



by Pamela Schumacher, MS, CCMF

*“There are only two types of speakers in the world: the nervous and the liar.”*

—Mark Twain

**M**edical assistant educators who speak at conferences and on panels tap into a powerful platform they can use to share their expertise, elevate their professional profile, and expand their network. Additionally, presenting at conferences allows educators to not only contribute to the advancement of best practices and training standards but also position themselves as thought leaders in their field.<sup>1</sup>

### **Amplify Your Impact**

“As educators, we should never stop learning or networking. All educators should consider speaking at conferences to share their knowledge with as many people as possible,” says Melody Gibson, MHRD, CMA (AAMA), CPT (ASPT), RPSGT, associate dean of allied health and director of the medical assisting program at Gaston College in Dallas, North Carolina. “Being a conference speaker allows us to step out of our comfort zone and prac-

tice what we preach in our classes. We are training medical assistants to be patient advocates and leaders in health care. We should be a shining example for them.”

“Speaking is a wonderful opportunity for education—your audience’s education and your own. I learn something new every time I give a presentation,” notes Teresa L. Schraeder, MD, author of *Physician Communication: Connecting with Patients, Peers, and the Public*. “It also promotes your ideas and provides recognition for you and your work, and you might even connect with others for new projects. I’ve had people come up to me after a speech, saying they’re working on a project, and they invite me to collaborate with them. You’d never get these opportunities if you didn’t put yourself out there.”

“A conference is the perfect audience, so why not take advantage of the opportunity?” says Cyndi Maxey, MA, CSP, a speaker, consultant, and author of *Present Like a Pro: The Field Guide to Mastering the Art of Business, Professional, and Public Speaking*. “A conference audience consists of people who do what you do, people who might hire you, and even meeting planners for other

events. There’s a nice variety of people that you don’t find in other places.”

### **Manners of Speaking**

In addition to educational sessions, panels, and workshops, associations host various events, such as meals, receptions, community gatherings, and even specialty groups, where you can connect and collaborate.

“Make yourself available to learn and interact,” says Gibson. “Volunteer to join an AAMA committee and committees on your campus. This can give you exposure and [connections to] other professionals. Doing this has brought me out of my building and day-to-day activities into the larger community.”

Dr. Schraeder, who teaches the Physician as Communicator scholarly concentration at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, urges educators to seek speaking opportunities in their local communities.

“If you are ever asked to speak by a superior or a colleague, you should definitely take the opportunity,” she says. “Even if it’s an in-service or an educational meeting, just

say, 'Yes!' because the more often you speak, the better you'll get at it. You can also create your own opportunities by thinking outside the box. Would senior centers, park districts, or libraries benefit from your information? Talk to your colleagues and your superiors about opportunities that might be available. Does your medical [practice] need someone to go to the local school to give a presentation? Always be thinking, 'Is there an audience that would benefit from my work and information?' and then find a way to get in front of them."

"I can't say this enough: it's imperative to join your national and local associations," says Maxey. "Speaking at a local event to a small group of colleagues will give you the confidence to speak at a national conference, but don't just stop at medical assisting conferences. ... One day, I got a flyer about an organization that did telemarketing, and I wasn't into telemarketing, but I was interested in the topic. I sat at the table next to a woman, and we started talking. She was an executive in a customer service group in a hospital, and I have a background in telephone customer service. She became a client for the next 10 years, so attending other professional meetings can be a way to easily expand your network."

### Heard Mentality

You may want to speak at a conference or on a panel, but you are terrified of speaking in front of an audience beyond your students. You are not alone. The fear of public speaking is the most common phobia, ahead of death, spiders, or heights. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that public speaking anxiety, or glossophobia, affects about 40% of the population.<sup>2</sup>

You can calm your fears and give an effective and

## Gift of the Gab

Teresa L. Schraeder, MD, suggests using her MACY Method when preparing a presentation<sup>3</sup>:

- **Mission:** Why are you speaking, and what is your purpose?
- **Audience:** Who is your audience, and what do they need from you?
- **Content:** Make it organized and informative. Be concise, relevant, and engaging. Tell a story. Make sure there is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Have specific points, but be prepared to improvise.
- **You:** Be prepared, organized, and rested. Rehearse at least twice in the week leading up to the talk. Visualize giving a great speech and practice breathing exercises beforehand.

engaging presentation by following these tips<sup>1</sup>:

- Know your subject well.
- Know your audience, their expectations, and potential questions they may have.
- Start with an impactful opening statement.
- Share a relatable story or case study.
- Practice.
- Take deep breaths, slow down, and appear confident, even if you do not feel it.

"Give your speech to your colleagues or even your dog. Memorize your opening lines and be very familiar with your slides," advises Maxey. "And if working with notes—which I recommend—keep them simple. Do not read every word of your notes—that's not a presentation, that's manuscript delivery. ... My slide presentation is usually available on

the conference portal, but I often also provide a one-sided handout with no more than four to five bullet points. If there's a longer article, I'll provide a link to that. People don't want to be overwhelmed with 20 things to remember from your presentation."

"The most important thing in public speaking is to be yourself," notes Dr. Schraeder. "You may watch other speakers, teachers, or presenters and notice what

you like about them, but you don't have to look or sound like anyone but yourself. Even if you are an introvert, you can still give a great public speech.

"Think of yourself in a one-on-one conversation with the audience. If you make a mistake, it's perfectly okay to correct yourself," says Dr. Schraeder. "And make eye contact. Find one friendly face and talk to them for a minute, and then find another friendly face, and that way you move around the room. I am convinced that most people have all the tools they need to be a great communicator; they just need to practice beforehand to bring out their best." ♦

### References

1. Vogel WH, Viale PH. Presenting with confidence. *J Adv Pract Oncol*. 2018;9(5):545-548. Accessed August 14, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.6004/jadpro.2018.9.5.9>
2. Public speaking anxiety. National Social Anxiety Center. Accessed August 14, 2025. <https://nationalsocialanxietycenter.com/social-anxiety/public-speaking-anxiety/>
3. Schraeder TL. Public speaking and presentation skills. In: Schraeder TL. *Physician Communication: Connecting with Patients, Peers, and the Public*. Oxford Academic; 2019. Accessed August 14, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780190882440.003.0003>

## Prep Talk

Cyndi Maxey, MA, CSP, offers tips for preparing to be on a panel:

- Be very clear with the moderator about what they want from you.
- Prepare your key points in advance and practice them.
- Don't waste time; when it's your turn to talk, state your point and thank the moderators and other participants afterward.
- Take the stage. Don't apologize for being asked to participate.
- Watch your nonverbals, distracting postures, or movements.
- Avoid being too academic, and state your point briefly.