

# Need a visual aid? You're sitting on it!



By [Douglas Kruger](#)

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Considering which anatomical part we park on them, chairs are one of the most venerable oratory tools in the universe. I'd go so far as to say, of all props and visual aids available to you, the humble chair, and not Bill Gates' little programme, is the ultimate.

For starters, just about every venue has them. Next, they are so versatile and can be used for so many purposes, that they really are the 'go-to' prop when there's nothing else available. If you're just a little creative, o speaker, you can work wonders with a chair.

Let me give you some examples:

Professional speaker Robin Banks (Yes, that really is his name, not his occupation), pulls a chair around the stage behind him to illustrate the drudgery of hanging on to past issues while trying to move forward in life. Every time his on-stage character develops a new problem, he adds another chair, until he's pulling a mountainous stack of them across the stage. After sufficiently building the tension, he simply lets go of the chairs when delivering his key point, which is, "Let it go!"

## The multipurpose chair

Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking, Randy Harvey, used a chair alternately as a car, a rock, his mother sitting on a couch and then a hospital bed, in his championship winning speech. For each illustration, he would come back to the chair and just 'turn it into' the person or item he was talking about. It was all done so naturally that not only did you not question the use of a chair as a person, but you barely even noticed. It just worked. The chair simply was whatever he was talking about.

One of the most emotive uses of a chair I've ever witnessed was by Canadian speaker J.A. Gamache, who spoke about his uncle who took ill. He stroked the chair as though it were the head of his dying uncle. Then, with the line, "I'll never forget the day he passed away," J.A. gently lowered the chair down backwards, until it was lying on its back on the stage. He did this in perfect silence, then stood looking at the chair. There was, I promise you, not a dry eye in the auditorium. The effect was magnificent.

If there is no other prop or visual aid available to you, use a chair.

## Three cheers for the chair

You can stand on it for drama. You can sit on it for intimacy. You can use it as a substitute for just about anything as you tell a story or deliver an illustration. You can drag it, pick it up, or get audience members to sit on it; you can hurl it, spin it, tip it over, sit on it, rub it, stroke it, buy it dinner, take it home to meet your parents... You get the idea.

The simple act of standing on a chair can also serve to heighten the intensity of a segment of your speaking. I sometimes use a story-illustration about performing squats at my local gym. For no reason other than to heighten the drama, I stand on a chair while explaining how squats are done. In the same way that varying your voice tone prevents you from sounding monotonous, the occasional rise on a chair adds movement and visual drama to your body language.

And so, here is my challenge to you: The next time you speak, suppress that reflex action to boot up PowerPoint. The Dark Side is strong, I know, but resist it!

Could you be a little more creative? Could you think laterally? Is it possible, just possible, that the greatest prop ever bequeathed on you as an orator is the one currently helping you to defy gravity? The humble chair has ever held you up. It won't let you down!

## ABOUT DOUGLAS KRUGER

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