



Presentation Skills

Essential [Life Skills](#)

Presenting information clearly and effectively is a key skill in getting your message across. Today, presentation skills are required in almost every field, and most of us are required to give presentations on occasions. While some people take this in their stride, others find it much more challenging.

It is, however, possible to improve your presentation skills with a bit of work. This section of SkillsYouNeed is designed to help.

Many people feel terrified when asked to talk in public, especially to bigger groups. However, these fears can be reduced by good preparation, which will also lay the groundwork for making an effective presentation.

There are Different Types of Presentations, but They're All Presentations

There are any number of occasions when you may be asked to speak in public or to a group of people. They include:

Presenting or making a speech at a conference or event.

Objecting to a planning proposal at a council meeting.

Making a speech at a wedding.

Proposing a vote of thanks to someone at a club or society.

On behalf of a team, saying goodbye and presenting a gift to a colleague who is leaving.

Seeking investment or a loan to help you set up a new business.

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These can all be considered presentations.

They do not, however, all require the same approach. You would not, for example, use PowerPoint to thank a colleague who was leaving. It would be unusual (though it has been done) to use it in a speech at a wedding. However, a conference audience would be somewhat surprised NOT to see slides projected onto a screen.

It follows, therefore, that there is no single set of rules that apply to all presentations. There are, however, some things that every presentation opportunity has in common. These include:

You will present better if you have prepared effectively. This does NOT necessarily mean that you have written out your speech verbatim and rehearsed it until you know it off by heart—although that might work for some people. It does, however, mean that you have to be confident that you are saying the right thing, in the right way, to the right people.

You need to be clear about your audience and your message. Every presentation will be better if you have clearly considered the message that you want or need to convey, and how best to convey it to your audience. These two pieces of information drive your style, structure, content, and use of visual aids.

You must never overrun your allocated time. In other words, don't outstay your welcome. Almost every speech or presentation is better if it is shorter. Nobody minds going for coffee early or finishing before they expected to do so. Everybody minds being held up.

Generally speaking, your audience starts on your side. As a rule, your audience is there (more or less) voluntarily. They have chosen to listen to you, and they want to enjoy your presentation. The occasion is yours to lose.

An Important Point

There is one very important point to remember: if what you're doing or saying is not working, do something else.

One of the worst feelings as a presenter is that you have lost your audience. You know that's happened, but you continue to stumble through your remaining PowerPoint slides for the next 15 minutes, as your audience



checks their phones and wishes it was coffee time. You think you have no choice, but that's not actually true.

When you present, you are in charge of the room. The audience has effectively handed you control and is sitting back waiting for you to do something. You may have prepared a specific talk, but if you see that isn't working, you can always change it. You are, after all, the expert.

You can, for example:

Skip through some slides to a section that they may find more interesting;

Ask your audience whether there is particular information that they were expecting that you are not providing;

Suggest that everyone looks a bit sleepy, and maybe it would be better to start questions early, or have a discussion; or

Ask the audience at the start of the presentation what they are expecting and what they want you to cover. That way, you can tailor the presentation to fit their expectations.

Just as when you are facilitating, you want to help your audience get the most out of your presentation. The best way to do that is to accept feedback—which may include smiles, nods of interest, or people getting their phones out.

Quick Guide to Effective Presentations

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If you need to improve your presentation skills quickly, then a really good place to start is with our **Top Tips for Effective Presentations**.



This will give you some ‘quick wins’ that will help you improve your presentations. If you’re already an experienced presenter, this page should be a useful refresher, or even take your skills from good to great.

Our tips include general ideas about connecting with your audience, information about the importance of voice and body language, and detailed tips about preparing slide-shows.

The most important tip of all, however, is to remember that it's all about your audience.

Keep that in mind, and your presentation skills will almost instantly improve.

If you have more time to develop your presentation skills...

...then the Presentation Skills section of SkillsYouNeed is designed to help.

Our Presentation Skills section is split into two parts.

The first gives you **a step-by-step guide to putting together and delivering a professional and effective presentation.**

The second provides **more detailed information about presenting and communicating in particular circumstances.**

You can either use our step-by-step guide to walk you through the presentation preparation and delivery process, or you can focus on particular areas that are an issue for you.

Preparing for Your Presentation

The guide starts by explaining [What is a Presentation?](#)

We define a presentation as a means of communication that can be adapted to various speaking situations, such as talking to a group, addressing a meeting or briefing a team. Effective presentations usually require careful thought and preparation—although this preparation need not take very long.

Preparation is the most important part of making a successful presentation. Our page [Preparing For A Presentation](#) explains what information you need before you can really start to plan your presentation and decide what you are going to say. The most important aspects include the objective of the presentation, the subject, and the audience.



Irrespective of whether the occasion is formal or informal, you should always aim to give a clear, well-structured delivery. To do so, you need to [organise your presentation material](#). You can either do this in your head, or use a technique like mind-mapping to help you identify links and good flow.

By the time you come **to write your presentation**, you should know exactly what you want to say and the order in which you want to say it. You may want to use one of the standard presentation structures, such as 'What, Why, How?'. You will also find it helpful to consider how to tell your story most effectively, and to use stories in your presentation to illustrate points. There is more about this in our page on [writing your presentation](#).

You also need to [decide on your presentation method](#). Presentations range from the formal to the informal. Your choice of presentation method will depend on many factors, including the audience, the venue, the facilities, and your own preferences.

Visual aids can add another dimension to your presentation, helping to hold your audience's attention, and also act as a reminder of what you wanted to say. However, they need handling with care. **Only use visual aids if they are necessary to maintain interest and assist comprehension.** If visual aids are not used well, they can ruin a presentation.

See [Working with Visual Aids](#) to avoid falling into the trap of the dreaded '*Death by PowerPoint*'.

A particular case of visual aids is the use of data in a presentation.

There are times when using data in a presentation can really help you to tell the story better. It is, however, important not to blind your audience with statistics. You also need to remember that many people find numbers difficult to understand. Our page on [Presenting Data](#) gives some hints and tips about using data effectively in a presentation situation.

On the Day of the Presentation

There are a number of aspects to delivering your presentation on the day.

The practicalities of how you manage your presentation can make a significant difference to its success, and to your nerves! For example, turning up early means that you will have a chance to see the room, and ensure that you can operate all the necessary



equipment. There is more about how to cope, including managing sound systems, audio-visual equipment and lecterns in our page on [Managing the Presentation Event](#).

Many people also feel very nervous before and during a presentation. This is entirely normal, and can even be helpful if you can channel it in the right way. There are some tried and tested strategies and techniques to manage your nerves so that you can concentrate on delivering an effective and engaging presentation.

See [Coping with Presentation Nerves](#) for some ideas that will help.

How you present yourself can also affect how your audience responds to your presentation.

You need to fit with your audience's expectations if they are not going to spend quite a large chunk of your presentation dealing with the differences between expectations and reality.

For more about aspects of self-presentation, see our page on [Self-Presentation in Presentations](#).

You also need to consider how to **manage your presentation notes**.

Few people are able to give a presentation without notes. You will need to know your own abilities and decide how best to make the presentation. You might manage your talk by using full text, notes on cue cards, keywords on cue cards, or mind maps. There is more about this in our page on [Managing your Presentation Notes](#).

After the presentation, you may be faced with a question-and-answer session. For many people, this is the worst part of the event.

Decide in advance how and when you wish to handle questions. Some speakers prefer questions to be raised as they arise during the presentation whilst others prefer to deal with questions at the end. At the start of your presentation, you should make clear your preferences to the audience. See our page on [Dealing with Questions](#) for more ideas about how to make the question session pleasant and productive, rather than something to dread.

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Presenting Under Particular Circumstances



You may find that you need to give a presentation under certain circumstances, where your previous experience is less helpful.

Circumstances that may be new to you include:

[Presentations in Interviews](#)

[Presenting to Large Groups and Conferences](#)

[Giving Lectures and Seminars](#)

[Giving a Speech](#), for example, at a wedding.

One particular special case is attending public consultation meetings.

Our pages on [Attending Public Consultation Meetings](#), and [Managing Public Consultation Meetings](#) provide information to help whether you are a concerned member of the public, or responsible for organising a public meeting.

You may also find yourself required to organise or manage a press conference.

Although this may not strictly be what you would describe as a 'presentation', it is nonetheless an event at which you are required to present your organisation in a particular light.

Our page on [Managing a Press Conference](#) gives some ideas about how best to do that.

Finally, should you be unlucky enough to be involved in a serious crisis or disaster that affects your organisation, our page on [Crisis Communications](#) gives some ideas about how to manage press and public relations on these occasions.

Start with:

[What is a Presentation?](#)

See also:

[Personal Appearance](#)

[Interpersonal Communication Skills](#)

Guest posts:

[Four Psychological Secrets for Effective Presentations](#)

[4 Ways to Get Creative Presentation Ideas: Looking into Your Product](#)



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