

CONFIDENT PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR CREATIVES

Welcome to the Confident Public Speaking for Creatives e-flet!

Let's face it- most of us aren't big fans of public speaking- whether that is chatting to people at shows, being interviewed or giving talks to a bigger audience. But, it needn't be daunting - it just requires a little bit of preparation and practice to gain in confidence.

This guide will give you some suggestions for discovering your authentic, natural voice as well as exercises to help strengthen this voice.

It offers you some practical tips on how to prepare for public speaking so that you can approach your next opportunity to communicate in person with confidence.

RECLAIM YOUR AUTHENTIC VOICE

When you are communicating about your work through writing, the goal is to find the voice that best expresses your ideas, a voice that sounds authentic. Usually this is your own voice – the voice that sounds like you. It's so much easier to write in the way that you would naturally talk and it almost always sounds better to the reader. So, once you have found your voice in your writing, you would think that when it comes to communicating verbally, in person, things would be easy. But somehow confidence gets lost and the authentic voice that you've harnessed on the page disappears. So often this comes from the anxiety of dealing with your audience face to face (whether at a show, an interview or in a video for promotion) but often it is because we forget to use our natural speaking voices.

Now, I can't help you with the anxiety of public speaking, but I've found some great resources which can help you find and reclaim your authentic speaking voice, so that you can communicate clearly and confidently.

Our natural voices

As children we are not afraid to use our natural voices. But as we grow up we adjust to fit into society; to be polite, to be accepted, to seem friendly, to be non-threatening etc. For those who are British, socialised as female, there can be a tendency towards self-deprecation and not wanting to appear immodest, so people modify the way they speak. This modification happens in so many ways: speaking more quietly, using words or phrases that are popular with our peers, speaking in a higher pitch or stumbling over words or mumbling. These small adaptations become habits and we are unaware of them. But in myriad small ways we diminish ourselves when we dampen down our voices.

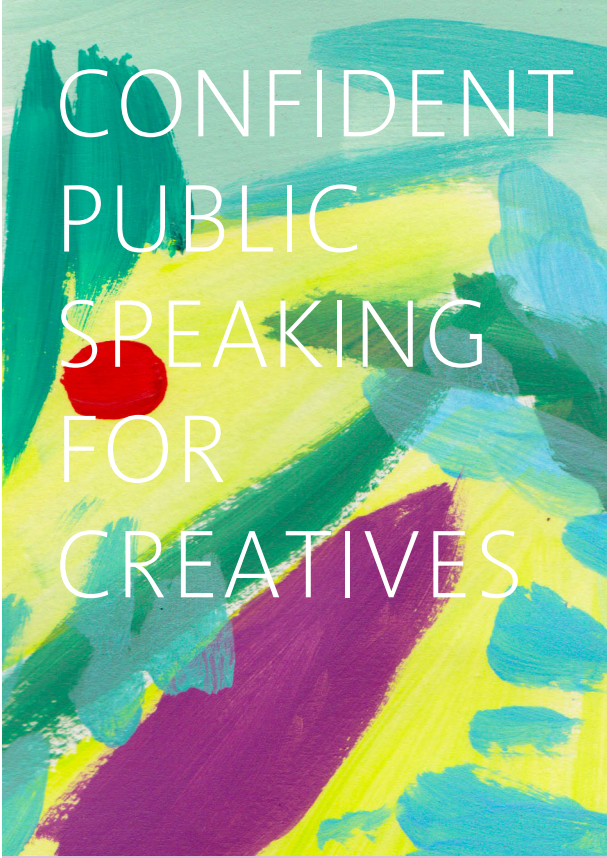
In a conversation with Mark McGuinness (in the 21st Century Creative Podcast) Kristin Linklater, the world-renowned voice teacher, explains that we are all born with a 'free voice' that is unique. This voice runs on emotion and free breath. As we grow up we learn that it is risky to say what we think and what we feel, so we become inhibited. This self-consciousness results in us holding tension within the body that constrains our voices.

The key to allowing your natural voice to re-emerge is to relax and release the tension. Linklater recommends loud sighing as a good way of doing this. She also suggests going outside and calling out to the sky (HA!) to the horizon (HEY!) and to the ground (HO!). Part of me wonders if having a good old sing along to a favourite song might also do the trick here. Anything where you are making a loud noise with your voice in an uninhibited way.

Hearing ourselves

Reclaiming your voice also involves an honest self- assessment of the limits we have been placing on ourselves. This is incredibly hard to do for yourself, and may require you to ask (trusted) friends or family for help. Be open to this, no matter how awkward or embarrassing it may be for you.

- Do you notice that you alter the way you speak? We often do this unconsciously, for example by slightly adapting our accents to sound more local. There's nothing wrong with this – we are social beings after all – but noticing if/when we do it is what's important here.
- Do you change the tone of your voice? Do you find yourself using a higher pitch or sounding more child-like, especially if you want to gain sympathy or get your way? Again, no judgements here, just noticing.
- Do you use certain words or phrases so regularly that they are almost catchphrases? Do you find yourself using slang or



CONFIDENT PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR CREATIVES

popular terms for things, things that other people may not know what they mean?

You may not be able to notice these things for yourself, so I recommend – if you can bear it!- recording yourself talking in an informal situation (for example, to a friend) to see what you pick up on. Also, ask someone else for feedback – what do they notice about the way you speak? It will be hard to hear, but it will be worth it to learn more about your socially-constructed voice.

Something else to think about is:

- What effect does public speaking have on your voice? Do you find talking with people daunting, or even terrifying? Do the nerves leave your voice wobbly and thin, or do you find yourself rushing to get through it? Some people find that their voice becomes monotonous, with little variation between words, and things start to run into each other.

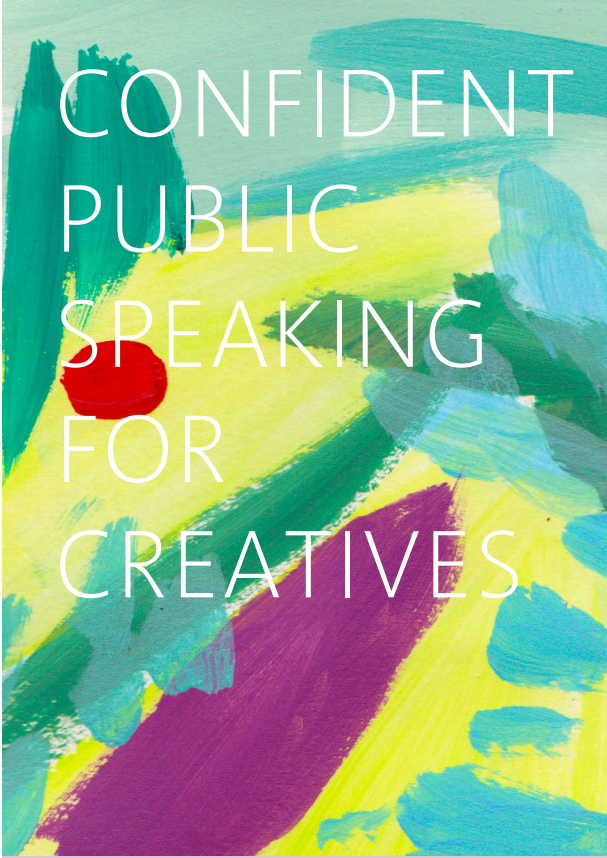
Noticing these things can also help when you are preparing for your next public speaking opportunity: what do you need to be mindful of?

Once you know more about your current voice habits, you can be more aware of them when it comes to talking about your creative practice in public. The funny thing is that when it comes to writing about your work it is good to sound like you, but when you are talking about your work you don't want to be too distracting with things that maybe you aren't aware of. You want to sound like you, but the natural you.

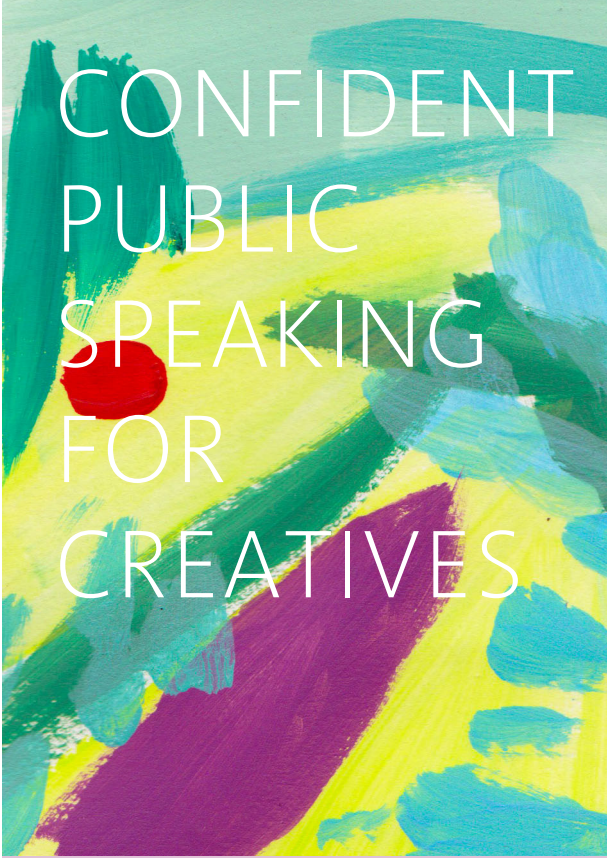
Next we'll look practically at ways that you can prepare your authentic voice for public speaking situations.

TIPS FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

Public speaking can be scary. Much as it might be tempting to turn to the gin to help with the nerves, I have some tips which will help you harness those feelings and allow you to find your natural voice. [Just to be clear, in this context I am calling all situations where you might need to talk about your work, to other people, 'public speaking'. I'm not limiting it to giving a talk or a speech.]



CONFIDENT PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR CREATIVES



CONFIDENT PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR CREATIVES

The next time you know you will have to speak in public about your work, remember what voice teacher Kristin Linklater says makes public speaking successful:

1. The audience wants to hear it
2. You feel you have the right to say it

If these two components aren't there, things will not go well. If your audience isn't receptive it will be really hard work for you to win them over, and if you don't believe what you have to say is worth saying you won't convince anyone. Unfortunately you can only control the second component, but luckily most situations you find yourself in, when talking about your work, will be with audiences who are already interested and eager to hear from you, so that's half the battle won.

I can't tackle the issue of self-belief here and do it justice. It is a huge topic and something that I know a lot of makers struggle with. What I will say, in relation to speaking about your work in public, is no one can talk about your work in a more genuine way than you can. You are the only person who knows it inside out and backwards. Trust that the people you meet are interested in your story, in your work. They want to hear from you. If you are passionate about your work and committed to sharing that with your audience, they will respond in a positive and supportive way.

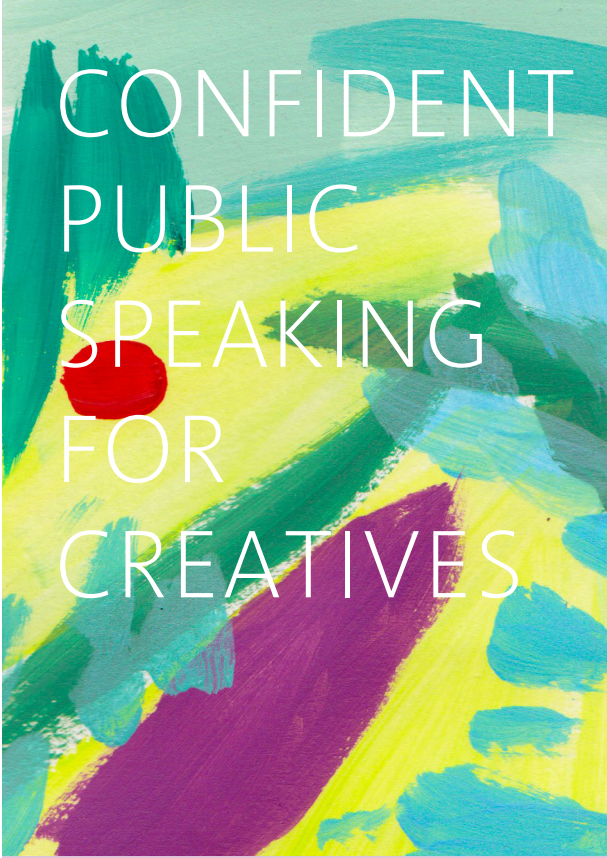
On a practical level, successful public speaking requires preparation beforehand and on the day:

- Be familiar with your material- practise!
- Warm up
- Relax

Practise

Just as you would practise giving a speech before you deliver it, you should practise talking about your work out loud. What are the key words or terms you want to use? Do you have phrases you like, that sound pleasing said out loud, that describe your process, techniques or ideas? Write things down, record a chat with a friend or fellow maker, whatever works for you to start generating words. Test them out loud and get a second opinion on how they sound.

I am not suggesting that you create a script for talking about your work. This isn't practical for shows or interviews, but the more familiar you are with the right words beforehand, the easier it will be for you to talk naturally and freely when you are in a public speaking situation.



CONFIDENT PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR CREATIVES

Warm Up

It is vital, before any public speaking situation, that you warm up your voice and free up your whole body.

- Start by shaking your body loose
- Let out 3 big sighs of release

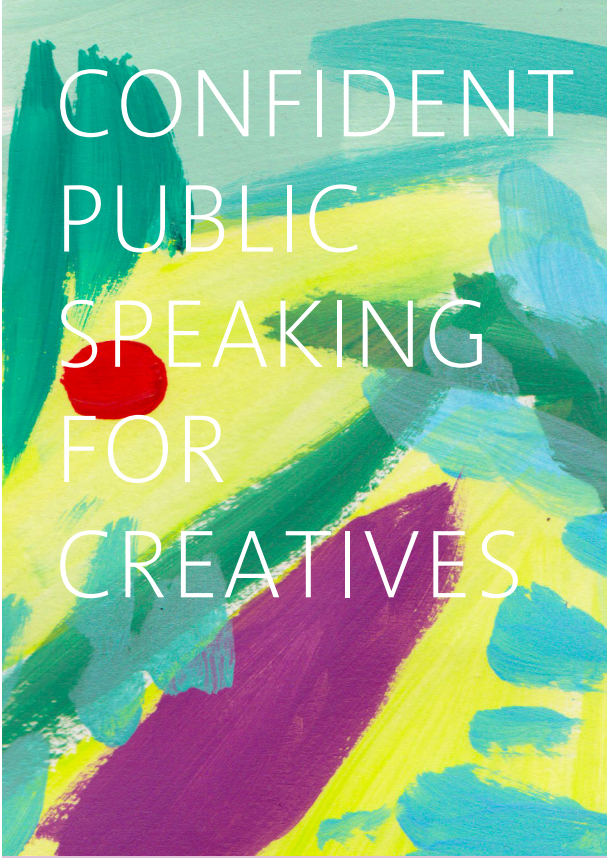
Julian Treasure, in his fantastic TED Talk “How to speak so that people want to listen”, shares some great warm up techniques for preparing your voice. The most important thing is that you don’t go into the situation cold – you have to let our your voice at more than indoor-voice volume.

Relax

The more you can relax the freer your breathing will be and the more natural your voice will sound.

- Pay attention to your stomach: is it tight and in knots or is it churning away? Can you relax your body? Imagine your stomach is soft, imagine the tension melting away.
- Be aware of your feet on the ground: can you feel where your feet make contact with the floor? Sense your body from your head all the way through your torso down your legs to your feet. This will help take your mind out of your head, and will help you feel more solid and grounded.
- Notice your breathing: is it fast and shallow or are you holding your breath? Take a few deep, long breaths. Gather your attention away from things going on around you and onto your breath.

We are often overwhelmed by our emotions and the anxiety of public speaking is a common example for lots of people. By preparing in advance, by warming up your voice and relaxing as much as you can, you will be the one in control of the situation, not your emotions. The anxiety may not disappear, but you will be more comfortable with it. In this way, you will be able to allow your full, natural and free voice to emerge – the voice which will connect with your audience in a meaningful way.



CONFIDENT PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR CREATIVES

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

21st Century Creative podcast: 'Freeing the natural voice with Kristin Linklater'

Movie: 'In a World' starring, written & directed by Lake Bell. This is a great film that highlights the gender inequalities in the movie voice-over industry.

TED Talk 'How to speak so that people want to listen' – Julian Treasure

This e-flet was written by Melody Vaughan (they/them)

© Melody Vaughan 2018

Creative mentoring tending to cultures of care

Melody is committed to working with professional artists, designers & contemporary craft makers who want to build ethical and sustainable creative practices full of care.

melodyvaughan.uk

[@melody_vaughan](https://www.instagram.com/melody_vaughan)