

# **The Basics of Giving Presentations**

Giving presentations and speeches is not just a matter of getting up on a stage and talking to a group of people. There is a great deal of important behind-the-scenes preparation that you must master in order to really impress an audience. Even “naturals” use these techniques. Learning them will improve your speaking technique. Mastering them will grab you listeners like never before.

## **Writing Your Speech**

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### **1. Identify Your Audience**

Who are you speaking to. Knowing more about your audience will allow you to tailor the presentation to their needs and interests. Remember: you don't want to tell them what YOU want them to hear; you want to tell them what THEY want to hear.

### **2. Identify Your Goals**

What is the purpose of your presentation? Do you want to move your audience to action? Are you just providing them with information? Do you want them to agree with your point of view? Although you must keep their interests and needs in mind to capture and keep their attention, you still have to accomplish your own goals. This is only possible if you make those goals clear.

### **3. Start Off Strong**

You literally have but a few seconds to prove to your audience that you are worth listening to. Don't start off giving them a self-introduction or telling them what you are going to talk about. Don't start off with a joke. Instead, start with something that will peak their interest. Ask them a question about something that concerns them. Give them a bit of surprising information related to their needs or interests. Tell them a story.

### **4. Keep It Simple**

It is more difficult to understand and retain spoken information than we realize. Long sentences and big words only serve to boost the speaker's own ego. Use easy to understand language and narrow your information down to three or four main points.

### **5. Make It Memorable**

We forget more than we remember. The statistics vary, but all scientists agree that forgetting is what we do best. If your audience forgets what you told them, your time and theirs has just been wasted. The most important part of developing your presentation is to factor in elements that will make it easy to remember.

- a. Stories are easy to remember. Try to think of stories that are pertinent to the content and will be interesting to your audience
- b. Images are easy to remember. If you are using a PowerPoint presentation or a projector, find strong images that relate to the content.
- c. Emotions affect memory. The stronger the emotional reaction, the stronger the memory will be. Shock, excitement, fear, surprise, expectation and happiness are all useful and can be achieved with stories, images, sounds, and facts.

- d. Words are not as easy to remember. Long lists of facts and lots of reading material in your PowerPoint or in their handouts will be more difficult to remember. Take-home materials can, of course, have more detailed explanations for further reference, but won't be useful if your presentation isn't memorable to start with.
6. Edit for Mistakes

Your presentation can have all the elements of success and still lose your audience with the wrong facts. A big part of giving a successful presentation is being able to create trust in a short period of time. Having the correct facts is crucial. Although to a lesser degree, your language will also come under scrutiny when giving a presentation in a foreign language. Your listeners will forgive a certain degree of mistakes, but will give up listening altogether if your grammar is difficult to follow. When possible, get a third party to check your presentation for mistakes.
7. Edit for Success

Make a checklist and go back over your presentation while checking off the necessary elements for your presentation. When possible, get a third party's feedback.

## **Rehearsing Your Speech**

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1. Memorization

The less you look at your notes and the more you look at your audience, the stronger your connection to them will be. Keep in mind that it is actually better to remember the elements of your speech rather than to memorize it word for word, which often causes speakers to sound stiff and mechanical. One important tool for memorization is index cards, which help with remembering the main points without becoming a "crutch" to read from.
2. Make It Real

As much as possible, rehearse in as close a situation as possible to the real situation in which you will be giving the presentation. Rehearse out loud instead of in your mind. This will help you to know what parts of the presentation are difficult to pronounce. It will allow you to gauge the actual time that the presentation takes. Rehearse in front of people instead of on your own. At the very least, get one friend or coworker to listen. This not only helps allay nervousness, but can be an invaluable source of advice and feedback. You can also reduce nervousness by imagining yourself speaking in front of a large group. Close your eyes and do the speech in front of an imaginary auditorium filled with people.
3. Feedback

It is very difficult to view your own work critically. Both when writing your speech and practicing the presentation, it is always best to get the advice of others. And be prepared to listen to feedback with an open mind. It is not always easy to take constructive criticism, but it is very important to recognize that you are looking at your presentation subjectively while most other people will be giving you their objective opinion.

#### 4. Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Very simply, the more you practice, the better you will get.

### **Giving Your Speech**

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#### 1. Audience Connection

Many great speeches are completely wasted by people who cannot connect to their audience. The greatest skill of a successful speaker is the ability to make a room full of people feel as if the speaker is speaking to them personally, on a one-on-one basis.

##### a. Eye Contact

Make eye contact with individual people in various different areas of the audience. If you have memorized your speech, make sure to move your eyes around the room, stopping at individuals as you go. If you are reading from your notes, make sure to look up at a different area when you look up. And remember, if you are reading from your notes, spend more time looking up at the audience than you spend looking down at your notes

##### b. Space and Distance

The distance you are from your listeners affects your connection to them. Even if only a little bit, moving towards them and leaning towards them will create a better connection. The worst thing you can do is hide behind a podium for the entire presentation.

#### 2. Non-verbal communication

People respond very strongly to non-verbal communication techniques. The majority of emotional content of communication is actual found not in the words but in the way they are spoken, the facial expression, and the body language of speaker. Understanding non-verbal communication and being aware of your non-verbal communication is a very important part of making your speech successful. Posture is part of this. Gestures are part of this. Expression is part of this. Make sure that your non-verbal communication relays the same message that your words do.

#### 3. Delivery

Not too fast, not too slow. Not too loud, not too quiet. Just like Goldilocks, Audiences are very picky, and they will only pay attention to presentations that are “just right.” Make sure your voice is strong and authoritative without being overbearing. Make sure you are speaking smoothly in order to convey confidence, but don’t start speaking so fast that your audience can’t keep up with what you are saying.

#### 4. Visual aids

Use images and visual aids as a technique to help your audience remember your message. Do not, however, over-use such visual aids. At the most, they should support your speech and never become the star of the show. This is especially true of PowerPoint presentations. Do not overload your audience’s concentration with dozens of slide or, worse, slides filled with written material.

## Honing Your Skills

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### 1. Voice

The voice is a muscle and must be trained just like any other muscle. Taking a little time each day to project your voice and work on different tones will give your voice the flexibility and strength you need to give more captivating presentations. Voice work should start with various types of warm-ups and then move into training with actual material. Children's books are an excellent practice tool as they allow for tonal variety as you create different voices to represent different characters.

### 2. Non-verbal Communication

Excellent presenters are also great actors. They have a wide range of facial expressions and body language options that they can use to support their spoken message. This skill also requires practice. Acting out different emotions is a great training tool. Another way to practice is to imitate other people – from TV, magazines and real life.

### 3. Language Skills

#### a. Pronunciation

One of the most difficult aspect of a foreign language is the pronunciation. All languages have their particular idiosyncrasies and picking those up takes practice. Three important keys of improving pronunciation are: working slowly to get the mouth used to the new sounds; working constantly to develop correct speaking habits; and working with someone to get good feedback on your pronunciation.

#### b. Usage

Usage refers to the grammar and vocabulary of a language. Improving foreign language usage is an ongoing task. The better you get at the language, the easier it is to forget the need for improvement. The best way to continue improving is to always be aware of how native speakers use the language and to incorporate that into your own speaking style.

## **Presentation Success Checklist 1**

Keep these things in mind while you write, edit, and rehearse your presentation. Focus on these skills and techniques when practicing to be a better speaker.

1. First impressions are **EVERYTHING**
2. Create a goal
3. Make your speech easy to understand
4. Make your speech easy to remember
5. Use your voice effectively
6. Use your face and body effectively
7. Use your space effectively
8. Talk **to** and talk **with** your audience. Never talk **at** them.
9. “Listen” to your audience
10. Really smile and really make eye contact

## **Presentation Success Checklist 2**

- ☐ Did you edit your presentation for grammar and usage?
- ☐ Did you create a simple, easy to follow presentation?
- ☐ Did you keep the audience's needs in mind while creating your presentation?
- ☐ Do you demonstrate to the audience that your presentation meets their needs?
- ☐ Does your presentation show your passion for what you are talking about?
- ☐ Did you rehearse smiling, making eye-contact, and connecting with your audience?
- ☐ Do you have a strong start to grab their attention from the beginning?
- ☐ Did you include stories?
- ☐ Did you practice using your presentation tools effectively?
- ☐ Voice?
- ☐ Body?
- ☐ Space?
- ☐ Media?
- ☐ Is your presentation more visual than auditory?
- ☐ Did you actually practice the full presentation?
- ☐ Did you film yourself and review the video?
- ☐ Did you practice relaxation techniques?