

Top Tips for Effective Presentations

See also: [Dealing with Presentation Nerves](#)

How can you make a good presentation even more effective?

This page draws on published advice from expert presenters around the world, which will help to take your presentations from merely 'good' to 'great'.

By bringing together advice from a wide range of people, the aim is to cover a whole range of areas.

Whether you are an experienced presenter, or just starting out, there should be ideas here to help you to improve.

1. Show your Passion and Connect with your Audience

It's hard to be relaxed and be yourself when you're nervous.

But time and again, the great presenters say that the most important thing is to connect with your audience, and the best way to do that is to let your passion for the subject shine through.

Be honest with the audience about what is important to you and why it matters.

Be enthusiastic and honest, and the audience will respond.

2. Focus on your Audience's Needs

Your presentation needs to be built around what your audience is going to get out of the presentation.

As you prepare the presentation, you always need to bear in mind what the audience needs and wants to know, not what you can tell them.

While you're giving the presentation, you also need to remain focused on your audience's response, and react to that.

You need to make it easy for your audience to understand and respond.

3. Keep it Simple: Concentrate on your Core Message

When planning your presentation, you should always keep in mind the question:

What is the key message (or three key points) for my audience to take away?

You should be able to communicate that key message very briefly.

Some experts recommend a 30-second 'elevator summary', others that you can write it on the back of a business card, or say it in no more than 15 words.

Whichever rule you choose, the important thing is to keep your core message focused and brief.

And if what you are planning to say doesn't contribute to that core message, don't say it.

4. Smile and Make Eye Contact with your Audience

This sounds very easy, but a surprisingly large number of presenters fail to do it.

If you smile and make eye contact, you are **building rapport**, which helps the audience to connect with you and your subject. It also helps you to feel less nervous, because you are talking to individuals, not to a great mass of unknown people.

To help you with this, make sure that you don't turn down all the lights so that only the slide screen is visible. **Your audience needs to see you as well as your slides.**

5. Start Strongly

The beginning of your presentation is crucial. You need to grab your audience's attention and hold it.

They will give you a few minutes' grace in which to entertain them, before they start to switch off if you're dull. So don't waste that on explaining who you are. Start by entertaining them.

Try a story (see tip 7 below), or an attention-grabbing (but useful) image on a slide.

6. Remember the 10-20-30 Rule for Slideshows

This is a tip from Guy Kawasaki of Apple. He suggests that slideshows should:

- ✓ Contain no more than 10 slides;
- ✓ Last no more than 20 minutes; and
- ✓ Use a font size of no less than 30 point.

This last is particularly important as it stops you trying to put too much information on any one slide. This whole approach avoids the dreaded 'Death by PowerPoint'.

As a general rule, slides should be the sideshow to you, the presenter. A good set of slides should be no use without the presenter, and they should definitely contain less, rather than more, information, expressed simply.

If you need to provide more information, create a bespoke handout and give it out **after** your presentation.

7. Tell Stories

Human beings are programmed to respond to stories.

Stories help us to pay attention, and also to remember things. If you can use stories in your presentation, your audience is more likely to engage and to remember your points afterwards. It is a good idea to start with a story, but there is a wider point too: you need your presentation to act like a story.

Think about what story you are trying to tell your audience, and create your presentation to tell it.



To effectively tell a story, focus on using at least one of the two most basic storytelling mechanics in your presentation:

1. **Focusing On Characters** – People have stories; things, data, and objects do not. So ask yourself “who” is directly involved in your topic that you can use as the focal point of your story.

For example, instead of talking about cars (your company’s products), you could focus on specific characters like:

- The drivers the car is intended for – people looking for speed and adventure
- The engineers who went out of their way to design the most cost-effective car imaginable

2. **A Changing Dynamic** – A story needs something to change along the way. So ask yourself “What is not as it should be?” and answer with what you are going to do about it (or what you did about it).

For example...

- Did hazardous road conditions inspire you to build a rugged, all-terrain jeep that any family could afford?
- Did a complicated and confusing food labelling system lead you to establish a colour-coded nutritional index so that anybody could easily understand it?

To see 15 more actionable storytelling tips, see Nuts & Bolts Speed Training’s post on [Storytelling Tips](#).

8. Use your Voice Effectively

The spoken word is actually a pretty inefficient means of communication, because it uses only one of your audience’s five senses. That’s why presenters tend to use visual aids, too. But you can help to make the spoken word better by using your voice effectively.

Varying the speed at which you talk, and emphasising changes in pitch and tone all help to make your voice more interesting and hold your audience’s attention.

For more about this, see our page on [Effective Speaking](#).

9. Use your Body Too

It has been estimated that more than three quarters of communication is non-verbal.

That means that as well as your tone of voice, your body language is crucial to getting your message across. Make sure that you are giving the right messages: body language to avoid includes crossed arms, hands held behind your back or in your pockets, and pacing the stage.

Make your gestures open and confident, and move naturally around the stage, and among the audience too, if possible.

10. Relax, Breathe and Enjoy

If you find presenting difficult, it can be hard to be calm and relaxed about doing it.

One option is to start by concentrating on your breathing. Slow it down, and make sure that you're breathing fully. Make sure that you continue to pause for breath occasionally during your presentation too.

For more ideas, see our page on [Coping with Presentation Nerves](#).

If you can bring yourself to relax, you will almost certainly present better. If you can actually start to enjoy yourself, your audience will respond to that, and engage better. Your presentations will improve exponentially, and so will your confidence. It's well worth a try.



Improve your Presentation Skills

Follow our guide to boost your presentation skills learning about preparation, delivery, questions and all other aspects of giving effective presentations.

Start with: [What is a Presentation?](#)

More
Skills You Need

Continue to:

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