

Presentation and Public Speaking Tips

At Sunnylands, giving a tour and interacting with guests (whether at the historic house or at the Center & Gardens) requires you to put on your most professional and helpful demeanor. Public speaking can be terrifying for anyone, but taking advantage of the following tips can prepare you for providing an excellent guest experience.

Know your material. There is a lot of information on Sunnylands and the Annenbergs. Too much to say it all on either a 90-minute tour or a short, guided walk through the historic house. Knowing your material will help you decide what to talk about and give you confidence that you are presenting accurate information. Also, if a guest or retreat participant asks you a question, you'll be ready with an answer.

Rehearse. As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. Knowing the material is the absolute first step, but presenting that information in a professional (yet entertaining) way is a separate set of skills. Practice what you want to say and how you want to say it, especially if any of the terminology is new to you. While rehearsing, be sure to practice with distractions and in front of a mirror. Time your phone to ring halfway through your presentation or have the TV or radio on in the background. Practicing with distractions at home will help you maneuver through any distractions that may arise at Sunnylands. Practicing in front of a mirror is practicing with a private audience, YOU! In this way, you are able to build confidence by becoming comfortable with an audience watching you speak, even if this audience is just your reflection.

Practice body language and movement. While you're practicing in front of the mirror, also make sure to practice body language and movement. Your body language can make you look either professional or inexperienced, confident or scared, etc. Remember to stand up straight, smile, never turn your back on your audience while speaking, and make eye contact.

Make eye contact. Making eye contact with the people you want to communicate with allows for a connection. It makes the guest feel as if you are speaking directly to them. If you are speaking to more than one person, be sure to make eye contact with each individual in your group so that they do not feel left out of the conversation.

Practice tone, projection, and speaking clearly. There's nothing worse for an audience than trying to listen to someone who uses a flat tone and poor volume. Tone (quality or character of sound) and projection (volume of voice) keep guests fully engaged and listening to you. Tone helps to grab their attention and keep their minds from wandering away from the speaker. You should sound interested in the topic and happy to be giving the tour. If you're not interested and happy, how can you expect your guests to be? Proper projection ensures that your guests can hear you. Along with these, please remember to articulate and enunciate your words.

Slow down. Generally, people talk faster than they realize, and they speak even faster when they're nervous. Don't race through your presentation. For your guests to understand you and come away with having learned something, make sure they can hear what you are saying. Slow down and take the time to fully form each word and sentence. Remember, it's okay to slow down and breathe.

Stay on time. This is extremely important. Whether you are giving a tour or guiding a retreat participant, do not go over the allotted time. It is poor speaking etiquette, disrespectful of your guests' time, and may affect the timing of other tours, scheduled breaks, and other operations on the estate. Good timing is all about practice.