



UNDERSTANDING YOUR IMPACT

HOW GOOD ARE YOUR PRESENTATION SKILLS?

How do you feel when you have to make a presentation?

Are you well prepared and relaxed, confident that your performance will have the desired impact on your audience?

Or is the thought of standing on a podium, holding a microphone, enough to give you stage fright?

Enjoy it or not, presenting – in some form – is usually a part of business. Whether you get up in front of formal audiences on a regular basis, or you simply have to make your voice heard in a meeting, you're using presentation skills.

Many believe that good presenters are born, not made. This is simply not true. Sure, some people are more relaxed and comfortable speaking in front of others, but everyone can learn the skills and techniques they need to increase their level of confidence and performance when presenting.

From sales pitches to training lectures, good presentation and public speaking skills are key to many influential roles in today's business world. The good news about presenting is that you can improve with practice.

Becoming a Better Presenter

Effective presentations are a mixture of a variety of elements. You have to know what your audience wants. You need to prepare good, interesting, engaging content. You must be confident in presenting the material, you have to know how to manage your environment successfully, and you need to make sure that your message has maximum impact.

Balancing all four elements is no easy task. And, when combined with the natural anxiety often felt before giving presentations, it's no wonder that many people struggle with this skill. In fact, fear of public speaking is extremely common.

However, you don't have to remain fearful and stressed by the thought of giving a presentation. With the right tools and material, along with planning and preparation, you can present with energy and confidence.

Let's now look in detail at those four key elements of effective presentations:

1. Understanding your audience.
2. Preparing your content.
3. Delivering confidently.
4. Controlling the environment.



Understanding Your Audience

The success of most presentations is generally judged on how the audience responds. You may think you did a great job, but unless your audience agrees with you, that may not be the case. Before you even begin putting your PowerPoint slides together, the first thing you need to do is understand what your audience wants. Try following these steps:

- Determine who the members of the audience are.
- Find out what they want and expect from your presentation. What do they need to learn? Do they have entrenched attitudes or interests that you need to respect? And what do they already know that you don't have to repeat?
- Create an outline for your presentation and ask for advance feedback on your proposed content.

When what you say is what your audience wants or needs to hear, then you'll probably receive positive reinforcement throughout your presentation. If you see nods and smiles, or hear murmurs of agreement, for example, then this will motivate you to keep going and do a great job.

When your audience is satisfied, it doesn't matter if your delivery wasn't absolutely perfect. The primary goal of the people listening to your presentation is to get the information they need. When that happens, you've done a good job. Of course, you want to do a great job, not just a good job - and that's where the rest of the tips can help.

Preparing Your Content

The only way to satisfy your audience's needs and expectations is to deliver the content they want. That means understanding what to present, and how to present it. Bear in mind that if you give the right information in the wrong sequence, this may leave the audience confused, frustrated, or bored.

If you provide the information in a well-structured format, and you include various techniques to keep the audience engaged and interested, then they'll probably remember what you said - and they'll remember you.

There are a variety of ways to structure your content, depending on the type of presentation you'll give. Here are some principles that you can apply:

- **Identify a few key points** - To help the audience retain the messages you're giving them, use the **chunking** principle to organize your information into five to seven key points.
- **Don't include every detail** - Good presentations inspire the audience to learn more and ask further statements to maximize their understanding of the issue.
- **Use an outline** - At the beginning, tell your audience what you intend to cover, and let them know what to expect. This helps build anticipation and interest from the start.
- **Start and end strongly** - Capture people's interest as soon as you begin and leave them with a message they won't forget. It's tempting to put all of your effort into the main body of the presentation. However, if you don't get people's



attention at the start, they'll probably lose interest, and not really hear the rest anyway.

- **Use examples** - Where possible, use lots of examples to support your points. A lecture is often the least interesting and engaging form of presentation. Look for ways to liven things up by telling stories, talking about real-life examples, and using metaphors to engage your audience fully.

A special type of presentation is one that seeks to persuade. **Monroe's Motivated Sequence**, consisting of five steps, gives you a framework for developing content for this kind of presentation:

1. Get the attention of your audience - Use an interesting 'hook' or opening point, like a shocking statistic. Be provocative and stimulating, not boring or calm.
2. Create a need - Convince the audience there's a problem, explain how it affects them - and persuade them that things need to change.
3. Define your solution - Explain what you think needs to be done.
4. Describe a detailed picture of success (or failure) - Give the audience a vision; something they can see, hear, taste, and touch.
5. Ask the audience to do something right away - Get the audience involved right from the start. Then it's usually much easier to keep them engaged and active in your cause.

To brush up on your skills of persuasion, look at **The Rhetorical Triangle**. This tool asks you to consider your communication from three perspectives: those of the writer, the audience, and the context. It's a method that builds credibility and ensures that your arguments are logical.

Delivering Confidently

Even the best content can be ineffective if your presentation style contradicts or detracts from your message. Many people are nervous when they present, so this will probably affect your delivery. But it's the major distractions that you want to avoid. As you build confidence, you can gradually eliminate the small and unconstructive habits you may have. These tips may help you:

- **Practice to build confidence** - Some people think that if you practice too much, your speech will sound rehearsed and less genuine. Don't necessarily memorize your presentation but be so familiar with the content that you're able to speak fluently and comfortably and adjust as necessary.
- **Be flexible** - This is easier to do if you're comfortable with the material. Don't attempt to present something you just learned the previous night. You want to know your material well enough to answer statements. And, if you don't know something, just admit it, and commit to finding the answer.
- **Welcome statements from the audience** - This is a sign that a presenter knows what he or she is talking about. It builds audience confidence, and people are much more likely to trust what you say and respect your message.
- **Use slides and other visual aids** - These can help you deliver a confident presentation. The key point here is to learn how much visual information to give the audience, and yet not distract them from what you're saying.
- **Keep your visuals simple and brief** - Don't use too many pictures, charts, or graphs. Your slides should summarize or draw attention to one or two items each. And don't try to fit your whole presentation onto your slides. If the slides



cover every single detail, then you've probably put too much information on them. Slides should give the overall message, and then the audience should know where to look for supporting evidence.

- **Manage your stress** – Confidence has a lot to do with managing your stress levels. If you feel particularly nervous and anxious, then those emotions will probably show. They're such strong feelings that you can easily become overwhelmed, which can affect your ability to perform effectively. A little nervousness is useful because it can build energy. But that energy may quickly turn negative if nerves build to the point where you can't control them.

If you have anxiety before a presentation, try some of these stress management tools:

- Use **physical relaxation techniques**, like deep breathing and visualization, to calm your body and ease your tension.
- Use **imagery** to help keep calm and visualize yourself delivering a successful presentation.
- Learn strategies to **build your self-confidence** in general. The more assured you are about yourself and your abilities, the better you'll feel when you get up in front of people and say what you want to say.

When you present with confidence and authority, your audience will likely pay attention and react to you as someone who's worth listening to. So 'pretend' if you need to, by turning your nervousness into creative and enthusiastic energy.

For other tips on delivering confidently, see [Delivering Great Presentations](#), [Speaking to an Audience](#), [Managing Presentation Nerves](#), and our Bite-Sized Training session [Giving Better Presentations](#).

Controlling the Environment

While much of the outside environment is beyond your control, there are still some things you can do to reduce potential risks to your presentation.

- **Practice in the presentation room** – This forces you to become familiar with the room and the equipment. It will not only build your confidence, but also help you identify sources of risk. Do you have trouble accessing your PowerPoint file? Does the microphone reach the places you want to walk? Can you move the podium? Are there stairs that might cause you to trip? These are the sorts of issues you may discover and resolve by doing one or two practice presentations.
- **Do your own setup** – Don't leave this to other people. Even though you probably want to focus on numerous other details, it's a good idea not to delegate too much of the preparation to others. You need the hands-on experience to make sure nothing disastrous happens at the real event.
- **Test your timing** – When you practice, you also improve your chances of keeping to time. You get a good idea how long each part of the presentation will actually take, and this helps you plan how much time you'll have for statements and other audience interactions.



Members of the audience want you to respect their time. If you end your presentation on time or early, this can make a huge, positive impression on them. When speakers go over their allowed time, they may disrupt the whole schedule of the event and/or cause the audience unnecessary inconvenience. Be considerate and stick to your agenda as closely as possible.

Key Points

Presenting doesn't have to be scary, or something you seek to avoid. Find opportunities to practice the tips and techniques discussed above and become more confident in your ability to present your ideas to an audience. We all have something important to say, and sometimes it takes more than a memo or report to communicate it. You owe it to yourself, and your organization, to develop the skills you need to present your ideas clearly, purposefully, engagingly, and confidently.

NOTE: This assessment has not been validated and is intended for illustrative purposes only. It is just one of many that help you evaluate your abilities in a wide range of important career skills.



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