

Using Notes

The use of notes can often cause problems for speakers. They are necessary to prompt you if you forget what you are saying but they can be a distraction for the audience. If they are too obvious, the audience will focus more on the notes than on the speaker.

There are various ways to use notes each with their advantages and disadvantages. Think about the options that would suit you best.

Relying on Memory

This is not a good idea unless you are a very experienced speaker and you know your material very well. Nervousness often takes over when speaking in public and it is easy to forget what you are saying part way through your presentation.

Prompt cards

This is often a good method to use but only if you know your presentation well enough just to have a few cards with a few notes on each card. The cards should fit into the palm of your hand. Hold your hand at about shoulder height, this will enable you to flick your eyes down to read the next key word on your card.

Some people make the mistake of having too many cards which means they are constantly shuffling them as they speak. Also they tend to hold their cards at waist height which means they have to keep looking down to see their notes. Constantly bobbing their heads becomes a distraction. Another mistake is to write their whole speech on the cards often in very small writing. They become so focused on reading their cards that they lose all eye contact and therefore all connection with their audience.

Prompt sheets

This method has all the notes written on one sheet of paper in large print. This paper is then held about

shoulder height and your eyes can flick to the next point as you are speaking. While this has the disadvantage of making it obvious to your audience that you are using notes, it means that you do not have to shuffle cards which can also be distracting.

Read from a Script

This method is not generally recommended. Reading tends to flatten the tone of the voice and decrease the amount of eye contact. However, for someone who is extremely nervous, this may be a reasonable strategy.



Points to Remember

No matter what method of using notes you decide on there are some key points to remember.

- **Write your notes in large print** so that you can see them easily
- **Just write the key points**, don't write out the whole speech
- **Practise, practise, practise** so that your notes are just a prompt in your presentation and not a crutch. No one else will know what you were going to say so if it doesn't happen in exactly the order you planned – **DON'T PANIC!** Just keep going and no one will know the difference.

PHOTO REFERENCE

Anders Sandberg, 'Threat refuted', In:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/arenamontanus/2581472438/>,
ed, 2008, lecturer addresses class with whiteboard.

