

How to Use a Microphone

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At some point in your professional speaking life you will have to hold a dynamic microphone¹ in your hands in front of an audience, just like a rock star. Not only should you be aware that it's not a pepper mill², there's a few more things to keep in mind while using them.

1. Keep the mic close to your mouth at all times. Because that's where you get the best sound for the audience. Not at 20 cm, not at 10 cm, not next to your hip, not in your pocket, not anywhere, but next to your mouth. Because that's where the sound of your voice comes through, unless you're a ventriloquist. The whole point of having a mic in your hand is for the audience to be able to hear you. Otherwise, people in the audience won't hear you at all and will complain, and you don't want that. Go to rule number 2 for a trick to help you achieve this feat.
2. Rule number 1 is most easily fulfilled if you stick the microphone to your chin, to your lower jaw, right below your lower lip. Keep it there the whole time. Feel it. It's cold and metallic. Now talk and don't even think about moving it away. After a few seconds, it'll be a part of you. This will help you fulfill rule number 1, and the sound of your voice will be loud and clear.
3. Don't wave your hands while talking with a microphone, at least not the hand holding it. This moves the microphone away from your mouth and breaks rule number 1. It also generates a waving sound, whereby the volume of your voice as heard by the audience increases and decreases with a frequency directly proportional to your enthusiasm. The previous sentence was particularly long. Anyway, this is really important for mediterranean folks to keep in mind (I know what I'm talking about.) Remember rule number 1. Use rule number 2 to keep the mic in a single place at all times while you're talking. You can move the other hand if you really have to.
4. Repeat questions on the microphone if the audience don't have their own mic. This is valid with any mic, tbh, not only hand microphones, but it's good to remember this when they cannot fulfill rule number 1 by themselves. If possible, get a separate mic for questions in the audience. There are some funny ones wrapped in large foam cubes that you can throw around so people can ask their questions. But be careful not to throw them around like baseballs, they can still hurt in case of a direct hit in the face. You want conference attendees to come back next year and

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microphone#Dynamic>

²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLJkPE6x4pI>

not sue you, remember.

5. Make sure the mic is turned on before talking. Just in case, there's usually a red light below that indicates that the mic is on. Then remember rule number 1 and apply rule 2. Your sound engineer can help, if there is one, that is.
6. Don't tap on the mic to check if it's working, if only because the sound it generates can be too loud for some ears, and even worse, you could trigger a feedback loop. If there's a sound engineer, their job is to make the sound of your voice flow through the speakers. It's not your job. Look at them while speaking, and they'll let you know when it's OK with one of those "thumbs up" signs you've probably seen on TV. Re-read rules number 1 and 2 now.
7. Also, don't ask if the audience can hear you. If they don't, they'll let you know by screaming or throwing you something, like tomatoes, rabbits, or pop corn. Remember rules 1 and 2 now.
8. If you feel the need to cough or sneeze on stage, move the mic away from your mouth, preferably behind your back. Not only for sanitary reasons of public knowledge, but also to prevent an explosion of eardrums in your audience. After you've cleaned your mess, go back to rules number 1 and 2. Use hand sanitizer, for the sake of mankind.
9. Don't mic drop³, even if you're Obama. Microphones are fragile and expensive and your sound engineer will be mad at you. Just follow rules 1 and 2 and you'll do great.

³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEp9OUIx-w>