

Speak Easy: 5 Phrases and Habits to Leave Out of Your Presentation

1) All Apologies: This is a common practice in an increasingly self-effacing generation: negating your own point by prefacing it with an apology (“this may be totally wrong, but...,” “sorry if this makes no sense,” etc.). The goal of a presentation is to bring listeners to your side—and by tacking on a “sorry,” you leave yourself (and your audience) doubting your ideas. Be firm in your thoughts; you'll always have detractors, but you'll *never* have supporters, if you don't show confidence in what you say.

2) Like, UMMM...these are bad words: “Like”s and “um”s are our subconscious way of collecting our thoughts in between points, as natural to us as the words that come thereafter. Yet these fillers, however small, will dominate the conversation. “They often detract from the listener’s ability to understand a particular message,” says award-winning speaker and Harvard Extension School teacher Steven D. Cohen. This language makes you look, and *feel*, unsure of what you’re saying—and no one wants to listen to an amateur.

3) Not Everything is a *Question?*: Inflection is a *re*-flection of how strongly you believe in your thoughts—and when it's misplaced, it betrays a lack of confidence. This most frequently happens at the end of a thought, when a declarative statement suddenly transforms into a question? You know? This doesn't sound as convincing, with a question mark—and neither do you. Don't leave your thoughts up for debate; end with a period.

4) Hands-On Approach: Gesturing is crucial in engaging your audience—though it’s a hard balance to strike between being animated, and being animated to the point of distraction. Presentation trainer Olivia Mitchell says that it's best to ease listeners in with your gestures. “Let them hang loosely at your sides,” at the outset; your motions will become more natural, as you engage with the audience, which will “add energy, engagement and persuasive power to your presentations.”

5) “In my opinion,” this is a confidence killer: This is the quickest way to lose authority, in the eyes of your audience. The phrase “in my opinion” does little more than absolve the speaker of liability, in the face of opposition. It's clear that it's your opinion by virtue of you saying it—but people aren't interested in opinions; they want expertise and insight. State your thoughts as facts, and you'll make others believe in what *you* believe in.