**6 presentation skills and how to improve them**

**What are presentation skills?**

Presentation skills are the qualities and abilities you need to [communicate ideas effectively](https://www.betterup.com/blog/why-communication-is-key-to-workplace-and-how-to-improve-skills) and deliver a compelling speech. They influence how you structure a presentation and how an audience receives it. Understanding [body language](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-read-body-language), creating impactful visual aids, and projecting your voice all fall under this umbrella.

A great presentation depends on more than what you say. It’s about how you say it. [Storytelling](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-be-a-good-storyteller), stage presence, and voice projection all shape how well you express your ideas and connect with the audience. These skills do take practice, but they’re worth developing — especially if public speaking makes you nervous.

**The importance of presentation skills**

Engaging a crowd isn’t easy. You may feel anxious to step in front of an audience and have all eyes and ears on you.

But feeling that anxiety doesn’t mean your ideas aren’t worth sharing. Whether you’re giving an inspiring speech or delivering a monthly recap at work, your audience is there to listen to you. Harness that nervous energy and turn it into progress.

Strong presentation skills make it easier to convey your thoughts to audiences of all sizes. They can help you tell a compelling story, [convince people of a pitch](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-pitch-ideas), or teach a group something entirely new to them. And when it comes to the workplace, the strength of your presentation skills could play a part in [getting a promotion](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-get-promoted) or contributing to a new initiative.

**6 presentation skills examples**

To fully understand the impact these skills have on creating a successful presentation, it’s helpful to look at each one individually. Here are six valuable skills you can develop:

**1. Active listening**

[Active listening](https://www.betterup.com/blog/active-listening) is an excellent communication skill for any professional to hone. When you have strong active listening skills, you can listen to others effectively and observe their [nonverbal cues](https://www.betterup.com/blog/types-of-nonverbal-communication). This helps you assess whether or not your audience members are engaged in and understand what you’re sharing.

Great public speakers use active listening to assess the audience’s reactions and adjust their speech if they find it lacks impact. Signs like slouching, negative facial expressions, and roaming [eye contact](https://www.betterup.com/blog/why-is-eye-contact-important) are all signs to watch out for when giving a presentation.

**2. Body language**

If you’re researching presentation skills, chances are you’ve already watched a few notable speeches like [TED Talks](https://www.betterup.com/blog/inspiring-ted-talks) or industry seminars. And one thing you probably noticed is that speakers can capture attention with their body language.

A mixture of eye contact, [hand gestures](https://www.betterup.com/blog/types-of-gestures/), and purposeful pacing makes a presentation more interesting and engaging. If you stand in one spot and don’t move your body, the audience might zone out.

**3. Stage presence**

A great stage presence looks different for everyone. A comedian might aim for more movement and excitement, and a conference speaker might focus their energy on the content of their speech. Although neither is better than the other, both understand their strengths and their audience’s needs.

Developing a stage presence involves finding your own unique [communication style](https://www.betterup.com/blog/communication-styles-in-the-workplace). Lean into your strengths, whether that’s adding [an injection of humor](https://www.betterup.com/blog/humor-in-the-workplace) or asking questions to [make it interactive](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-make-a-presentation-interactive). To give a great presentation, you might even incorporate relevant props or presentation slides.

**4. Storytelling**

According to Forbes, [audiences typically pay attention for about 10 minutes before tuning out](https://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallo/2019/02/28/your-audience-tunes-out-after-10-minutes-heres-how-to-keep-their-attention/). But you can lengthen their attention span by offering a presentation that interests them for longer. Include a narrative they’ll want to listen to, and tell a story as you go along.

Shaping your content to follow a clear narrative can spark your audience’s curiosity and entice them to pay careful attention. You can use anecdotes from your personal or professional life that take your audience along through relevant moments. If you’re pitching a product, you can start with a problem and lead your audience through the stages of how your product provides a solution.

**5. Voice projection**

Although this skill may be obvious, you need your audience to hear what you’re saying. This can be challenging if you’re naturally soft-spoken and struggle to project your voice.

Remember to straighten your posture and [take deep breaths](https://www.betterup.com/blog/mindful-breathing) before speaking, which will help you speak louder and fill the room. If you’re talking into a microphone or participating in a virtual meeting, you can use your regular conversational voice, but you still want to sound confident and self-assured with a strong tone.

If you’re unsure whether everyone can hear you, you can always ask the audience at the beginning of your speech and wait for confirmation. That way, they won’t have to potentially interrupt you later.

Ensuring everyone can hear you also includes your speed and annunciation. It’s easy to speak quickly when nervous, but try to slow down and pronounce every word. Mumbling can make your presentation difficult to understand and pay attention to.

**6. Verbal communication**

Although verbal communication involves your projection and tone, it also covers the language and pacing you use to get your point across. This includes where you choose to place pauses in your speech or the tone you use to emphasize important ideas.

If you’re giving a presentation on [collaboration in the workplace](https://www.betterup.com/blog/collaboration-at-work/), you might start your speech by saying, “There’s something every workplace needs to succeed: teamwork.” By placing emphasis on the word “[teamwork](https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-teamwork),” you give your audience a hint on what ideas will follow.

To further connect with your audience through diction, pay careful attention to who you’re speaking to. The way you talk to your colleagues might be different from how you speak to a group of superiors, even if you’re discussing the same subject. You might use more humor and a conversational tone for the former and more serious, formal diction for the latter.

**How to improve presentation skills**

Everyone has [strengths and weaknesses](https://www.betterup.com/blog/strengths-and-weaknesses) when it comes to presenting. Maybe you’re confident in your use of body language, but your voice projection needs work. Maybe you’re a great storyteller in small group settings, but need to work on your stage presence in front of larger crowds.

The first step to improving presentation skills is pinpointing your gaps and determining which qualities to build upon first. Here are four tips for enhancing your presentation skills:

**1. Build self-confidence**

Confident people know how to speak with authority and share their ideas. Although feeling good about your presentation skills is easier said than done, building confidence is key to helping your audience believe in what you’re saying. Try practicing [positive self-talk](https://www.betterup.com/blog/self-talk) and continuously researching your topic's ins and outs.

If you don’t feel confident on the inside, fake it until you make it. Stand up straight, project your voice, and try your best to appear engaged and excited. Chances are, the audience doesn’t know you’re unsure of your skills — and they don’t need to.

Another tip is to lean into your slideshow, if you’re using one. Create something colorful and interesting so the audience’s eyes fall there instead of on you. And when you feel proud of your slideshow, you’ll be more eager to share it with others, bringing more energy to your presentation.

**2. Watch other presentations**

Developing the soft skills necessary for a [good presentation](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-give-a-good-presentation) can be challenging without seeing them in action. Watch as many as possible to become more familiar with [public speaking skills](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-improve-your-public-speaking) and what makes a great presentation. You could attend events with keynote speakers or view past speeches on similar topics online.

Take a close look at how those presenters use verbal communication and body language to engage their audiences. Grab a notebook and jot down what you enjoyed and your main takeaways. Try to recall the techniques they used to emphasize their main points, whether they used pauses effectively, had interesting visual aids, or told a fascinating story.

**3. Get in front of a crowd**

You don’t need a large auditorium to practice public speaking. There are dozens of other ways to feel confident and develop good presentation skills.

If you’re a natural comedian, consider joining a small stand-up comedy club. If you’re an avid writer, participate in a public poetry reading. Even music and acting can help you feel more comfortable in front of a crowd.

If you’d rather keep it professional, you can still work on your presentation skills in the office. Challenge yourself to participate at least once in every team meeting, or plan and present a project to become more comfortable vocalizing your ideas. You could also speak to your manager about opportunities that flex your public speaking abilities.

**4. Overcome fear**

Many people experience feelings of fear before presenting in front of an audience, whether those feelings appear as a few butterflies or more severe anxiety. Try [grounding yourself](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-ground-yourself) to shift your focus to the present moment. If you’re stuck dwelling on previous experiences that didn’t go well, use those mistakes as learning experiences and focus on what you can improve to do better in the future.

**Tips for dealing with presentation anxiety**

[It’s normal to feel nervous](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-not-be-nervous-for-a-presentation) when sharing your ideas. In fact, according to a report from the Journal of Graduate Medical Education, [public speaking anxiety is prevalent in 15–30% of the general population](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4763377/).

Even though having a fear of public speaking is common, it doesn’t make it easier. You might feel overwhelmed, become stiff, and forget what you were going to say. But although the moment might scare you, there are ways to [overcome the fear](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-overcome-fear-and-anxiety) and put mind over matter.

Use these tactics to reduce your stress when you have to make a presentation:

**1. Practice breathing techniques**

If you experience anxiety often, you’re probably familiar with breathing techniques for [stress relief](https://www.betterup.com/blog/stress-relief). Incorporating these exercises into your daily routine can help you [stop worrying](https://www.betterup.com/blog/worry) and regulate anxious feelings.

Before a big presentation, take a moment alone to practice breathing techniques, ground yourself, and reduce tension. It’s also a good idea to take breaths throughout the presentation to speak slower and [calm yourself down](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-calm-yourself-down).

**2. Get organized**

The more organized you are, the more prepared you’ll feel. Carefully outline all of the critical information you want to use in your presentation, including your main talking points and visual aids, so you don’t forget anything. Use bullet points and visuals on each slide to remind you of what you want to talk about, and create handheld notes to help you stay on track.

**3. Embrace moments of silence**

It’s okay to lose your train of thought. It happens to even the most experienced public speakers once in a while. If your mind goes blank, don’t panic. Take a moment to breathe, gather your thoughts, and refer to your notes to see where you left off. You can drink some water or make a quick joke to ease the silence or regain your footing. And it’s okay to say, “Give me a moment while I find my notes.” Chances are, people understand the position you’re in.

**4. Practice makes progress**

Before presenting, rehearse in front of friends and family members you trust. This gives you the chance to work out any weak spots in your speech and become comfortable communicating out loud. If you want to go the extra mile, ask your makeshift audience to ask a surprise question. This tests your on-the-spot thinking and will prove that you can keep cool when things come up.