

# Are you talking at or talking with your audience?

I recently attended a panel discussion where the five speakers on the panel were going to share their insights about industry trends. The first speaker got up (literally, up out of his seat) and started providing stats and information *about his business*, and then proceeded to ask the audience for questions. The moderator had to jump in to remind him that questions would be taken after all the speakers had their say.

This speaker didn't seem to know what the panel's topic was (trends) and he was completely focused on sharing what his business does, even though the audience wasn't there to hear that. Worse, he acted as if he was the only one presenting by pacing in front of the other panelists.

The speaker was *talking at* the audience. He was giving a speech that was all about him and did not respond to what the audience wanted or needed.

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Does the expression "given a talking to" convey positive feelings for you? I bet it doesn't. Nobody likes to be *talked to* and being *talked at* is almost as bad. Both imply that the speaker has power over the audience or that the speaker is superior in some way.

On the other hand, if someone is *talking with* you, there's a conversation going on. There's some give and take, even if it's not verbal. Speakers who are *talking with* an audience are paying attention to what the audience needs, they are responding to cues and they are engaging the audience's attention.

You want to be talking *with* your audience. You want to be *responsive* to their needs.

There are three basic steps to make sure you are talking with your audience:

1. Understand **who** your audience is
2. Understand **why** the audience is there
3. Understand **what** the audience needs from you

You get bonus points for adjusting your speech depending on **where** you are and **when** you are giving it.

Have you sat through a speech that was all about the speaker? Did you feel talked at? Did it bother you? Please share your stories in the comments.

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## Giving a speech?

For some, giving a speech is just part of the job. These people are constantly doing sales pitches or addressing the board. For others, giving a speech is an opportunity to establish their credentials or gain more visibility. In any case, not everyone is a good speaker, and some people have really annoying habits when giving a speech.

I was at a two-day conference last week and I heard A LOT of speeches. Some were good, some were fine and some were just plain annoying. Here is a list of actual behaviors observed last week. If you are giving a speech, please keep your audience in mind and try to avoid any of these!

**Talking too loudly:** do not yell into a microphone please!

**Talking too softly:** yeah, the microphone amplifies your voice, but won't help if you are whispering. Besides, to me talking softly means that you are unsure of yourself.

**Sounding unsure:** mostly this happens when you end each and every sentence with a question mark, so your speech sound like this: Hi? Today I am going to be talking about widgets? Widgets are the fastest growing segment in the market?

**Sounding too sure:** also known as sounding arrogant or dismissive.

**Self promoting:** say you are asked to talk about literature in the eighteenth century, but all you talk about is the book you just wrote, inspired by the 18th century.

**Being off-topic:** you were given a topic, try to address it. No one came to hear your views on extra-terrestrials if the topic was the planetary system.

**Hogging the spotlight:** if you are speaking on a panel, that means the other people get to speak to. If you are told you have five minutes, we should not still be hearing from you fifteen minutes later.

**Not answering questions:** this applies to speeches that have an audience Q&A component. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is OK to say that you don't know. It is not OK to go off on a tangent or ignore the content of the question and add more time to your speech.

Do you have any pet peeves about speeches? Any advice? Please share in the comments.

