

The Microphone - “Own the mic-Own the room”

by Gary Engbrecht

If you use a microphone (mic), plan to use a mic, or are asking someone to use a mic at an event of some sort, here are 12 useful tips.

The mic is your friend. It is a useful tool. Used correctly, it can enhance your ability to reach listeners, convey your message, and further your goals as a public speaker. Improperly used, it can make you look foolish, frightened, and inept. You don't want that, and your audience doesn't want that for you either.

The sound person is also your friend and wants the best for you. Help them do their best by taking a few minutes to look over these helpful suggestions and put them into practice.

1. **“Eat the Mic.”** That sounds crude, but the best relationship you can have with a mic is one of intimacy and closeness. If you are using a dynamic mic, your mouth should be 2-4 inches from the mic. Then adjust it based on the sound coming from the speakers. If the mic is on a mic stand, before speaking, adjust the mic stand yourself to position the mic just below your mouth *at an angle* pointing directly at your mouth. (To adjust the stand, put your foot on the base, grab the upper part of the mic stand with one hand, grab the connect sleeve with the other, and turn, adjust and tighten the connect sleeve.) Don't rush this. Take time to do it right so the mic is correctly positioned and the stand is secure. A mic that drifts away from you while you're speaking is distracting and embarrassing. Be sure to check that your mic is secure. Don't rely on the crew. Just check it yourself. Use this time to ground yourself in front of the room, show your comfort with the technology, and let attention turn to you, the next speaker. (If time allows, familiarize yourself with the operation of the mic stand before the event. That will pay off.)
2. **Can you hear yourself?** A speaker should be able to hear their voice through the PA system. If they can't, their mic technique likely needs some adjustment, or the volume is too low.
3. **Always address the mic.** Keep the mic close to your mouth and speak in your normal, natural voice. If the volume is too loud, let the sound person handle that adjustment. If you must raise your voice to be heard, do so until the sound person can make that adjustment for you or the listeners give you their full attention and the relative volume in the room corrects itself.
4. **Holding the mic.** Holding the mic is a good choice for some situations. Unless otherwise instructed or agreed, remember you can remove the mic from the mic clip and hold it in your hand while you speak. Make sure the mic cable is free from the mic stand and has enough slack to follow along if you choose to move about while you speak. If you are seated at a table in a “panel” setting, picking up the mic and standing can make you more visible, show confidence, and command more attention than staying in your seat. If you plan to continue to rise when you speak, don't

bother replacing the mic in the mic clip. Just place it on the table gently and pick it up when you speak again.

5. **How to hold the mic.** Hold the mic like a hammer. Don't use a 3-finger (ice cream cone) grip. Hold it firmly and confidently. If you are moving around while speaking and holding the mic, use the other hand to hold the cable in a short "swag" to avoid the surprise of running short of cable and, heaven forbid, having the mic jerked out of your hand. (Once it hits the floor, we call it "an expensive maraca.")
6. **Feedback happens.** We all hate it and do what we can to avoid it; still, it happens. One cause of feedback is moving too close to the loudspeaker. Don't do it. Another cause is speaking too far from the mic. Our natural reaction when we hear feedback is to move away from the mic. Do just the opposite. "Eat the Mic"!
7. **Sharing the mic.** Sharing a mic with another speaker can have its own challenges. The suggestions listed still apply. Don't stand on your tippy-toes or squat down to reach the mic. Adjust the mic stand to your use, even if it takes a moment or two. It's worth it and, again, gives you time to prepare yourself.
8. **Plosives and Sibilance.** Plosives and Sibilance are the "pops" and "ssssss" we sometimes hear when using a mic. A windscreen helps a lot. You can ask for one if it's not fitted in advance. If one is not available, you might wish to "haze" your p's and t's. Just soften them a bit to tame the unwanted sounds.
9. **Don't do this in a mic.** Don't blow into the mic or thump it with your hand to determine if it's working. If the sound person is asleep or not paying attention, glare at them or ask someone to get their attention for you. Be patient. Perhaps something is going on that commands their attention as they work to make things go smoothly.
10. **Pretend the mic is live.** Always treat the mic as "hot." Don't say anything you wouldn't wish to see on a billboard with your picture next to it.
11. **The mic is not just for you.** Often a speaker will say, "I'm a loud speaker and don't need a mic." or "Everyone can hear me without a mic, right?." If there is a mic available, use it. You will reach your listeners more effectively and show your comfort with the technology. Remember that we live in a community with some older vintage individuals, some of whom may be hearing impaired.
12. **Q&A.** If you are facilitating a Question and Answer session and an audience mic is not available or a questioner elects not to use the mic, be prepared to repeat the question to the audience as clearly as you can, or ask the questioner to repeat themselves once they are handed a mic.

Integrate these tips into your public speaking, and you will deliver your message to your audience more clearly.