

Kahit Kabado

A CONFIDENCE GUIDE FOR
EVERY FILIPINO WHO'S EVER
FELT AFRAID TO SPEAK

written by
Gia Abao



Kahit Kabado:

A Confidence Guide for Every Filipino
Who's Ever Felt Afraid to Speak

by **Gia Abao**

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Kahit Kabado is a self-led, self-produced passion project created without external funding, a publishing team, or third-party support. All visuals in this ebook were generated using AI-assisted tools to support accessibility, creativity, and cost-conscious self-publishing. No known artist styles, copyrighted characters, or brand assets were used or referenced. All outputs were carefully reviewed to ensure originality, respect, and compliance with fair creative use.

The current edition is part of a testing phase. The decision to use AI visuals was made after thoughtful consideration of both the topic's sensitivity and the realities of independent production. Given the limited project timeline and the fact that everything, from writing to layout to visuals, was completed by a one-person team, the author chose to prioritize completion and accessibility. A clear long-term goal remains: to hire and collaborate with local artists in future editions to elevate the visual and educational experience.

Every word and resource was created independently by the author with care, reflection, and personal commitment. While every effort was made to ensure factual accuracy and clarity, this book was created without a full editorial or academic review team, and may contain unintentional errors.

Readers are encouraged to take what resonates, reflect with discernment, and consult licensed professionals for personal guidance, especially in matters related to mental health, trauma, or clinical anxiety.

If you spot any factual inaccuracies or have suggestions for improvement, feel free to reach out to the author at work@giaabao.com.

Acknowledgments

This book was written for my community.

To every person who watched my impromptu speech clips, sent a kind DM, or shared a post with a friend, thank you. You were part of this even before the first page was written.

I wrote *Kahit Kabado* for the quiet ones, the anxious ones, the ones who've stayed silent too long. But I also wrote it for all of you, who believed in me while I was still figuring things out, documenting every nervous step of the way.

Your messages reminded me that my voice mattered, even when it shook. I hope this book reminds you that yours does, too.

Special thanks to my family and friends who previewed early drafts and helped me double-check the research, especially ate Nadine, and to my friends Alexandria and Angelina for checking the content of this ebook and sharing their insights. Though this is a self-published work, it was shaped and strengthened by your care and attention to detail.

May this book be your quiet permission slip to begin: messy, brave, and still afraid.

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How to Use This Book

This isn't a workbook you have to finish in one go. It's a companion, something you can return to when you need a reminder, a pep talk, or a plan. Whether you're a student, a freelancer, or an employee trying to find your voice in meetings, I hope this guide finds you where you are. Your fear doesn't make you unqualified. It makes you human.

Here's how you can make the most out of it:

- 1. Read at your own pace.**

You don't need to rush. Whether you read it all in one weekend or take it chapter by chapter over a month, what matters is that it resonates with you.

- 2. Pause and reflect.**

Each chapter ends with prompts and practical tools. These aren't just there for show. Use them to check in with yourself, to unpack your fears, or to brainstorm your next brave move.

- 3. Come back to it.**

Confidence isn't built overnight. When self-doubt creeps back in (and it will), flip to the part that reminds you who you are and what you're capable of.

- 4. Make it personal.**

Highlight what hits. Scribble on the sides. Take notes. Apply the frameworks to your school org, your work pitch, your next content post. This book becomes more powerful the more you use it.

- 5. Try the 30-Day #Kahitkabado Speaking Challenge.**

At the end of this book, you'll find a speaking challenge designed to help you build courage little by little. No pressure. Just progress.

- 6. Start where it feels right.**

If you're looking for tools, templates, and quick wins, feel free to jump ahead to Chapter 4 (Openings That Make People Listen) or Chapter 5 (How to Practice Even Without a Stage). This book is designed to meet you where you are, whether you need mindset shifts or just a presentation plan.

This is your space to grow. Messy, meaningful, and honest. Use it in the way that fits your story.

Kahit Kabado, Tuloy Pa Rin

I used to think I wasn't the kind of person who could speak up. I've always found comfort in writing. It was my quiet space, my way of making sense of the world. But when I joined a global competition back in college, everything changed.

In 2017, I applied for the National Model United Nations in New York, one of the most prestigious international simulations of the United Nations, attended by thousands of students from over 130 countries. It was intimidating, to say the least. We trained for seven months in writing, research, lobbying, and public speaking. While I felt confident on paper, the moment I had to speak out loud, I'd freeze. My hands would tremble, my breath would shorten, and my mind would go blank. I'd overthink every sentence before it left my mouth. I even asked to be paired with someone stronger in speaking, hoping I could hide behind her voice.

But life had other plans. During the conference, my partner lost her voice, and suddenly, I had no one else to rely on but myself.

That moment taught me something I'll never forget: you can't delegate your voice. You have to own it.

This book is for every Filipino who's ever held back.

For the student afraid of recitation.

For the jobseeker dreading interviews.

For the overlooked worker, the passionate dreamer who just wants to be heard.

This isn't about sounding flawless. It's about sounding real. It's a guide to help you speak with heart, even when you feel like you're not enough, especially when you feel like you're not enough.

Your voice matters. Your story deserves to be told.

You don't have to be fearless. You just have to begin.

Start here. *Kahit kabado.*

Why This Book Is In Taglish

You'll notice this book is written the way many of us speak: in Filipino-English. That choice was intentional.

Not because I can't write in full English, but because I believe confidence should sound like you. And for many Filipinos, that means a mix of languages, emotions, and lived realities.

As a content creator, I've learned that I connect most deeply with my audience when I speak the way we do in real life: unfiltered, heartfelt, and local. That's when people say, "Ate, *parang ako 'yan*." That's when they stay, listen, and start believing in their own voice.

This book was written for Filipinos, by a Filipino. And that's not just a tagline, it's the core of everything:

The *tone*.

The *stories*.

The *examples*.

Even the studies I cite reflect the unique challenges we face as Filipinos: how *hiya*, fear of judgment, and language bias can silence us before we even try.

Because public speaking shouldn't feel foreign. It should feel familiar. Safe. Ours.

So if you're used to more formal, polished books, thank you for staying.

I hope this reminds you that speaking well doesn't mean erasing your tone, your texture, or your story.

Chapter 1: “I Go Blank When I Speak”: What To Do When Your Brain Betrays You

Lahat ng magaling magsalita, dati ring natakot.

I took up Consular and Diplomatic Affairs (CDA) at De La Salle–College of Saint Benilde, and public speaking was a huge part of our training. But I wasn’t one of those students who already knew how to command the room.

I didn’t join debate teams or pageants.

I didn’t grow up being told that my voice was powerful.

In fact, I was a late bloomer in almost everything.

I only started building confidence because I *had* to.

At that age, I was still trying to figure out who I was. I’ve always been the type who falls in love with too many things. I’d go through seasons of wanting to be a writer, then a diplomat, then a dancer, then an artist. I used to envy people who seemed to know exactly who they wanted to be. I, on the other hand, felt like I was always just starting over, always catching up.

That’s why when I saw the application for the National Model United Nations in New York in 2017, I told myself: “*Sige na, subukan mo na. Wala namang mawawala.*” It felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to finally sharpen the skills I always wished I had.

It wasn’t just about speaking on the international stage.

It was about me trying to become someone I could be proud of.

At that time, I didn’t fully understand what I was walking into. The NMUN-NY wasn’t just any conference. It was one of the most prestigious academic simulations of the United Nations in the world, with thousands of students from over a hundred countries. There was a training program provided by our college, which promised to strengthen our research, writing, negotiation, and, you guessed it, public speaking.

I was excited. But I was also quietly terrified.

Nothing prepared me for how much I’d have to face myself.

This wasn’t new.

I'd felt this before. In high school, I was so soft-spoken my classmates joked about turning off the aircon just to hear me. If you've ever been in organizations like JPIA, UP Debate Society, or PUP Speak, you've probably felt this too. One minute, you're just attending a meeting or helping out, and the next, someone says, "*Ikaw na mag-host.*" Or maybe, you were asked to present updates during a Zoom call without warning, "Can you walk us through this deck?"

Suddenly your mouth goes dry. No prep. No script. Just you and the mic, or the screen share. *Kahit gusto mo, parang ayaw ng katawan mo.* Your hands shake. Your heart races. You knew what to say. But the moment you speak, it all scatters. *Parang nawala lahat ng na-practice mo.*

As a content creator, I've heard this from so many Filipinos: the pressure to speak "proper English," the shame around our accents. Even SB19, one of the biggest Filipino pop acts today, once opened up about feeling insecure during global interviews because of how they spoke English. But what stood out wasn't their accent. It was their authenticity, effort, and heart. And that's what people remembered. This insecurity is not uncommon. A study by Hjalmar P. Hernandez, on Filipino graduate students, found that many still perceive American-accented English as the ideal, even when teaching in the Philippines, revealing how deep our colonial hang-ups about language still run.¹

So there I was at 19, during NMUN training, outline in hand. All eyes on me.

Halfway through my speech, my thoughts slipped away. My voice trembled. I stared blankly at the wall behind the trainer, wishing the floor would swallow me whole.

That night, I was convinced I'd be cut from the team.

This was a global competition, and I couldn't even finish a one-minute speech.

I think a lot of us feel this, especially growing up in classrooms where one mistake can get you laughed at. *Minsan, mas pipiliin na lang natin tumahimik.*

It's not just fear. It's *hiya*. The kind that lingers long after the class ends.

For the longest time, I thought nervousness meant I was failing. But I've learned that feeling nervous doesn't mean you're unprepared. It means you care. Your body is reacting to how much the moment matters to you.

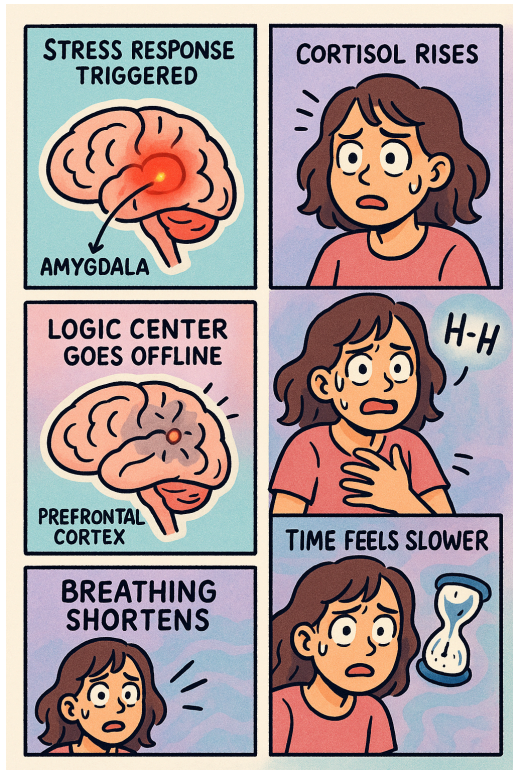
In many Filipino households, there's quiet pressure to speak English fluently and avoid mistakes, especially in public. That pressure can make speaking feel heavier than it should be. A study from UP Diliman found that the value of *hiya*, a concern about embarrassing oneself or

¹ H. P. Hernandez, Filipino Graduate Students' Attitudes Toward Teaching Educated Philippine English, *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1280>

others, can prevent students from even asking basic questions in libraries or class, not due to lack of knowledge, but fear of being judged.²

But here's what I wish someone told me earlier: Nerves don't mean you're not ready. I froze because I cared. That's why it mattered so much. I wasn't weak. I was just overwhelmed by how much I wanted to get it right.

That moment became one of the biggest mindset shifts I've ever had.



How Your Body Reacts

When you blank during a speech, your body's stress response is triggered. Research found that public speaking significantly raises levels of cortisol (a hormone released during stress). This further shows just how real and intense that biological reaction is

At the same time, your amygdala (the brain's alarm system) takes over. It signals your body to freeze, as if it's assessing whether to fight, run, or stay still (LeDoux, 2000)³. This temporarily shifts mental resources away from thinking and toward reacting, making it harder to access your words in the moment (Arnsten, 2009).⁴

Why Time Feels Slower

That pause, that blank, no matter how brief, feels like an eternity. And there's science behind it: in these moments, your prefrontal cortex (responsible for reasoning and memory) goes offline, overwhelmed by

stress. Suddenly, seconds feel like minutes, and words vanish.

This phenomenon isn't a failure of will. It's a survival mechanism. Your brain is trying to protect you, not embarrass you.

² F. D. Alvarez, *Bipolar Filipino Value of Hiya: Impact on Freshmen Students' Use of the Main Library* (Undergraduate thesis, UP Diliman, 2014). Retrieved from <https://tuklas.up.edu.ph/Record/UP-99796217611273588>

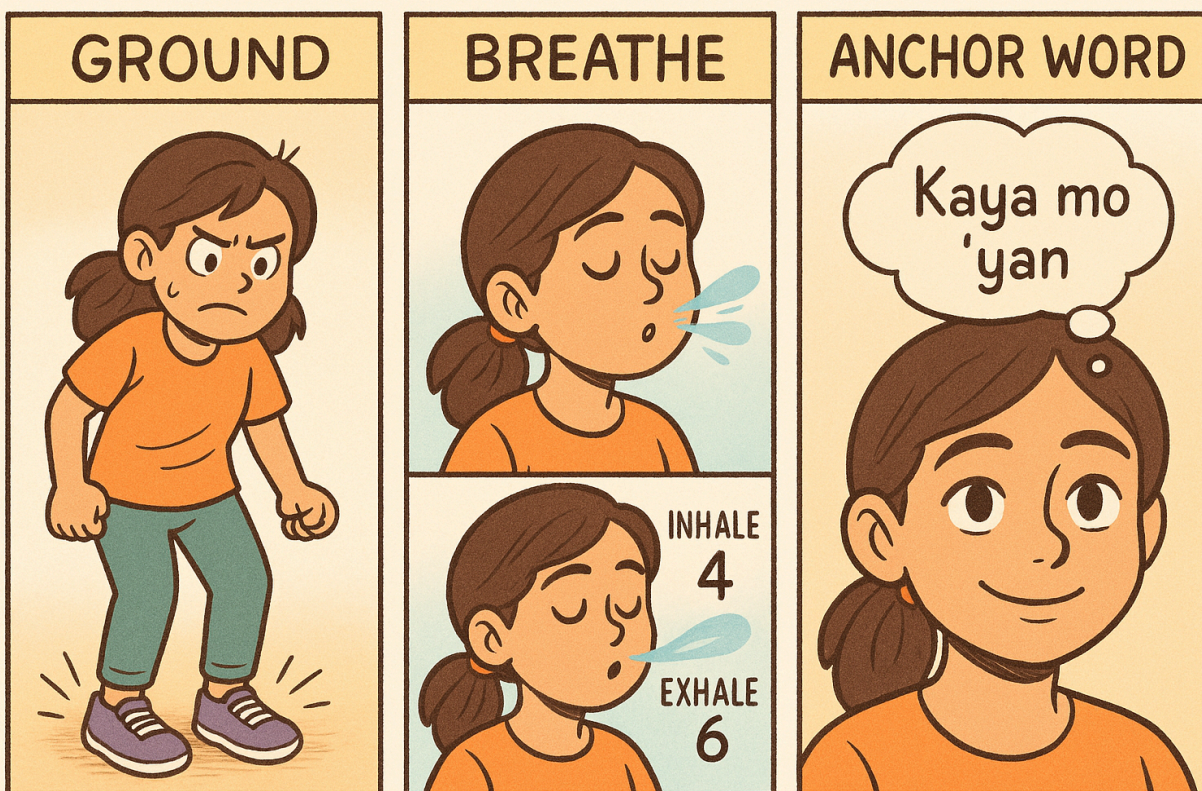
³ J. E. LeDoux, *Emotion Circuits in the Brain*, *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, vol. 23, 2000, pp. 155–184. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10845062/>

⁴ A. F. T. Arnsten, *Stress Signalling Pathways That Impair Prefrontal Cortex Structure and Function*, *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, vol. 10, no. 6, 2009, pp. 410–422. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19455173/>

When we know that freezing is a normal, biological reaction, not a lack of ability, we take away its power.

It stops being something to dread. It becomes something to recognize, then pause through.

When nerves arise, know they're not sabotaging you. They are signaling that this matters. They are the body's way of encouraging you to slow down, take a breath, and reestablish your footing.



My 3-Point Calm-Down Plan

I use a simple reset whenever anxiety strikes:

- Ground: Feel your feet firmly on the floor.
- Breathe: Inhale deeply for 4, exhale slowly for 6.
- Anchor Words: Tell yourself something reassuring. "*Kaya mo 'yan.*" Choose something that feels like a friend whispering to you, not judging you.

This anchors my mind to the present and slows the panic.

Why Keywords & Outlines Truly Work

I swapped full scripts for keyword outlines, and that changed everything. Research shows that using a delivery outline composed of keywords and cues, instead of full scripts, helps speakers stay present, maintain natural flow, and sound more authentic by enhancing eye contact, vocal variety, gestures, and audience engagement. When you speak from keywords, you trust your ideas more than your words and your audience feels that trust.

After returning home to the Philippines, I made a daily promise: if there's an opportunity to speak, I'll take it. Presentations, class discussions, even small group meetings. I started raising my hand more than ever. Confidence, it turns out, is built through consistent exposure. Repeated public speaking experiences have been shown to reduce anxiety and desensitize fear responses over time, a process aligned with exposure therapy techniques⁵.

That's exposure therapy in action, not just psychological jargon, but a retraining of both body and brain through imperfect, consistent practice. Each talk I gave, whether smooth or messy, helped me trust myself, my voice, and the process. And every time I stumbled but continued, I realized: I could handle it.

Here's your reminder kahit kabado:

"Hindi mo kailangang maging magaling agad, basta handang magsimula."

Key takeaways:

- Nervousness doesn't mean you're unprepared; it means you care.
- Freezing is a biological stress response, not a personal failure.
- Use the Ground–Breathe–Anchor reset to manage anxiety.
- Shift from full scripts to keyword outlines to speak naturally.
- Confidence grows through consistent exposure, not waiting to feel ready.

⁵ Speak Out, Call In: Organizing and Outlining – Chapter 6. University of Kansas Open Textbook. Retrieved July 12, 2025, from <https://opentext.ku.edu/speakupcallin/chapter/chapter-6-organizing-and-outlining/>

Kailan Mo 'To Susubukan?

List experiences in the past where you started blanking out. Moving forward, how do you plan to address it:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Kahit Kabado, Gawin Mo 'To:

Craft a 1-minute speech. In this short talk, reflect on a moment when you froze, why that moment mattered to you, and what you would tell your younger self now that you've grown. Use the "Ground-Breathe-Anchor" reset before you begin: feel your feet on the floor, take two deep breaths, and repeat a calming phrase like "*Kaya mo 'yan.*" If you can, deliver your speech in front of someone you trust or record it for yourself. The goal is to practice staying grounded, even while nervous. Reclaim your voice, not by erasing your fear, but by showing up anyway.

Chapter 2: Overthinking Isn't Preparation (It's Paralysis)

Hindi lang accent, vocabulary, o grammar ang sukatan ng talino.

After graduating, I wasn't sure where life would take me. I was in my early 20s, freshly out of college, and figuring things out as I went. There was no grand plan. Just a vague idea that I needed to find work, get experience, and somehow land on a path that made sense. I didn't have a clear sense of what I wanted to do, only that I had to start somewhere.

I found myself working at a staffing firm as a management trainee. The role was rotational, which meant I got hands-on training in different departments: human resources, business development, operations, and marketing. It was a crash course in how businesses run, and each rotation added a layer to my understanding of the corporate world.

Then, the pandemic hit.

Like many others, I was laid off. I lost my job.

Everything came to a halt. But in that pause, a window opened. For the first time, I had space to think about what I actually wanted. I remembered how, even before graduating, I had been curious about starting something of my own. With no more 9-to-5 and the world shifting online, I decided to finally take the leap and build my own business.

Working independently was a shift. No managers, no meetings, no one to report to.

Lahat nakasalalay sa akin.

And that meant I had to learn fast, not just about business, but about myself.

One thing became clear early on: whether or not my business would take off, I needed to improve my communication skills. I needed to know how to express ideas clearly, whether I was pitching, presenting, or simply showing up online.

That's when I remembered Toastmasters.

My dad had encouraged me to join the organization even before I finished college. He believed in the value of the platform and even accompanied me when I started attending different clubs. Eventually, I joined Metro Manila Toastmasters Club and started showing up regularly.

Our meetings were every Monday. I volunteered often and took every chance I could to speak. I also scheduled weekly mentoring sessions outside the meetings to continue learning. Most of our sessions were on Zoom, and that's where I first started practicing. I remember logging in week after week, anxious but determined to improve.

My setup wasn't fancy. I used my laptop camera, a lamp, and a desk full of notes. I'd rehearse my opening line. *"Minsan naiisip ko: Ano kayang iniisip nila tungkol sa'kin habang nagsasalita ako?"*

Each session challenged us to create and deliver a 7-minute speech.

It was through those weekly assignments that I started learning how to build my own outlines, organize my thoughts, and develop a rhythm that felt natural. Over time, I learned that I didn't have to aim for perfection.

Clear, simple, and authentic communication made a bigger impact.

That was my starting point, not on a stage, not with a big audience, but on a Monday night Zoom call, learning how to speak and own my voice.

To develop my own speaking style, I had to ask myself these questions:

1. What was my natural energy?

I realized early on that storytelling came naturally to me. I didn't just present facts. I wrapped them in stories. And turns out, there's science behind why that works. Researchers in Uri Hasson's Princeton lab discovered through MRI that during storytelling, listeners' brain activity synchronizes with the speaker's often called neural coupling (Stephens et al., 2010).⁶ The stronger this coupling, the better the audience understands the message (Hasson et al., 2012).⁷

That's why I leaned into storytelling, especially the funny or relatable stuff from my life. As I began creating content online, my speaking style became much more conversational just like how I speak with my audience on social media.

Another study led by Ralf Schmäzle at Michigan State (Grall et al., 2021) found that when people hear personal narratives, their brains show increased intersubject correlation in attention and mentalizing regions, meaning listeners' brains literally light up in sync.⁸ That neural alignment fosters connection, and that's what makes a message stick.

⁶ G. J. Stephens, L. J. Silbert, and U. Hasson, Speaker–Listener Neural Coupling Underlies Successful Communication, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 107, no. 32, 2010, pp. 14425–14430. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1008662107>

⁷ U. Hasson, A. A. Ghazanfar, B. Galantucci, S. Garrod, and C. Keysers, Brain-to-Brain Coupling: A Mechanism for Creating and Sharing a Social World, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2012, pp. 114–121. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3269540/>

⁸ C. Grall, R. Weber, R. Tamborini, and R. Schmäzle, Stories Collectively Engage Listeners' Brains: Enhanced Intersubject Correlations During Reception of Personal Narratives, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 71, no. 2, 2021, pp. 332–355. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2022-14084-007>

What a lot of people don't realize is that content creation is also public speaking. You're still building a hook, telling a story, and trying to connect. Discovering my own storytelling style helped me build my platform. It wasn't about being super formal, it was about being me, with structure.

2. Who are your favorite speakers?

Science actually backs this up. One study found that when we communicate, whether by talking, using hand gestures, or even drawing, our brains light up in the same areas. These parts of the brain help us understand what other people are thinking or feeling. It's called the mentalizing network, and it shows that storytelling isn't just something we enjoy. It's actually how our brains are wired to connect with others (Ferstl et al., 2005).⁹

As I began sharing more online, I started noticing the same patterns among the content creators I admired. I'd ask: How do they hook people in? What tone do they use? How do they make their audience feel seen? I watched how they structured their stories, how they kept them real but focused.



Turns out, stories don't just help us connect. They're also far more memorable. A good story can shape emotions, shift behavior, and trigger those "wait, me too" moments, where the audience sees themselves in what you're saying.

That's why I never tried to copy anyone outright. I just paid attention to what worked, and slowly figured out how to make it mine.

3. How can I apply what I've learned?

I started recording myself at home and even practiced in front of mirrors. I challenged myself to actually listen to myself. At first, I hated how my voice sounded. You might've experienced it too. It's that feeling when you record a Tiktok video with a voiceover *tapos dinelete mo kasi parang ang awkward ng boses mo*.

Even online creators feel it. *Kahit yung mga confident sa camera, alam mong ilang retakes din 'yan*. I think a lot of Filipinos feel this.

⁹ Ferstl, E. C., Rinck, M., & Von Cramon, D. Y. (2005). Emotional and Temporal Aspects of Situation Model Processing during Text Comprehension: An Event-Related fMRI Study. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 17(5), 724–739. <https://doi.org/10.1162/0898929053747658>

Sometimes, people judge you just because of your accent. I get so many DMs like, “Ate, my voice sounds ugly,” or “Nahiyaya ako sa accent. ko” A lot of us feel this way like we don’t sound smart enough if we don’t have an American accent. But here’s the thing: Philippine English is a real and valid form of English, and it includes our local accents, vocabulary, and grammar. You don’t need to change how you speak just to be seen as confident or good at English.

But here’s the truth: your accent is part of your story.

But I kept going. I learned that the more I practiced, the more familiar my voice became.

One of the simplest but most powerful practices I use before any talk, presentation, or content shoot is this: I outline what I want to say.

It sounds basic, but outlining helps me slow down my thinking and speak with more intention. When the topic is unfamiliar, I don’t just push through and hope for the best. I take time to indulge in the topic first. That could mean reading articles, skimming studies, watching videos, or simply sitting with the topic and asking myself what I already know about it. This step makes me more mindful of how I want to explain things, and how others might receive them.

Speaking with clarity isn’t about sounding smart. It’s about making your ideas easier to understand and remember. That’s what makes people trust you and listen longer.

Speak with Clarity – 1 Point, 2 Stories, 3 Phrases

Use this when you need to speak without a script during recitations, interviews, org meetings, or team updates.

- What’s your ONE clear message?
-

- What are TWO stories or examples that support it?

- Story 1: _____

- Story 2: _____

- What are THREE memorable lines you can repeat or emphasize?

- Phrase 1: _____

- Phrase 2: _____

- Phrase 3: _____

1 Point – 2 Stories – 3 Key Phrases

1. What’s your ONE clear point?

This is the main idea you want your audience to walk away with. Try boiling it down into one sentence.

- Example: “You don’t need to be perfect to be impactful.”

2. What are TWO stories that support your point?

Use one personal story and one relatable example (from a friend, a moment online, or a speaker you admire).

- Personal: Something you experienced that proves your point.
- Relatable: A TED Talk, a viral video, or a moment you saw someone else live it out.

3. What are THREE key phrases?

These help anchor your message. Think of them as tweetable lines, hooks, or mic-drop statements.

- “If you confuse them, you lose them.”
- “Speak as if the right people are already listening.”
- “Your message is just as powerful as those you admired from afar.”

How to prepare: Indulge in the Topic

Before building your outline, immerse yourself first. If the topic feels vague or scary, get curious.

- Read or skim 1–2 solid articles or videos.
- Take notes on what confuses or excites you.
- Ask: What part of this feels most relevant to my audience?

The more connected you are to your material, the more natural your delivery will feel.

Here’s your reminder, kahit kabado:

Hindi mo kailangang perpekto agad. Simulan mo lang. Gawin mo muna, saka mo na ayusin habang natututo ka.

Key Takeaways:

- Overthinking often leads to paralysis, not readiness.
- Storytelling builds connection and makes you memorable.
- Your accent is valid. Philippine English is real English.
- Use the 1 Point, 2 Stories, 3 Phrases framework for clarity.
- Start messy, improve later. Clarity comes with practice.

Kailan Mo ‘To Susubukan?

List experiences in the past where you started overthinking. Moving forward, how do you plan to address it:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Kahit Kabado, Gawin Mo ‘To

Set a timer for 60 seconds. Record yourself and speak in front of the camera. Do not overthink it. Try your best to answer the question in the best way that you can. Here are some questions you can practice with: “How do you think public speaking can change your life?”

Chapter 3: The Fear of Being Judged (And How to Speak Anyway)

Lahat tayo gustong mapakinggan pero natatakot tayong mapahiya.

I always loved writing. It felt like my safe space, but speaking?

Speaking felt like exposure. There was no delete button. No backspace. No quiet space to rewrite what you wish you'd said.

So I joined Toastmasters hoping I could practice being seen.

Eventually, I took on the role of Vice President for PR of Metro Manila Toastmasters Club. Part of my task was to promote our sessions and invite new members. That's when I started posting my impromptu speeches online, short, unpolished clips of me answering random questions in real time.

I wasn't trying to go viral. I was just documenting my journey. But then, something unexpected happened.

The videos took off.

Suddenly, one post had a million views. Then another. People started commenting things like "Grabe, ang bilis ng isip mo," or "Nakaka-inspire ka kapag nagsasalita kahit kabado."

When the Audience Gets Bigger, So Does the Fear

One night, after another video hit a million views, I stared at the comments, not the hundreds of kind ones, but the handful that stung. And I asked myself: Why does this affect me so much?

And then it hit me.

Maybe I was afraid that someone would finally say what I believed about myself all along: You're not a real speaker. You're just good at pretending.

Kahit wala pa silang sinasabi, parang may pressure na agad.

A study found that fear of negative evaluation, worrying about what others might think, is one of the biggest reasons people feel anxious about speaking. Even if you don't show it on the outside, it can affect your confidence and ability to focus.¹⁰ Sometimes the loudest fears are the ones no one sees.

¹⁰ N. L. Kocovski and N. S. Endler, Social Anxiety, Self-Regulation, and Fear of Negative Evaluation, European Journal of Personality, vol. 14, no. 4, 2000, pp. 347–358. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0984\(200007/08\)14:4](https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0984(200007/08)14:4)

That made sense to me. I already thought of myself as a writer, not a speaker. I was someone who hid behind drafts, who edited, and rewrote until it felt safe to be seen. Speaking didn't give me that luxury. You had to show up as you are.

And I wasn't sure that was enough.

But somehow, even with that fear, I kept showing up.

The Email That Changed Everything

On March 15, 2024, an email landed in my inbox.

It was from Toastmasters International. They were inviting me to speak at their 100th anniversary convention in Anaheim, California.

At first, I thought it was a mistake.

I blinked at the screen.

Paused.

Reread it.

Then I sat frozen in my chair, heart pounding.

This wasn't a webinar. This wasn't a panel tucked into a side room. This was the main stage, an event that happens once every hundred years. The lineup included global leaders, world champions of public speaking, and Toastmasters who had been in the organization longer than I've been alive.

And they wanted me.

I wish I could say I felt confident. But in that moment, panic flooded in.

Would they even take me seriously?

I'm 26. I speak Filipino-English. My audience is mostly Gen Z. I'm not corporate. I don't wear blazers every day or use big executive words. I don't fit the usual mold of who gets invited to speak on global stages. And deep down, a question started whispering inside me: "Do I even belong?"

But then I remembered the promise I made to myself years ago, back when I was still trembling every time I held a mic.

"One day, I'll do a TED Talk. One day, I'll be the kind of speaker who represents the quiet dreamers. The ones who didn't think they were loud or polished or charismatic enough to lead."

And in that moment, I realized something: This might not be a TED stage, but it was just as powerful.

It was real.

It was global.

Maybe I wasn't what the world expected, but maybe that's exactly why I needed to be there.

This wasn't just an invitation. It was a door.

And ready or not, I chose to walk through it.

Imposter Feelings and the Marriott Stage

According to Toastmasters International's Statistics and Data Hub as of July 2023, the average member is 49 years old, with a large portion of leadership composed of retirees, seasoned professionals, and long-time members from corporate and diplomatic backgrounds.¹¹

In other words, people my dad's age.

Everyone already seemed to know each other. They had shared history, stories, inside jokes. Meanwhile, I stood there, jet-lagged and overwhelmed, not knowing how to start a conversation. I tried to smile, introduce myself, but in my head, the thoughts returned: "*Bakit ba ko nandito?*"

What if I mess up? What if they regret inviting me?

I felt too young, too different. Like I accidentally walked into the wrong room.

But I kept going.

I remembered why I was invited: not because I had all the answers, but because I had a story only I could tell. A voice shaped by nervous starts and dreams that refused to die.

¹¹ Toastmasters International, Statistics and Data Hub, July 2023.
<https://www.toastmasters.org/resources/statistics-and-data-hub>

And suddenly, I wasn't there to impress them. I was there to represent the ones who never imagined they'd make it to rooms like this.

Not despite their fears, but because they kept going anyway.

So I lifted my chin. Took a breath. And stepped in, not as someone trying to prove she belonged, but as someone who finally realized she did.

The Moment Everything Shifted

The room was quiet, but my mind wasn't.

My heart was pounding. My makeup felt wrong. I had no idea how to do my hair for a stage like that. I was in front of the mirror, wondering how I'd ended up here, about to speak at Toastmasters International's 100th Anniversary Convention.

A few days before flying to the US, I was still juggling it all, preparing for the launch of my small business, editing content, looking for suppliers for my packaging, and fixing listings for my products. I was barely holding it together. My to-do list didn't end. It just came with me across time zones.

And now, the suit I borrowed from a fashion stylist back home was shrinking. Or maybe, I just underestimated the effect of all the US food I'd been enjoying.

I remember standing there in front of the mirror, struggling with the zipper of the corset. The fabric resisted with every pull. I tugged, twisted, held my breath. No luck.

That's when my manager helped me.

She took one look at me, arms flailing, cheeks flushed, the suit half-zipped, and burst into laughter. The kind that fills the whole room and breaks the tension instantly.

"Ate," I groaned, still trying to wrestle the corset into submission, "*nakalimutan ko 'yung calorie count ko! Ang sarap kasi ng In-N-Out.*"

She helped me fix the suit, hands steady as I held my breath. We laughed through the chaos, running on caffeine and adrenaline. She was still jet-lagged, fresh from a flight she nearly missed after a booking issue. She flew in last-minute, tired but present. Just to show up for me.

As we walked through the halls, people started turning their heads. "Love the suit."

Funny, I'd been so stressed about fitting into it, and now here it was, helping me take up space before I even said a word.

Then I saw the stage. Four projectors. A countdown timer on the side. My name glowing on the screen. And suddenly, my breath caught.

It was just a rehearsal, but I felt eyes. I felt pressure. I felt the old fear rise again like a tide I thought I'd already learned to tame.

"Kaya ko ba 'to?"

"They were so generous to fly me here. What if I disappoint them?"

I took a shaky breath. The lights felt too bright. But I stepped forward anyway.

Then my name was called.

I stepped out, expecting to be swallowed by the lights, blinded, disoriented.

But it wasn't like that.

The lights were warm. The audience wasn't a sea of strangers. They were smiling. Confidence isn't a one-time badge. It's a choice you remake every time you speak.

And I did. I told them my story.

I spoke about starting small. About being 19 and showing up to Toastmasters meetings because well, there was Hawaiian pizza. And I was young. And hungry.

I spoke about how I didn't realize then that Toastmasters would be the foundation of everything I'd build. The platform that would lead me to national features, creative work, and international stages like this one.

The girl who never thought she'd speak at all. The girl who used to sit in the back, eating pizza, pretending not to be scared.

And somehow, I felt I was speaking to someone else in the audience, too. Someone who needed to hear that it's okay to be scared, and still show up.

When I stepped off the stage, I braced myself for critique, maybe small talk.

But what came instead was connection.

People came up to me, not to analyze, but to open up. They shared their own fears, their own insecurities. Some asked about my journey, but what they really wanted was the story behind it.

But more than strategy, *gusto nilang marinig yung kwento ko*. They wanted to know *why* I spoke the way I did. They wanted to learn, not just from my techniques, but from my story.

And that's when I realized something that changed me: Instead of imagining their judgment, I imagine their hopes. Their hunger to learn. Their kindness. What if your story is the exact thing someone needed to hear?

Because someone out there is waiting, not for a perfect speaker, but for you.

Using the Audience Empathy Map: Turning Fear into Connection

After Anaheim, I knew I had to change the way I saw my audience. Because here's the truth: most of our fear doesn't come from the stage. It comes from the story we tell ourselves about the people in front of us.

We imagine them judging us, picking apart our words, waiting for us to make a mistake.

But what if that story isn't true?

What if, instead of being critics, they're just humans?

That's when I started using a simple tool I now call my *Audience Empathy Map*. I didn't learn it in a workshop or training session. I discovered it alone, at a time when I was spiraling and doubting my worth as a speaker. The map helped me shift from self-focus to their experience. In Filipino liberation psychology, empathy isn't soft. It's a way to see others as extensions of ourselves, a core principle called *kapwa*. Building that kind of authentic connection is exactly what makes that opening line, your hook, truly powerful.



After a talk, I remember sitting in silence, overthinking every word I had said. I was replaying moments that didn't go "perfectly." And I asked myself: *Bakit ba feeling ko palagi jinu-judge ako ng mga tao?*

That's when I started looking for a better way to frame how I saw the people in front of me.

And I stumbled on a tool called the Empathy Map by Xplane, originally designed for user experience and design thinking. It wasn't even meant for public speaking. But something about it stuck with me. It felt human. It felt authentic.

So I adapted it. I turned it into something I now call my Audience Empathy Map, and it completely changed the way I speak.

I learned to ask myself three questions before any talk, video, or presentation:

- ***What are they afraid of?***

Your audience isn't perfect either. They've also doubted themselves. They've also stayed quiet when they wanted to speak. When you identify their fears, you begin to speak with them, not at them.

Are they afraid of being misunderstood? Of sounding "wrong"? Of not being good enough?

Once I saw that they were scared too, I stopped trying to impress and started trying to connect.

- ***What do they want?***

This is about their desire. Why are they listening to you in the first place?

Do they want more confidence? Do they want to feel seen or validated? Do they want practical tips to express themselves better?

When you know what they want, you can tailor your message to give them hope, clarity, or encouragement they've been silently craving.

- ***What do they need?***

This is deeper than what I want. This is about what they need, especially if they don't know how to say it yet.

Do they need someone to tell them they're not alone? Do they need permission to start before they're ready? Do they need to see someone like them doing the thing they're scared of?

That's where your story comes in. You're not just giving information. You're giving evidence that healing, confidence, and growth are possible.

Why It Works

The moment you stop seeing your audience as critics and start seeing them as humans with fears, hopes, and desires just like yours, you start showing up differently.

You speak from connection, not performance. And that's when people really listen.

Here's your reminder:

Hindi nila maalala lahat ng sinabi mo, pero maalala nila kung anong naramdaman nila sa sinabi mo.

Key Takeaways:

- Fear of judgment is universal, even for experienced speakers.
- Your story might be what someone else needs to hear.
- Use the Audience Empathy Map to focus on your audience.
- Connection is more powerful than performance.
- Showing up scared is still showing up.

Kailan Mo 'To Susubukan?

Think of your next speech, presentation, or post. How would you answer the three empathy map questions for your audience? Fill it out on a page or notebook. This small shift in mindset can change how you speak, and how people listen.

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Kahit Kabado, Gawin Mo 'To

Practice in front of a trusted friend. Hop onto a Zoom call with a friend and present a 7-minute speech. It can be a topic of your liking or something that you're passionate about. Start with a hook. Use three key points. Then end with a strong conclusion or call-to-action.

Chapter 4: How Do I Start? Openings That Make People Listen

Simula pa lang, iparamdam mo na: “Kasama niyo ako.”

You might have the most powerful message in the world, but if your first 7 seconds don't connect, your audience might never hear it.

Yung tipong minsan kahit hindi mo pa kilala yung isang tao, may opinyon ka na agad tungkol sa kanya.

That's faster than most of us can finish our introduction. In public speaking, this means your audience is already deciding whether to trust you, listen to you, or tune you out before you even reach your first main point.

And it doesn't stop there.

A book by Dr. Gloria Mark, a researcher at the University of California, Irvine, revealed that our average attention span has dropped from 2.5 minutes in 2004 to just 47 seconds today.¹² While her research focuses on digital environments, it reflects a broader truth: people today are overwhelmed, easily distracted, and quick to decide what's worth their time.

In the Philippines, where oral tradition runs deep, storytelling does more than entertain, it brings listeners into a shared emotional space. Research in *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* shows that Filipino storytelling can transform trauma into collective healing and social resilience, making early emotional grounding crucial in forging trust and empathy.¹³

And that connection, once formed, is what holds attention even through imperfections.

Why I Always Start with a Hook

This year alone, I've spoken at classrooms, convention halls, and Zoom rooms, from Ateneo to DLSU, from UP Manila to Bulacan State University. Sometimes, I start with a metaphor. Sometimes it's a memory. But always, it's connection first, content second.

But here's what I've learned: before you even think about the content of your hook, you need to listen to your intuition.

Before I speak, I ask: What do they need right now, and how can I show them I'm with them, not above them?

¹² G. Mark, *Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness and Productivity*. Harlequin, 2023.

¹³ A. Fuentes, *Story-Telling and Its Transformative Impact in the Philippines*, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2012, pp. 333–348. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-09302-006>

Rapport isn't built by impressing. It's built by relating. And sometimes, your gut knows how to relate faster than your outline does.

My TED Talk: The Hook I Wish I Used



Let me take you behind the scenes of one of the most high-pressure moments of my life: my first TEDxYouth Talk in DLSU.

For context, TEDx is part of the global TED platform, known for hosting some of the most influential talks in the world. The TED brand stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, and its talks have featured voices like Brené Brown, Simon Sinek, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. You don't just sign up to give a TEDx Talk; you're chosen because someone sees potential in your story, your message, and your ability to move people.

That's why this meant everything to me.

As a public speaking content creator, this was the stage.

The platform I had dreamed of for years. The moment where I wasn't just teaching others how to speak. I was being asked to live it. This was where everything I stood for: confidence, purposeful storytelling, showing up even when afraid was being put to the test.

It was an honor, one that came with heavy pressure.

Backstage, I felt the weight of expectation. People kept saying, "*Na-eexcite po akong marinig yung speech niyo, Ms. Gia. Pinapanuod ko po kayo simula pa nung pandemic.*"

And instead of letting that lift me, I let it crush me.

I told myself: You teach this. You can't fail now.

But when I finally walked on stage, something unexpected happened.

What I Would've Done Differently in My TED Talk Opening

When I stepped onto the TED stage, I had rehearsed every beat of my talk. But looking back, if I could change just one thing, it would be how I opened.

I Wish I Used Humor to Break the Ice

Before my TED Talk began, there was supposed to be an introduction video to ease the transition. But a technical issue happened instead, minutes of silence.

When I finally stepped onto the stage, I just stood there and smiled at the audience, hoping my presence would build rapport. I knew that pausing, letting the room settle, is a deliberate tactic to project confidence and invite connection. Filipino stand-up comedians use the same technique, combining audience-centric timing and pauses to strengthen engagement and trust.

But in my case, I wasn't doing it on purpose.

And in doing so, I forgot to use one of my most reliable coping mechanisms: my humor.

My TED Talk was titled "*How to Be a Successful Failure.*" That title alone practically begged for a lighthearted opener. I could've said something like: "*You know it's going to be a great talk when it starts with 'failure.' Don't worry. My parents are used to it. I'm the most chaotic yet suspiciously high-functioning child in the family.*"

But instead, I launched straight into the message. No warm-up. No intro. No background music. Just me, the mic, and a very quiet room.

In hindsight, I realized that humor could've been my greatest ally.

Studies show that speakers who open with humor are seen as more credible, relatable, and trustworthy (Frymier & Wanzer, 2021).¹⁴ Laughter doesn't just entertain. It opens the audience up to connection.

In other words, humor doesn't just entertain.

It builds a bridge.

And maybe, if I had let myself be that candid, bubbly version of me that people see online, I wouldn't have just delivered the talk. I would've *connected* more deeply. I would've brought more of *me* into the TED stage.

¹⁴ A. B. Frymier and M. B. Wanzer, *Humor Competence in the Classroom*, in Routledge eBooks, 2021, pp. 130–147. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003042440-8-11>

I Wish I Started With a Short Story to Build Anticipation

A well-placed story creates tension, and tension makes people lean in.

Something like: *“My intro didn’t play. To everyone watching this, I’d like to apologize in advance because I’m not really built for high-pressure moments. The last time I said that was during my first job interview, so I could get hired.”*

When my TED Talk started with an unexpected tech issue, I stayed serious instead of showing my humanity. Looking back, I wish I told a quick story or cracked a small joke. Not to be funny, but to be real. Sometimes, connection matters more than composure.

And the science backs this up. According to a study by neuroscientist Uri Hasson and colleagues at Princeton University, when a speaker tells a compelling story, the brain activity of the listener starts to mirror the speaker’s. In those moments, the speaker and audience are no longer separate, they’re synced.

Emotionally. Cognitively. Biologically.

In short: when you tell a story, your audience doesn’t just hear you.

They feel you.

I Wish I Used a Simple Metaphor

A simple metaphor would have made the silence make sense. Metaphors take abstract experiences and turn them into something tangible. Something the audience can immediately feel.

Like this:

“Giving a TED Talk after a tech glitch feels like stepping on stage to dance only to realize the music hasn’t started. You know the choreography, but suddenly, the silence feels louder than the steps.”

Then I could’ve led into the message:

“Failure feels like that too. Sometimes, you’re ready, but the world isn’t in sync yet. And you still have to move anyway.”

Metaphors like this don’t just add style. They add clarity. Studies of Philippine print advertising by Fernandez (2017) shows that Filipino educators and communicators prefer metaphors, especially those rooted in shared cultural experiences, because listeners can instantly visualize

and emotionally connect with them.¹⁵ According to Sopory and Dillard (2002), metaphors significantly enhance persuasion and comprehension, especially when used early and in a simple, memorable form.¹⁶ They give listeners a mental anchor, helping them grasp abstract or emotionally complex ideas.

Flat vs. Impactful Openings

Let's break this down with an example:

Flat opening:

"Hi everyone, I'm Gia, and today I'll be talking about failure."

It's polite. It's safe. But it doesn't spark curiosity. The audience has no emotional reason to lean in. They're still deciding whether to listen.

Impactful opening:

"₱600,000.

That's how much I lost when I closed down the business I poured my early 20s into. At first, it felt like all that hard work amounted to nothing. I was lost, embarrassed, and even angry.

But in the quiet that followed failure, I learned three lessons that changed the way I see success. And today, I want to share them with you."

This one drops you straight into a moment. It's vulnerable, human, and real. It signals to your audience: I'm not just here to teach. I'm here to tell the truth.

The difference?

One recites.

The other reveals.

Flat intros rely on titles and topics. Impactful intros tap into emotion, story, or surprise. All of which activate attention and connection.

¹⁵ E. Fernandez, Discourse Analysis of Persuasive Language in Philippine Print Advertising, *The Reflective Practitioner*, vol. 1 (2016), Holy Cross of Davao College, September 22, 2017. Retrieved from <https://cas.upm.edu.ph/journals/index.php/the-reflective-practitioner/article/view/2/12>

¹⁶ P. Sopory and J. P. Dillard, The Persuasive Effects of Metaphor: A Meta-Analysis, *Human Communication Research*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2002, pp. 382–419. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00813.x>

Research analyzing over 2,000 TED Talks found that rhetorical devices like contrast, suspense, and storytelling were strong predictors of audience applause.¹⁷ Starting strong, not just with content, but with craft makes a measurable difference.

How to Structure Your Presentation

One of the common comments I receive is, “*Ate Gia, alam ko yung sagot pero hindi ko alam kung paano i-organize yung ideas ko.*”

That’s why I created a simple tool you can use when you’re preparing for a class report, org presentation, panel interview, vlog, or even a random live session.

Here’s a flexible structure that works even if you freeze easily, overthink a lot, or feel like your thoughts are all over the place.

Here’s the presentation structure framework (tabulated format)

Step	What to Do	Why It Works	Examples / Prompts
1. Topic & Purpose	Identify your topic and goal. Keep it simple and clear.	Clarity of intention keeps your talk focused and easy to follow.	Topic: Overcoming Fear Purpose: To inspire others to speak up even when scared
2. Introduction: Start with a Hook	Open with something human, honest, or unexpected. Use a story, stat, question, or joke to grab attention.	First impressions matter. A good hook builds emotional connection and curiosity.	Stat: “Roughly 70% of people fear public speaking more than death.”
3. Background or Tension	Provide context. Why does this topic matter to you? What turning point brought you here?	Builds empathy and explains your “why.” Helps the audience emotionally invest.	“I used to stay quiet even when I knew the answer, but that changed after joining the National Model United Nations in New York.”

¹⁷ Z. Liu, A. Xu, M. Zhang, J. Mahmud, and V. Sinha, Fostering User Engagement: Rhetorical Devices for Applause Generation Learnt from TED Talks, arXiv (Cornell University), 2017. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.1704.02362>

4. State 3 Main Points	Share 3 key ideas that support your message. Structure each point with: What's the point? What's the story? Why does it matter to them?	Keep your talk organized and memorable. 3 points = simple, structured storytelling.	Core Message: "Kahit kabado, your voice matters."
5. Conclusion with Impact	End clearly and powerfully.	Final impression lasts the longest. The ending reinforces memory and emotional closure.	Summarize: "Your voice has value even when it shakes."

Presentation Structure Framework Template

Use this to prepare short talks, impromptu responses, or formal speeches whether for orgs, interviews, or online meetings.

- Topic or Prompt: What are you speaking about?

- Purpose: Why are you sharing this? What do you want your audience to feel, remember, or do after?

- Hook: How will you grab attention in the first 1–2 lines? (Example: a question, a personal moment, or a surprising fact)

- Tension / Background: What problem, conflict, or fear makes this topic important or urgent?

- Main Point 1

- Why does it matter: _____
- Example/Evidence: _____
- Relevance: _____

- Main Point 2

- Why does it matter: _____
- Example/Evidence: _____

- Relevance: _____
 - Main Point 3
 - Why does it matter: _____
 - Example/Evidence: _____
 - Relevance: _____
 - Conclusion: How will you tie everything together? What final message do you want to leave them with?
-

- One-Liner or Call to Action (optional): Something short and memorable the audience can take with them.
-

Step 1: Topic & Purpose

Before anything else, ask yourself: *Ano yung topic ko? Ano yung goal ko: inform, inspire, persuade, or reflect?* Keep it simple.

- Example:
 - Topic: Overcoming Fear
 - Purpose: To inspire others to speak up even when they're scared

Your talk doesn't need a fancy title. But your intention must be clear.

Step 2: Introduction: Start with a Hook

Practice your hook aloud. If it makes you lean in, your audience will too. Let's be real: first impressions matter. In public speaking, your first 7 seconds decide whether people lean in or tune out. That's why a good intro isn't just a greeting. It's a hook. Something that grabs attention and makes your audience want to listen.

So how do you do that?

Start with something human, honest, or unexpected.

Here are a few powerful ways you can open your speech:

- A Personal Story: Start with a raw, relatable moment.
 - "The first time I did my impromptu speech, I blanked out. I wanted to run. I wanted people to stop staring at me. I lost my voice to fear."
 - Why it works: People don't relate to perfection. They relate to truth. Your vulnerability builds instant trust.

- A Surprising Stat: Share a fact that makes people go, “Wait, what?”
 - “Did you know roughly 70% of people are more afraid of public speaking than death?”
 - Why it works: Stats trigger curiosity. It also reassures your audience that they’re not alone.
- A Rhetorical Question: Make your audience reflect.
 - “Have you ever known the answer but held back because you were afraid of what people might say? I felt the same.”
 - Why it works: Questions invite connection. They pull your listener in and make them feel seen.
- A Quick Anecdote or Joke: Lighten the mood with a dash of humor.
 - “Public speaking, to me, feels like making the first move. My mind just goes blank before I can even do it.”
 - Why it works: Laughter breaks the ice. It lowers tension and builds instant rapport.

Step 3: Brief Background or Tension

After your hook, give them a reason to stay. This is your emotional why and the reason your audience should care. Now that you’ve caught their attention, it’s time to give them context. Help your audience understand why this topic matters to you. What personal experience or turning point brought you here? This is where you paint the picture. You don’t need to give your full life story. Just enough for them to understand the emotional stakes.

- Sample Transition:
 - “I used to be the kind of person who stayed quiet, even when I knew the answer. I didn’t think my voice mattered. But that changed when I joined the National Model United Nations in New York in 2017. Today, I want to talk to you about owning your voice, how it can change your life, and the impact you can create on others by speaking up. *Kahit kabado.*”
 - Why This Works:
 - It tells us where you came from (quiet, unsure, hesitant)
 - It builds curiosity (What happened in New York?)
 - It connects your audience to your why

Step 4: State Your 3 Main Points

Think of this as the “meat” of your message. Once you’ve set the stage with your intro and background, it’s time to walk your audience through your message. But here’s the key: keep it focused. Stick to 3 main points that support your core message. These points should build your case, give depth to your story, and make your talk easy to follow even for someone hearing it for the first time.

Example:

Core Message: “*Kahit kabado*, your voice matters.”

Your 3 points might look like this:

- Point 1: Your voice has power even if it shakes.
 - Why does it matter to them: Because speaking up builds self-trust, not just confidence.
 - Support: Share a story about how your first impromptu speech didn't go perfectly, but taught you to show up anyway.
 - Relevance: Most people wait until they're “ready.” But readiness comes after repetition, not before.

- Point 2: Public speaking is a skill, not a personality trait.
 - Why does it matter to them: This breaks the myth that only extroverts can speak well.
 - Support: Cite how practice, feedback, and outlining helped you go from blanking out to confidently delivering webinars.
 - Relevance: Remind your audience: If you can learn to type, cook, or ride a bike, you can learn to speak too.

- Point 3: Speaking up creates impact on others, not just yourself.
 - Why does it matter to them: Because when we speak, we make others feel seen too.
 - Support: Recall how someone messaged you after a talk or video and said, “*Ate*, you said what I was too scared to say.”
 - Relevance: Let your readers realize: Your story might be the survival guide someone else needs.

This is your chance to build emotional momentum. Think of it as the tension before the transformation.

Step 5: Conclude Your Message, but End with Impact

Your conclusion is your final impression. This is what lingers after you leave the stage or end your video. So don't just trail off close with clarity and heart.

Here are 3 powerful ways to end your speech:

- Summarize Your Core Message: This is your one-liner takeaway. It brings your whole talk together and reminds the audience of what truly matters.
 - Example: “So if there's one thing I want you to remember, it's this: your voice has value even when it shakes. Especially when it shakes.”
 - Why it works: Repetition = retention.
 - The clearer your message, the longer it sticks.

- End with a Call to Action (CTA): Push them to take the next brave step. No matter how small.
 - Example: “Don’t wait to feel ready. Be the first one to believe in your own voice. Practice while you’re scared. Say yes to that next opportunity.”
 - Why it works: People want to change, but they need a nudge.
 - A CTA makes your talk actionable, not just inspiring.
- Leave with a Line That Lingers: This is your mic-drop moment. A line that’s felt, not just heard.
 - Example: “Your voice is just as powerful, just as impactful, and just as influential as those you look up to.”
 - Why it works: People might forget your points, but they’ll remember how you made them feel.

Here’s your reminder:

Kung magaan ang simula, mas madali kang pakikilingan.

Key Takeaways:

- Your first 7 seconds are crucial. Use a strong hook.
- Hooks can be stories, stats, questions, or humor.
- Share why your topic matters to build connection.
- Use the Presentation Structure Framework to organize your talk.
- Connection beats perfection. Your voice is enough.

Kailan Mo ‘To Susubukan?

Think of your next speech, presentation, or post. How would you apply the Presentation Structure Framework Template? Write your outline below.

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Kahit Kabado, Gawin Mo ‘To

Practice in front of a trusted friend. Hop onto a Zoom call with a friend and present a 7-minute speech. It can be a topic of your liking or something that you’re passionate about. Start with a hook. Use three key points. Then end with a strong conclusion or call-to-action.

Chapter 5: How I Practiced Public Speaking (Even Without a Stage)

Minsan, hindi mo kailangan maging handa. Kailangan mo lang simulan.

One of the most frequent questions I get during university visits is: *“Ate Gia, paano po ba mag-practice ng public speaking kung wala naman stage?”*

I remember a student from UP Manila asking me that exact question. He admitted shyly, *“Natatakot po talaga ako magsalita, pero gusto ko matuto.”*

That stuck with me.

Because it wasn't just a question about technique. It was a question rooted in fear, and a quiet but persistent desire to grow.

That day, I was conducting a workshop for scholars, teaching how to build confidence in public speaking, especially for job interviews.

We talked about how the ability to express yourself clearly can make or break opportunities, whether you're applying for a BPO job, pitching yourself in a panel, or joining your first company orientation. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), roughly 3 in 10 Filipino graduates feel their university training left them mismatched to their jobs, citing crucial gaps in communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, despite these being exactly what employers are looking for. A 2024 PIDS study also found that Filipino workers often lack “soft skills,” including communication and adaptability, putting them at a disadvantage in the tech-driven, client-facing economy (Bernardo et al., 2024).¹⁸

But I understood where they were coming from.

That's how it started for me.

I practiced in small, awkward moments. In my room, in front of a mirror. Alone, answering random questions I found online. There were days I couldn't even complete a thought without spiraling into self-doubt. But the more I exposed myself to the discomfort of speaking, without the pressure to be perfect, the more confident I became.

And that's the shift. Confidence doesn't come from waiting for the right moment. It comes from movement.

¹⁸ A. Bernardo, J. R. Albert, J. F. Vizmanos, and M. Muñoz, *Toward Measuring Soft Skills for Youth Development: A Scoping Study*, Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.pids.gov.ph/publication/discussion-papers/toward-measuring-soft-skills-for-youth-development-a-scoping-study>

Why It Matters Now

The reason I started learning public speaking was because of my dad.

Growing up, I saw one of his greatest challenges: public speaking. My dad came from a family of farmers. He had to work while studying just to graduate. During that time, he paid ₱250 per semester just to stay in school. He didn't have access to expensive training or confidence-building workshops.

Whenever he would share stories about how hard it was to build his career, there was always a trace of frustration in his voice. He'd often say, "*Sayang, anak. Kung magaling lang sana akong magsalita, baka napromote pa si daddy.*"

My dad had technical skills. He was diligent, skilled, and hardworking.

But when it came to explaining his ideas or presenting in front of others, he struggled. He dreaded presentations. He found it hard to articulate what he already knew so well. And it made me realize: sometimes, it's not just about what you know, but how well you can share it with others.

It's not a lack of intelligence or talent. It's a lack of confidence.

In today's world, strong communication is no longer optional. It's an edge. Whether you're presenting at work, applying for a BPO job, or sitting in your first job interview, how you speak can open doors and fast-track your progress.

Practice With Purpose (Not Just Projection)

Ever since college, I knew I wanted to become a more confident communicator.

I was taking up diplomacy and communication was a core part of our training. We were trained to present policy briefs, conduct negotiations, and take part in simulated diplomatic discussions.

But even then, I realized: just because you're required to speak doesn't mean you feel ready to do it.

There were days I could deliver my points clearly. But there were also days I froze up or mumbled through my answer, wishing I had said something better.

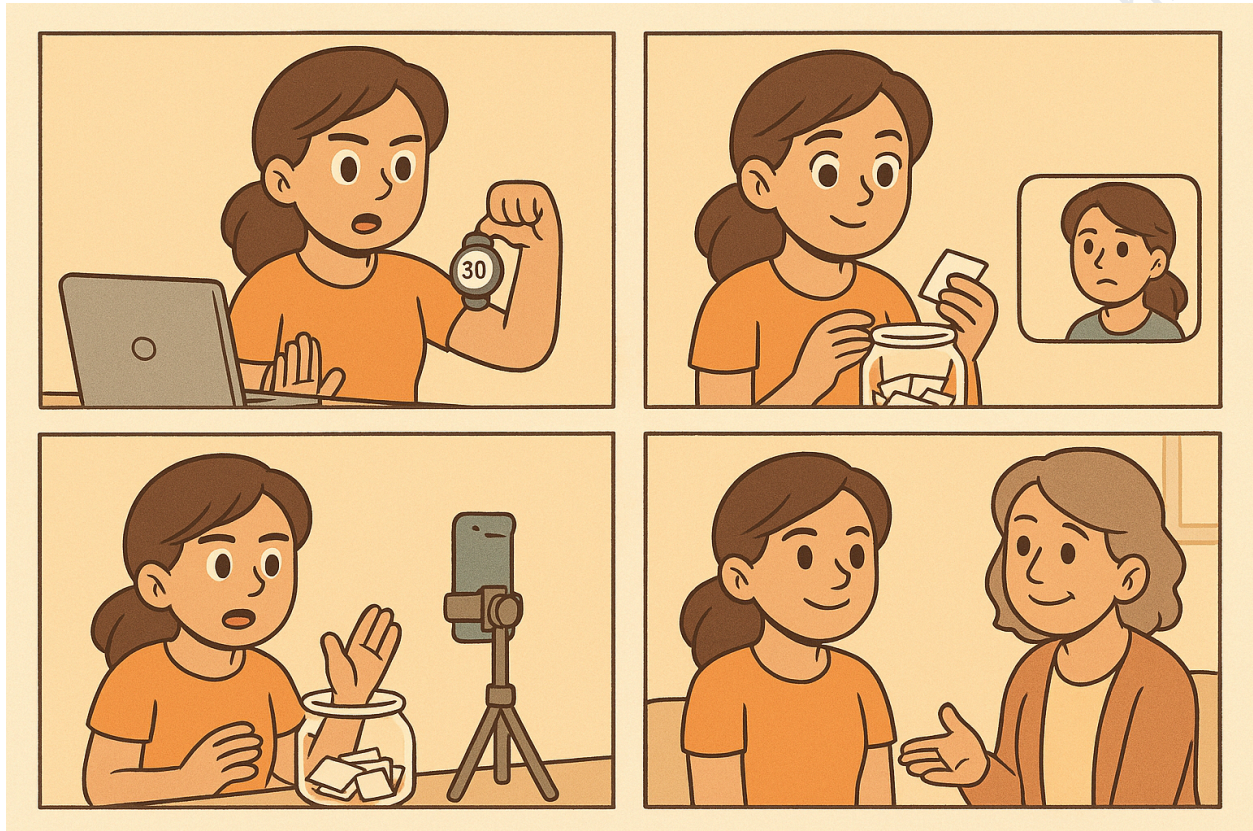
Nakakafrustrate kapag alam mo yung sagot pero hindi mo alam kung paano sabihin.

That's when I decided to do something different.

Instead of waiting to be called, I started volunteering more during recitations. I didn't care if I got it wrong. I just wanted to try. That small shift, raising my hand instead of shrinking back, became one of my earliest acts of confidence.

But I wanted more than classroom confidence. I wanted to build a habit of speaking clearly, even under pressure.

Here's what that looked like:



- 30 minutes of focused speaking practice every day
- A list of random impromptu questions I could pull from
- Mirror sessions or recordings to watch myself back
- Honest feedback from trusted friends

I wasn't aiming for perfection. I was aiming for consistency.

At first, it was awkward. I'd freeze mid-answer. I'd overthink every word. I'd cringe hearing my own voice. But over time, I started to notice progress, little shifts that built up. I became more fluent. My thoughts became more organized. My transitions became smoother.

Recording myself was uncomfortable at first, but it became one of my most helpful tools. When you watch yourself speak, you become aware of patterns you don't notice at the moment. Your filler words, awkward pauses, or hand gestures. It gave me the clarity I needed to self-correct.

Feedback Is the Magic

I still remember the day I asked my roommate to help me practice.

We were both in college, living in a small dorm room, juggling classes and deadlines. I had been practicing alone for weeks, just me, a mirror, and a list of impromptu questions I pulled from Google. I would record myself on my laptop and review the footage like a coach studying game tape. I thought I was getting better.

But I knew I needed feedback from someone else, someone who could see what I couldn't.

So one afternoon, I gathered my courage and asked her, "*Pwede ba magpatulong? Gusto ko kasi gumaling magsalita. Bigyan mo lang ako ng feedback.*" She agreed. We were already close friends, and I felt safe around her.

I thought it would be easy.

But the moment she sat across from me and pulled a question from the jar, my heart started racing.

She read the prompt aloud. I don't even remember what it was, something simple, probably, but my mind went blank.

I tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come. I kept pausing, repeating myself, doubting every sentence that came out of my mouth. It was strange. I had practiced this so many times on my own. But now, with just one person watching, everything felt different.

When I finally stopped talking, she looked at me and said something that I've carried with me ever since.

"Alam mo naman yung sagot," she said. *"Pero kung hindi ka maniniwala sa sinasabi mo, paano kami maniniwala sayo?"*

That one line hit me harder than any comment or critique I'd ever received. It wasn't about structure. It wasn't about delivery. It was about belief.

She was right. I did know the answer.

But I wasn't owning it. I wasn't speaking from a place of conviction. I was still scared of sounding wrong, still unsure if my voice deserved to be heard.

That day taught me something I couldn't learn from any textbook or YouTube video: Confidence isn't about perfection. It's about believing in your own voice especially when you feel small.

Since then, every time I prepare for a talk, whether it's a small classroom or a TEDx stage, I go back to that moment. I remind myself: You don't need to be the best speaker in the room. You just need to speak about something you fiercely believe in. People won't always remember your grammar or your gestures, but they'll remember how you made them feel.

And when you speak with belief, people feel it.

Why Your Voice Grows in Motion, Not in Theory

Even after speaking on stages, I still went back to practicing in front of mirrors. That I still said yes to university talks, not just to teach, but to train.

Because speaking well is not a one-time thing. It's a lifelong habit.

I still fumble sometimes. I still feel my voice tremble when the topic is personal. I still check my pacing, listen to my tone, and ask myself: *Maganda kaya yung speech ko? May natutunan kaya sila?*

There's this illusion that once you've achieved something, spoken on a big stage, hit a milestone, you're done. But the truth is, speaking confidently is something I have to choose and rebuild every time I open my mouth.

You don't learn it by watching.

You learn it by doing.

You can memorize techniques, frameworks, or formulas, but none of them will feel natural until you try them for yourself. Until you mess up a few times. A lot of times. Until you learn how your voice sounds when it's steady and when it shakes.

And that's the part no one can do for you.

Yes, people can teach you outlines. You can study how to build a strong hook, how to pause for effect, how to use gestures, and those tools are powerful.

But confidence? Style? Presence?

That's something only practice can teach you.

That's why I kept saying yes to opportunities, even the small ones. That's why I kept speaking even when I wasn't sure if I did well. Because growth doesn't happen in your head. It happens when you move.

You don't need a viral moment. You just need to show up.

Speak in front of your friend. Answer one question in class. Film one 60-second video. That's how it starts.

And every time I speak, whether it's for 2 people or 1,200, I remember that what makes a good speaker isn't perfection. It's presence.

So speak, even if you're scared. Practice, even if you're unsure. Show up, even if you're not ready. Because you don't become a speaker by waiting.

You become one by speaking.

Here's your reminder:

Hindi mo kailangan maging sigurado sa lahat. Ang mahalaga, nagsimula ka kahit kinakabahan ka.

Key Takeaways:

- You can practice public speaking anywhere, not just on stage.
- Feedback accelerates your growth more than isolated practice.
- Practicing while scared builds courage and muscle memory.
- Purposeful practice matters. Focus on clarity and connection.
- Start where you are, *kahit kabado*. Pursue progress over perfection.

Kailan Mo ‘To Susubukan?

Based on what you’ve learned in this chapter, think about how you can fit short speaking practice sessions into your daily routine. Also, consider small, courageous actions you can take each day to boost your confidence in public speaking. Write your plan below, and commit to putting it into action over the next 30 days.

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Kahit Kabado, Gawin Mo ‘To

Choose a random impromptu speaking topic and talk about it for 1–2 minutes in front of a trusted friend. Afterward, ask your friend for honest feedback on your delivery, structure, and clarity. Reflect on their suggestions and apply the feedback the next time you speak.

Now It's Your Turn. Kahit Kabado.

You've made it to the end of this book, but this isn't the end of your journey.

Buying this book wasn't just an act of support. It was a promise to yourself: **"I want to get better at public speaking."** Not just to read about it. But to actually do it. And that's exactly what I want to help you with next.

That's why I created the 30-Day #KahitKabado Speaking Challenge.

This challenge is my personal invitation to you to start showing up.

Here's how it works:

- Record 1 60-second video a day for 30 days.
- Use the speaking prompts I've prepared for you.
- It's better if I can see at least half of your body in the frame, so I can observe your body language too.
- No overthinking. No editing. Just raw, real, and you.

Post it with the hashtag **#KahitKabado** and tag me **@gianna.abao** on any social media platform.

I'll be watching, cheering you on, and sharing the first seven prompts on TikTok so others can join. After the 30 days, feel free to keep going with more questions. And yes, I'll be doing duets on TikTok and giving feedback on all platforms to help you grow.

To the introverts reading this, yes, especially you.

I've seen so many of you quietly join my community channel on Facebook and Instagram, and I want to remind you: Some of the best, most powerful speakers I know are introverts. Why? Because they speak with depth.

So whether you're an introvert, ambivert, or extrovert, this challenge is for you.

Kahit Kabado: 30 Confidence-Building Questions

- Day 1: What's one thing you used to be scared to say out loud, but finally did?
- Day 2: How do you define confidence today?
- Day 3: When was the last time you did something *kahit kabado*?
- Day 4: What's a misconception people have about you and what's the truth?
- Day 5: What do you wish more people understood about being quiet or shy?
- Day 6: Tell me about a time your voice made an impact.
- Day 7: What's one fear you're learning to outgrow?
- Day 8: When do you feel most confident?

- Day 9: What would you say to your 15-year-old self who was afraid to speak?
- Day 10: Describe a moment you felt judged. How did you handle it?
- Day 11: What's one thing you've been wanting to say, but keep holding back?
- Day 12: What does "owning your voice" mean to you?
- Day 13: How do you calm yourself before speaking or performing?
- Day 14: What's a speech, talk, or video that inspired you and why?
- Day 15: What's your pep talk to yourself when you feel like backing out?
- Day 16: What's something people-pleasing taught you and what did it cost you?
- Day 17: What kind of speaker do you want to become?
- Day 18: Share one small win from this week that you're proud of.
- Day 19: What advice would you give to someone who feels like they're not ready?
- Day 20: What's something you've done even when it scared you?
- Day 21: How do you want people to feel after hearing you speak?
- Day 22: What's a topic you could talk about for hours?
- Day 23: What limiting belief are you trying to let go of?
- Day 24: What's the bravest thing you've said in front of people?
- Day 25: How do you deal with overthinking before a presentation?
- Day 26: What's something about your voice that you're learning to love?
- Day 27: How does it feel to show up as your full self?
- Day 28: What does "progress" mean to you right now?
- Day 29: What would you tell someone who feels like their voice doesn't matter?
- Day 30: What did you learn about yourself through this 30-day challenge?

You don't need to start perfect.

You just need to start.

Today. Right where you are. With the voice you have now.

Let's build a brave community of Filipino voices.

Isa-isang kwento. Kahit kabado.

Want to go deeper with me?

I'm opening solo coaching slots, group circles, and launching a mini-course this August.

Join the waitlist and get exclusive updates by scanning the QR Code.



Kwento Mo, Kahit Kabado

Congratulations on finishing the 30-day challenge. But remember, our learning doesn't stop here.

In fact, this is just the beginning.

Now, I want to take you one step further.

It's time to bring your voice beyond the screen.

Out of the notebook.

And into real life.

Whether you're in school, at work, or facing something personal, ask yourself: What's one moment this week when you chose to speak up even if your voice shook?

Maybe you finally answered a recitation. Maybe you spoke up in a meeting. Maybe you introduced yourself with confidence for the first time.

Whatever it was, it counts.

This book isn't the end of your journey. It's your launchpad.

Let our *Kahit Kabado* Community be your safe space and accountability circle.

- Submit your story anonymously
- Share your learnings, wins, or fears
- Let us celebrate your brave moment with you

Scan the QR code and send in your entry.

We'll feature select stories (anonymously) to inspire more Filipinos to speak up. *Kahit kabado*.

Because confidence isn't about being the loudest in the room. It's about choosing to speak, even when your voice shakes.

Your learning doesn't end here.

It starts here. *Kahit kabado*.



About the Author

Gia Abao is a Filipino writer, speaker, and content creator known for helping Filipinos find their voice even when their voice shakes.

After overcoming her own fear of public speaking, Gia built a platform that now reaches over 2.4 million Filipinos across TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, where she creates content on confidence, communication, and personal growth.

Her work has been featured by Toastmasters International, TEDxYouth@DLSU, and top organizations and media outlets including Philippine Star, Manila Standard, NYLON Manila, and WhenInManila. She has spoken to thousands, both online and in person, about breaking through self-doubt, especially for young Filipinos who feel unheard, underestimated, or afraid to speak up.



Coming This July & August: Your Next Brave Step

Gia is launching her signature coaching program and confidence course, designed for students, professionals, and content creators who want to:

- **Mini-Course this August:** Bite-sized lessons to help you speak with heart, even when you're scared
- **Solo Coaching:** Personalized 1-on-1 sessions for targeted feedback, clarity, and practice

For bookings and collaborations, email:
work@giaabao.com

Join the Kahit Kabado Confidence Hub

A safe, supportive space for public speaking and personal growth. Scan the QR code to join us, because confidence doesn't have to start loud. It just has to start.



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Further Readings and TED Talks You'll Love

Books

- “Talk Like TED” by Carmine Gallo
 - Analyzes the best TED speakers and explains what makes talks memorable.
- “The Art of Public Speaking” by Dale Carnegie
 - A timeless foundation in persuasive, engaging communication.
- “Quiet” by Susan Cain
 - Perfect for introverts trying to find power in their quiet voices.
- “The Charisma Myth” by Olivia Fox Cabane
 - Teaches you how to build presence, power, and warmth to become more compelling in any room.
- “Captivate” by Vanessa Van Edwards
 - A science-backed guide to human behavior, this book shows how to make great first impressions, connect quickly, and leave a lasting impact
- “Cues” by Vanessa Van Edwards
 - A deeper dive into nonverbal communication

TED Talks to Watch

- “Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are” by Amy Cuddy
 - Learn how "power posing" and body language can boost confidence before a big talk.
- “The Power of Introverts” by Susan Cain
 - A reminder that quiet people have powerful ideas
- “The Skill of Self Confidence” by Dr. Ivan Joseph
 - A powerful talk on how self-confidence is not something you're born with. It's something you build.
- “How to Speak So That People Want to Listen” by Julian Treasure
 - Practical techniques on tone, pace, and intention. Great for learning how to hook any audience.