

PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILL BUILDERS

Fifteen short, repeatable drills for storytelling, delivery, confidence, impromptu speaking, and brevity

15 DRILLS

3 TO 10 MINUTES EACH

NO MATERIALS

STUDENT-LED

HOW TO USE

Pick two or three drills per meeting. Pair one Storytelling drill with one Delivery drill for a weekly advisor meeting, or build a full session around Impromptu and Q&A ahead of CONA. The numbered steps are the script, so student leaders can run every drill themselves.

QUICK SESSION PLANS

20 minutes, first meeting: drills 1, 5, 7. **30 minutes, before bills are due:** 3, 4, 10. **45 minutes, conference week:** 9, 12, 13, 15. **CONA prep:** 12, 13, 14.

HOW TO RUN ANY DRILL

1. Name the one skill it builds, in a sentence.
2. Demonstrate it once yourself. Students relax when the adult goes first.
3. Run it in pairs or small groups so everyone speaks, not one volunteer.
4. Debrief in two minutes: one thing that worked, one thing to try next time.

FEEDBACK THAT HELPS

Specific beats nice. “Good job” teaches nothing; “you hit the center point twice and skipped the left” changes the next round.

Keep it to one thing per round, and let students give it. Listeners who must name what worked learn as fast as the speaker.

► **STORYTELLING** Four drills for finding the one true point of a story, shaping someone else's material, and editing without mercy.

1 Six-Word Story

STORYTELLING · SOLO THEN PAIRS · 5 MIN

Forces you to find the one true point of your story before you pad it with detail.

1. Write your Story of Me/Us/Now in exactly six words.
2. Read it aloud to a partner.
3. Expand it to a full 60-second story, keeping that six-word core as the spine.
4. Partner checks: does every sentence still serve that core line?

BUILDS: STORY OF ME/US/NOW

2 Story Swap

STORYTELLING · PAIRS · 8 MIN

Teaches the difference between a fact and a narrative by forcing you to shape someone else's raw material.

1. Trade one true personal detail with a partner: a challenge, a change, a moment.
2. Each person turns the other's detail into a Y story: person, challenge, intervention, change.
3. Tell it back to its original owner.
4. Owner confirms: did it capture the real shape of what happened?

BUILDS: THE Y STORY FORMAT

3 Ask-First Drafting

STORYTELLING · SOLO · 10 MIN

Prevents the "great story, no point" problem by locking in the call to action before anything else.

1. Write only the ask or call-to-action sentence first.
2. Work backward: what story would make that ask land?
3. Draft the story toward that one sentence.
4. Read the ask aloud last, exactly as first written. Does the story earn it?

BUILDS: EVERY STORY ENDS WITH AN ASK

4 Cut It in Half

STORYTELLING · SOLO · 10 MIN

A direct drill for the 10%-keep editing rule: cut on purpose before someone else cuts for you.

1. Take a finished story or statement draft.
2. Physically cross out half the words.
3. Read the cut version aloud. Does the ask still land?
4. Repeat once more, cutting another 20%, if time allows.

BUILDS: KEEP THE 10%, CUT THE REST

► **DELIVERY** Four drills for projection, posture, and eye contact, the habits that get heard across a chamber.

5 Volume Ladder

DELIVERY · SOLO OR PAIRS · 5 MIN

Finds the "address the whole chamber" volume without it feeling like shouting.

1. Deliver one line at a whisper.
2. Deliver the same line at normal conversation volume.
3. Deliver it again at full chamber-address volume.
4. Partner names which volume felt the most natural, and the most effective.

BUILDS: PROJECT YOUR VOICE

6 Hands-Behind-the-Back Opening

DELIVERY · SOLO · 3 MIN

Breaks the habit of defensive, closed-off posture before it starts.

1. Clasp hands behind your back for the first 15 seconds of your opening.
2. Release into natural gesture for the rest of the statement.
3. Notice the moment your hands want to come forward; that's often where the real point begins.

BUILDS: DON'T CLOSE YOURSELF OFF

7

Three-Point Eye Contact

DELIVERY · SOLO OR GROUP · 5 MIN

A concrete fix for “no eye contact” and “not addressing the whole chamber.”

1. Pick three fixed points across the room: left, center, right.
2. Deliver your statement, consciously landing on each point at least once per minute.
3. Listener tracks which point got skipped.

BUILDS: ADDRESS THE WHOLE CHAMBER

8

Walk-and-Talk

DELIVERY · SOLO · 6 MIN

Most speakers find their stronger, more grounded version by comparing both and feeling the difference.

1. Deliver a full opening statement while slowly pacing.
2. Deliver it again standing still, planted.
3. Partner names which version felt more confident.
4. Keep that version's posture for the next practice round.

BUILDS: CONFIDENCE AND RHYTHM

► **CONFIDENCE** Three drills for staying composed under interruption, a weak draft, or the urge to hedge.

9

Interruption Drill

CONFIDENCE · PAIRS · 6 MIN

Builds the “defend it under questioning” muscle from the CONA proposal format.

1. Speaker begins their statement.
2. Partner interrupts mid-sentence with a tough technical question.
3. Speaker finishes the thought, answers directly, and returns to the speech without losing the thread.
4. Repeat with a harder interruption.

BUILDS: DEFEND IT UNDER QUESTIONING

10

The Bad Draft

CONFIDENCE · SOLO OR GROUP · 5 MIN

Separates good content from good delivery, so speakers see they can carry a shaky draft, and that a great draft still needs strong delivery.

1. Write (or use) a deliberately weak, thin opening statement.
2. Deliver it with full confidence and commitment: eye contact, projection, pacing, the works.
3. Audience rates delivery and content separately.
4. Discuss: how far did delivery alone carry a weak draft?

BUILDS: CONFIDENCE AND CHARISMA

11

Apology Ban

CONFIDENCE · GROUP · 10 MIN

Directly trains “never apologize for having the microphone.”

1. One full practice round, no exceptions: no “sorry,” “I guess,” “this is probably wrong, but...,” or any hedge.
2. Listeners call out any hedge the instant they hear it.
3. Speaker restarts the sentence without the hedge.
4. Debrief: how did cutting hedges change how confident the speech sounded?

BUILDS: NEVER APOLOGIZE FOR THE MIC

► IMPROMPTU AND Q&A

Three drills for speaking with zero prep, conceding without surrendering, and working a statistic in on the spot.

12 Table Topics

IMPROMPTU AND Q&A · GROUP · 10 MIN TOTAL, 60 SEC EACH

Builds the same muscle CONA roundtables and technical questions demand: speaking with zero prep.

1. Draw a random prompt: a Storybook County topic, or a real bill topic.
2. 30 seconds silent prep, no notes allowed after that.
3. Deliver 60 seconds, no stopping.
4. Group names one thing that worked under pressure.

BUILDS: CONA ROUNDTABLE READINESS

13 Concede-and-Pivot

IMPROMPTU AND Q&A · PAIRS · 6 MIN

Models the debate rubric's "conceded what should be conceded" standard without abandoning the position.

1. Partner raises a genuinely strong con argument against the speaker's bill or position.
2. Speaker concedes the valid part in one sentence.
3. Speaker pivots back to their position in the next sentence.
4. Repeat with a different con, raising the difficulty each round.

BUILDS: CONCEDE WITHOUT SURRENDERING

14 Rapid-Fire Statistics

IMPROMPTU AND Q&A · GROUP · 8 MIN

Builds the Statistics component of the opening-statement framework on demand, not just in prepared drafts.

1. Facilitator hands the speaker a random statistic (real or invented for practice).
2. Speaker has 10 seconds to work it into a sentence supporting their bill or position.
3. Group rates: did the stat land naturally, or feel bolted on?
4. Rotate through the group.

BUILDS: THE STATISTICS COMPONENT

► BREVITY One drill for compressing gracefully under a hard stop: the four-minute clock, and real life.

15 The Elevator Cutoff

BREVITY · PAIRS OR GROUP · 8 MIN

Trains graceful compression under a hard stop, useful for both the 4-minute chamber clock and a real elevator speech.

1. Speaker begins delivering their full opening statement.
2. Facilitator calls "time" at 30 seconds, far short of the real limit.
3. Speaker must instantly summarize everything left in one or two sentences.
4. Discuss: what did the compressed version keep, and what did it correctly cut?

BUILDS: BREVITY AND THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

► RUN IT AS A FOUR-WEEK ARC

WEEK	DRILLS	GOAL
1	Storytelling 1 and 3	Every speaker has a six-word core and an ask
2	Delivery 5, 6, 7	Heard across the room, open posture, whole-chamber eye contact
3	Confidence 9 and 11, then 10	No hedges, no lost thread under questioning
4	Impromptu 12 and 13, then the Elevator Cutoff	Everyone has felt the clock before the real one

PROMPTS FOR TABLE TOPICS

“Should Storybook County license giants?” “Convince the Three Bears to lock their door.” “Defend your bill to a skeptical parent in 60 seconds.” “What should every freshman know about the Capitol?” Keep a jar of these; students add their own.

PART OF THE EDUCATOR TOOLKIT

Every drill pairs with a Storybook County lesson (Core Value Speeches, Running for Office, Floor Debate, Proposals and Roundtables) and with the conference itself. The toolkit, both lesson plan series, and this handout live in one folder:

drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MIeLDxVzKNq7QTwjw2EPFDqgMOaaJ2US. Questions: Drew Caldwell, dcaldwell@ymcanys.org.