

Presentation Skills

1. Smile, don't shake

Drinking four cups of coffee on the morning of the presentation may just stimulate your nerves! Doing stretching and breathing exercises both the night before and that morning would help to energise and calm you. By visualising how you will feel while delivering a successful presentation you will approach it in a positive frame of mind.

2. Prepare and anticipate

Consider the audience and what would be important to each individual. Anticipate and answer the key concerns of every individual and ensure that nobody is left with nagging doubts. Don't underestimate how clear and direct you need to be in order to get your message across. A logical structure is essential. Highlight when one section or point is closing and 'signpost' the next one. A final recap of the main points at the end will help to emphasise the message and reinforce it in the audience's memory.

3. Make an impact, but still be yourself!

Consider what kind of an impact you want to make. Do you want to be seen as witty or knowledgeable? Are there ways you could change your own behaviour to create the desired effect? Think about those people whose impact on others you admire and try to isolate what they do to achieve this.

4. Let your body do the talking

Watch out for your body language, for example sometimes folk fiddle with their watch strap when they are describing something they are a little uncertain about. We all have different mannerisms however we need to be aware of what message they are delivering! Non-verbal language accounts for more than 90% of the impact you make, so be aware of any habits or gestures you make that could highlight lack of confidence. Divide the room up mentally into segments and look at a friendly person in each one for a few seconds before moving on to the next segment. When you have moved around the whole room, return to the beginning and look at someone different in the first segment. The way you dress also has an important impact on an audience. It can influence how professional and credible you appear, so think about it carefully.

5. Am I loud enough?

Projecting your voice to the back of the room is critical - no one near the front is ever going to complain that you were too loud. If you have the opportunity, ask a colleague to go to the back to listen to you. Think about how small children talk and describe things they are excited about. The pitch of their voices varies dramatically and their energy and sense of surprise always come across. Experiment by reading a short piece of text and recording your rendition. What may feel like a huge variation in pitch to you will sound like normal, but engaging, speech to the listener. A pause of a few seconds may feel like a lifetime, but it will give the audience time to absorb what you are saying.

6. Preparing spontaneity

Prompt/cue cards are useful if you keep to the **rule of five**: five lines per card and five words per line. Resist the urge to look down at your notes as you approach the end of each sentence or section, because this is when you need to look at the audience most, to help emphasise your point. If you are using PowerPoint slides or flipcharts, don't read from them. Keep facing the audience and make sure that your notes will give you all the help you need. If possible, arrange the room to your advantage. If you want the presentation to be interactive, arrange the seating in a circle, a U shape or theatre style, rather than in rows.

7. The clue is in the question

Spend some time anticipating what questions people might ask - and think about the responses. Begin by briefly paraphrasing and reiterating the question. This will give you time to think. If you don't have the relevant information to hand, make clear the need to get back to the questioner after the presentation - then make sure you do. Or consider throwing the question back to the audience by saying something along the lines of "That's a very interesting question. What does everyone else think?"

8. Believe what you say

Your most effective asset is your belief in your message. If you have to include areas in your presentation that you are not comfortable with, make sure that you focus on the positive aspects of these.