

Using a Teleprompter: Hints, Tips & Techniques by Howard Heitner

If you've ever made a speech or presentation in front of a video camera you probably already know that when you're under the hot lights, the director says "action!" and points to you, there are about a million other places you'd rather be. The room may be filled with people but you're all alone... alone to deliver the best performance that you can. Here are a few hints, techniques and ways to prepare for your on-camera performance that can help you make it the best it can be.

Use a conversational writing style
Keep in mind that your audience will hear your words, not see them. So, it's important to write in a way that, when spoken, sounds natural. For example, using contractions is a simple way to make the written word more conversational.

Practice

There's no substitute for practice. The more you practice and internalize the text, the more you'll put meaning into the words. It's very important to practice aloud. See how the words roll off your tongue. If needed, make changes in the text that will make it easier to deliver.

Practice with a teleprompter

If time and budget allow, practicing your speech with a teleprompter can be beneficial. In addition to raising your confidence level, it's a great opportunity to edit the text and hone your speech.

Pump up the excitement

The simple fact is, the video medium squashes your energy level. What seems like "over the top" translates wonderfully on tape. Media savvy individuals pump up the excitement of their performance (in intensity not volume) and instantly become more interesting and appealing to watch.

Smile

Smiling is perhaps the simplest way to connect with your audience. The warmth of a smile is a must, at the very least, at the beginning and end of your performance. A smile can also be used throughout a delivery, almost regardless of the subject matter. As though you're telling a funny story, a smile creates an attitude that's captivating to watch.

Maintain eye contact

The magic of the teleprompter is that it enables you to look directly into the camera's lens, thus creating the illusion of eye contact with your audience. Take full advantage of this by not darting your eyes away. Your continuous gaze really does engage your audience. Eye movements away from the camera are distracting and will damage your credibility.

Use non-verbal communication

Appropriate facial expressions and hand gestures are critical to your performance. Perhaps nothing is more distracting to an audience than a "deer in the headlights," a person who's frozen except for their moving lips delivering a speech. Use your expressions and gestures to amplify your words, stress important points, and show that you're passionate about what you're saying. Watch television news anchors to observe masters of the subtleties of facial expression and head movements.

Don't shout

Unlike a live presentation in front of an audience, speak through the video camera to one person at a time. Even if the tape will be watched by a massive audience, you connect to each person individually, as though you're speaking only to them. Save the shouting for the convention hall.

Don't follow the teleprompter

Your teleprompter operator is trained to follow you. Deliver your speech with pacing that's appropriate and comfortable for you. Be confident that the words will always be there. When you pause, or even improvise off the script, your next word on the teleprompter will be there waiting for you to pick it up.

Use us, we're here to help

Most likely the crew working on your production have collectively been on thousands of shoots and take great pride in their work. Feel free to ask questions. We really want you to look your best!