

Preparing an effective presentation

At various points throughout a project, you will likely be required to deliver a presentation to team members, key stakeholders, senior leaders, or customers. Use the following tips and best practices to help you prepare an effective presentation.



Preparation

Get clear on your goals and the purpose of your presentation.

Be clear and specific about what you want to get out of the meeting, then frame the discussion with that goal in mind. For instance, “We need two engineers who have worked in this industry before,” instead of “We need more resources.”

Seek input and set expectations.

Ask your manager or check with stakeholders regarding your presentation goals. Get their input and feedback ahead of time.

If you were invited to present, make sure you understand in advance exactly what the requestor is hoping to gain from your presentation.

Create a delivery plan.

Identify a headline for each slide, which is the one-sentence main point that you are trying to illustrate with that slide.

Create a couple of supporting points that add interest to the headline, such as anecdotes, charts, data, etc.

Build in signposts. These are ways to clue the audience in to where you are going and what to expect with your presentation.

Limit the number of slides in the main presentation. At the same time, consider creating backup slides for potential challenges, difficult questions, trade-offs, or alternative solutions. You can hide these backup slides at the end of your presentation if you don’t need them, or add them into your presentation if you do.

Be mindful of your audience’s time.

Invite only participants who need to be there.

Send the presentation ahead of time, if possible.

Develop a strategy for making your presentation memorable.

Use stories and repeat key points.

Start with a strong intro. Spend extra prep time on the beginning. The beginning is when your nerves are typically the highest, and delivering the introduction successfully can help you quickly gain confidence.

Practice

Guide your audience through your presentation.

Help them notice what you notice, and transition between slides by using phrases like “Building on this point . . .” or “As I mentioned before . . .”

Do a mock presentation with your team.

If there will be more than one presenter, coordinate what each person will cover and how you will manage handoffs.

Practice a question-and-answer (Q&A) session, anticipating the kinds of questions your participants might ask so you are prepared with a quick and confident response. In addition, practice what you will say if you are asked a question that you don’t know the answer to.

Be prepared to run the whole meeting yourself. If a co-presenter fails to show up, are you prepared to step in?

Schedule time to practice.

Once you’ve outlined what you want to say, practice it—ideally in front of a mirror—or record yourself. This may help you identify awkward phrasing that could be improved and other issues.

Be prepared for surprises.

Show that you can adapt and that you know your subject matter.

If time runs short, can you quickly summarize the key points?

Can you pivot the content according to what is most important to your audience?

Presentation and pace
Get right to the point.

Identify what problem you are solving and state it up front.

Tell the audience why you are in the room with them and what you will be covering.

Lay down the ground rules. For example, how do you want to handle questions and comments? Will you take them throughout your presentation or afterwards?

Check your pace.

Be mindful of clues from your audience and adjust accordingly.

Follow up

If appropriate, send a follow up email with summary notes, action items, and time frames.

Debrief with your manager or key audience members on what they heard from the presentation. Ask them what went well and what could have gone better.

Review next steps.

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