

Tips for Effective Testimony

Testifying before a legislative committee or municipal board can seem intimidating, but the task can be much less daunting -- and much more effective -- by understanding some basic principles...

Your goals when giving testimony should be to inform and persuade. Testimony is not just reading words, it's communicating ideas. Thus, your testimony will be most effective if it is delivered in a conversational style and draws upon your own experience, real-life examples and case histories.

The following tips will help you give a persuasive statement:

- Be honest, brief and accurate.
- Don't play to the crowd, play to the legislators — specifically those who are undecided.
- Treat the panel with respect; find ways to get them to trust you.
- Don't read your testimony. If you use an outline or printed text, look down and pick up a complete thought, then establish eye contact, deliver the thought and look back down only when you've finished the thought.
- Deliver your testimony as a conversation between you and a friend — don't teach, preach, recite or orate.
- As a speaker, you must be pleasant and interesting to see. Use appropriate body language. Keep facial expressions open and use your hands naturally.
- If you are testifying as a member of a panel, be alert and look interested when you are not speaking; give the speaker your mental and physical attention.
- As a speaker, you must be pleasant and interesting to hear. Use vocal tools — volume, rate and pitch — that will give variety to your presentation.
- Use simple language, no jargon. Charts and visual aids can help get attention.
- Prepare by asking yourself 'what kinds of questions can I expect?' If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and offer to get the answer.
- Be ready to introduce yourself briefly.
- State your message and main point first, then prove it. If you are cut off because of time, you will have made your point.