

Making a Presentation

Practice Guide



Presentations are a method of communicating a message, idea or argument to an audience. This might be one-on-one or to a group, in person or via the internet or another medium.

Here are some tips for delivering successful presentations.

Plan well and be organised

Start planning your presentation as early as possible by brainstorming your goals and writing down the key points that you want to communicate to your audience. Find out how much time you have to talk and decide whether you are going to allocate any time for questions or discussion. Think about who your audience is going to be and how receptive they're going to be to what you have to say. Decide how you aim to engage your audience and whether you require any special resources or equipment.

In the days leading up to your presentation eat well, do some exercise and get plenty of sleep to help you feel refreshed and energised. On the day of your presentation avoid alcohol and minimise your caffeine intake. Drink plenty of water and eat some complex carbohydrates such as apricots and nuts as these are known to help with memory recall.

Have concrete goals

Before you begin preparing your presentation, determine the goals you want to achieve. Is your presentation to inform, educate, entertain or help the audience make a decision?

It can be helpful to write down your goals by completing these sentences:

- The audience will learn...
- The audience will decide...
- The audience will change...

Once you have clarity about the expected outcome of your presentation, you can then think about how you are going to achieve your goal in the time you have available.

If possible, once you have determined your goals and presentation approach, ask a trustworthy friend or colleague to listen to your presentation and give you some constructive feedback. This will help you refine the presentation and ensure you are speaking with clarity and conviction.

Know your audience

Never overlook the importance of knowing your audience. You need to understand your audience's needs, interests, expectations and levels of understanding. If you understand your audience, you can tailor your content to give them specifically what they want, need and expect. The best way to achieve success in a presentation is by meeting your audience's needs or solving a problem they might have.

Having a clear understanding of your audience also allows you to anticipate and prepare for any questions you may need to answer.

Be attentive to the audience and engage them

To engage your audience, you not only have to have an interesting topic, you also need to use a variety of strategies to keep the audience's attention as you progress through your presentation. Effective strategies include changing your tone of voice and your speaking volume, using silence and pauses, asking the audience questions and encouraging them to make comments at appropriate points. Using PowerPoint or other visual resources such as a whiteboard or handouts can also build audience engagement and participation.

Throughout your presentation, look for people's reaction to what you are saying. If you see people nodding or smiling then this is your permission to keep going, but if you notice concerned looks or puzzled faces, then slow your presentation down and if possible invite people to ask questions or make comments. If you are not attentive to your audience, they will feel left behind and may even stop listening altogether.

Engagement strategies also include using stories, humour, case studies, analogies, and asking the audience to participate in a group discussion or brainstorm. When people have to physically move or discuss a topic with other people, they are forced to refocus their attention on your presentation.

Your body language is very important – it can either sabotage your presentation and make people feel uncomfortable, or it can help you gain rapport with your audience and enhance your presentation. Powerful positive body language messages are sent subconsciously to your audience when you relax, make eye contact with people, and act as if you are having a genuine one-on-one conversation with them. If you do these things, your audience will feel that you are genuinely connecting with them and that you care about what they are thinking and feeling.

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Manage your anxiety and fear

Feeling anxious is perfectly normal. Everyone, even experienced speakers, have some anxiety when speaking in front of a group of people because some anxiety makes you alert. Too much anxiety, however, can make you look and feel awkward. The best way to deal with excessive anxiety is to acknowledge your concerns and come to the meeting prepared for success.

Never apologise for being nervous because most of the time your nervousness is not obvious to the audience. Think positive and stay confident. Your nervousness will decrease if you take your focus off yourself and focus your attention on the audience and what you want to say and achieve.

Anxiety can have physical effects on your body such as feeling short of breath, sweating and having a dry mouth. If this happens to you, then take control of your anxiety by taking slow deep breaths, talking more slowly, wearing suitable clothing and taking sips of water.

If you are still feeling anxious then remember, your brain is the boss. If your brain thinks fear, your body will begin to be afraid. So take control of what you are thinking and make a list of everything you are grateful for: for example, for having the opportunity to speak, for the opportunity to develop your presentation skills, and the chance to achieve your goals.

If you are anxious about blanking out, then arrive at the presentation with a strategy in case this situation occurs. Do not let it panic you, stay calm and simply take a pause – your audience might not even notice that you have forgotten what you were going to say. To ‘restart’ your memory, physically move your body, then either repeat the last sentence or phrase or jump ahead to the next slide or point that you do remember.

Manage your time well

Good time keeping is very important because the delivery of your presentation needs to be well-paced to achieve the best impact. Presentations that appear disorganised and rushed do not engage an audience. When you are planning the presentation, be generous with your time and be prepared

to be flexible, so you can cut out some of your presentation if you notice you are running out of time.

The best way to show your audience respect is to start on time and finish on time. Unless you are a very experienced presenter, always ask someone to time keep for you so you don't have to keep looking at the clock. When you have finished your presentation, conclude with a simple overview of your key points and/or an interesting remark, an appropriate punch line or a reflective question. Leave your audience feeling satisfied and thinking positively. Then thank your audience for listening.

Tips for a presenter

- Be prepared.
- Be energetic.
- Be clear.
- Think positive.
- Be flexible.
- Stay relaxed.
- Engage your audience.

An effective presentation structure



Tell them what you're going to tell them. Build a relationship with your audience and put them at ease.

Communicate your key points or ideas. Use questions, resources and visuals to help your audience stay focused and interested.

Tell them what you've told them. Highlight your key points and finish by summarising the decision you would like your audience to make or the information you'd like them to remember most.

Ruth Knight is a researcher, change facilitator and trainer. Ruth helps organisations to improve their organisational and workforce performance.

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