it interesting or useful to others?
- Does it have one main idea?
- Can I find enough information?
- Can I cover the topic in the length of time that will be available for my presentation?

The member should then consider whether the purpose of the talk will be to inform, persuade, instruct, entertain, or inspire his or her audience on the topic that is chosen.

Choosing your audience is almost as important as choosing your topic when you are doing public speaking. In order to "choose" your audience, here are some of the questions you should ask:

- Who do you want to talk to?
- Where would you like to give your presentation? (Outdoors, in someone's house, at a banquet hall?)
- Who would find your topic interesting?
- What do you want to accomplish with the audience?

Step 3: Have the club members list what they would like to do

Once the member has a list of possible topics and audiences, he/she can start to prioritize them. An easy way to do this is to have the member list all of the ideas on a sheet of paper and rank them according to how interested he/she is regarding each idea. One would indicate the greatest interest, and five the least amount of interest. From this, the member can pick his or her top priority topic and audience.

Step 4: Decide what will be done

Now that the member has narrowed down his broad list of topics and audiences, he/she needs to decide what can be done to make it happen. Who does the member need to contact to make sure he/she can speak to a particular audience? What reference items will the member need to consult before outlining his/her talking points? It is important that the member be encouraged to outline a plan of action to make sure that giving a public talk will really happen.

After the member has outlined a plan of action, proceed by learning as much as possible about the topic of the speech. Information should be gathered from several sources, including the local library, the Extension Office, a 4-H project book, or by talking to an authority on the subject. For example, if you're speaking on fire safety, a local fire department would have information on the number of fires in the community. This information would encourage the audience to follow the fire prevention tips in the talk.

Next, it is important that the member actually outline what he/she plans to say. Detailed notes are not necessary but an opening, three main points, and a closing are three essential things that should be listed on a piece of paper.

Lastly, the member should make plans with a group or organization to give the speech. Make sure to note the date, time, place, and length of the speech. Also, ask about the audience. How many people will be there, what does this group like, dislike, etc. In most cases, the 4-H club itself would be a good group to listen to a short speech.

Step 5: Processing

After a talk is over, good speakers evaluate their presentation. An important step in the learning process is having the member take the time to evaluate himself/herself on the how well he/she feels he/she did. This is called processing. The member who gave the presentation may want to give the audience an opportunity to share what they gained individually from the talk. This can be actual knowledge gained or simply what they liked most about the presentation. Another means of assisting members who try public speaking may be to have them tape record their presentation and then listen to it themselves at a later time.

Public Speaking Opportunities

The best public speaking opportunities for youth are centered around a personal interest shared with the other members in the club. There are, however, several other public speaking opportunities that are offered at the county and state level.

Basic public speaking opportunities in 4-H:

- Assuming the role of an officer
- Giving a committee report at a meeting
- Leading and teaching recreation
- Leading pledges

Advanced public speaking opportunities in 4-H:

- Camp counseling
- CarTeens
- Style revue commentator
- Announcing a show at county fair
- 4-H Ambassador/Promotion roles
- Peer mediation
- Demonstration or illustrated talk
- Health and Safety talk or skit
- Speaking to civic groups about 4-H
- Emceeing a program
- Participating in radio/television interviews
- Teaching a 4-H workshop or clinic

There are many more opportunities available in local communities. Members should be encouraged to try as many as possible.

References

Villard, J.A. & Weber, E. Tools For Public Speaking. Ohio State University Extension.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Adm. and Director, OSU Extension.

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