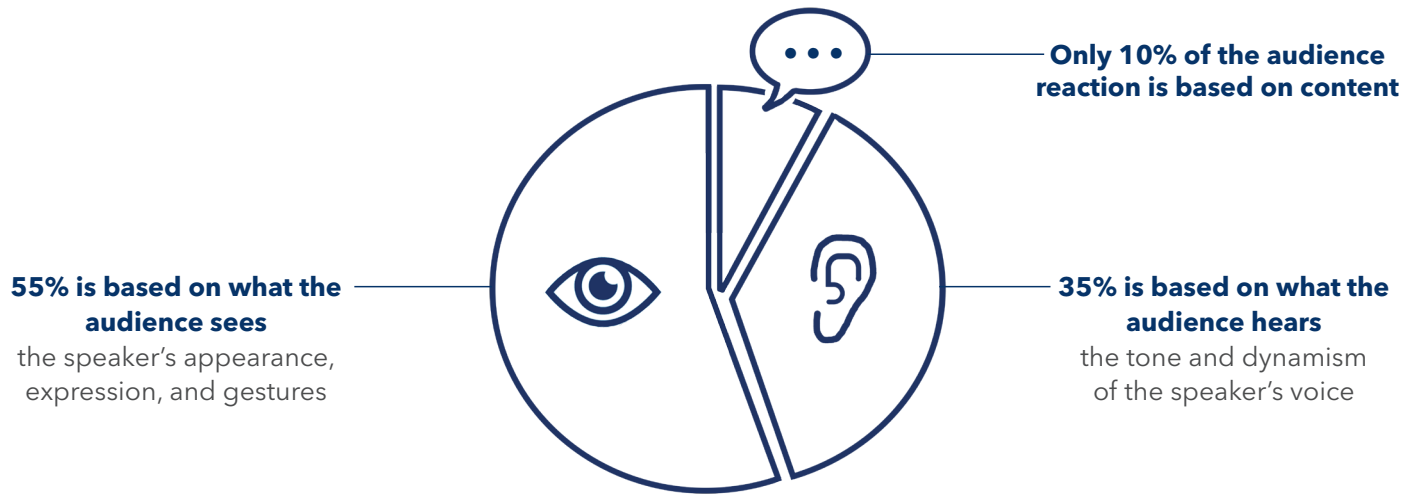


Content is important, but only with the right visuals and voice can it reach and influence audiences. When an audience watches a speaker on screen, here is what drives the audience's attention and reaction:



On-screen media, such as television and teleconferences, always distort the speaker. What audiences watching a speaker on a screen experience is different from what audiences watching the speaker in person would experience. So the strategy for effective on-screen performance is to adapt the performance to come across optimally on screen.

The appearance of **confidence** and **comfort** is the most important element of on-screen performance. But what feels confident and comfortable in person appears defensive, weak, nervous, scared or bored on screen. And what appears confident and comfortable on screen, may feel awkward and unnatural in person.

There are four ways speakers can compensate for the distortions caused by on-screen media:

1
Slightly forward-leaning posture

2
Dynamic voice

3
Smiling facial expression

4
 When speaking, **gesture broadly** with both arms

to animate the three dimensions of voice:
pitch, speed, and volume



The power of the visual component in on-screen performance, over content and sound, is epitomized in the first presidential debate in 1960, between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. It was the first presidential debate ever televised in the United States and marked the beginning of a new era where intentionally crafted on-screen performance became essential to the success of public figures.

By 1960, 88% of the U.S. population owned a TV, up from 11% in 1950. For the 70 million Americans who tuned in to watch, the debate was an undeniable victory for Kennedy, while radio listeners called it a draw. What accounted for this discrepancy?

During the debate, the candidates delivered decidedly contrasting physical performances:

Kennedy looked directly at the camera when answering, giving him an air of confidence and directness.

Kennedy's tan complexion and dark suit contrasted well on-screen, creating a healthful appearance.

Nixon looked at reporters when answering, causing his eyeline to shift and giving him an air of untrustworthiness.

Nixon's sickly pallor was washed out even more when paired with a gray suit.



John F. Kennedy

was just 43 years old by the time of the first presidential debate on September 26, 1960. He had served only one term as a senator. On top of his youth and inexperience, Kennedy's path to the White House was not made any easier by the fact he was one of the first Catholic candidates to run for president on a major party ticket.



Richard Nixon

was a seasoned lawmaker and politician, having served as a U.S. Representative and Senator, as well as two terms as Vice President to Dwight Eisenhower. Despite these advantages, Nixon's health took a turn for the worse in the weeks leading up to the first debate; he suffered an infection from a knee injury, that left him 20 pounds underweight and weak.

Ultimately, Kennedy won the election, despite by a narrow margin. He credited his televised debate performances as being the decisive factor in turning the tides of success in his favor.

Knowing the skills that lead to an effective on-screen performance can provide the competitive edge needed to win the hearts and minds of audiences.