

# Tips for Giving Effective Presentations

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Below are a few tips offered by seasoned speakers to help you get started or just brush up on giving effective presentations. Start with a style that is comfortable to you. As you get more experience, you can build on your skills.

## **Good speakers, like other performers, must rehearse.**

They master their subject matter so it is second nature. This frees them to pay attention to the audience, to make eye contact, and to avoid distracting mannerisms, such as saying “uh” or “basically.” They signal their genuine enthusiasm for the subject with animated expressions, emphasis and gestures. They learn ways to look comfortable even when they are nervous.

Rehearsing your presentation several times beforehand allows you to discover weaknesses and strengths, where to add humor or a personal example, when you tend to stumble, what you can cut if you run out of time. Get colleagues or friends to listen to you and take notes about your style. Ask them to tell you both the good and the not so good.

*When preparing your remarks . . .*

## **1 Answer 3 questions:**

1) What is the problem? 2) Who cares? 3) What are we going to do about it?

Write a snappy phrase or “sound bite” for each of the two or three points you want your audience to remember. Capture attention and create a little drama with your opening and closing message.

*Picture in your mind a speaker you've heard who made a strong impression. Ask yourself what it was about this person's style that was memorable. Was it relaxed, humorous, passionate, inspirational? Chances are it wasn't the color overheads.*

## **2 Know your audience.**

Who are they? Why are they there? What are their expectations? Tell stories or give examples that relate to the audience's experiences and concerns. Plan ways to involve them and get their comments.

## **3 Use humor that is appropriate, on target and makes the point memorable.**

## **4 Practice.**

Practice out loud, not just in your head. The more you practice, the more comfortable you'll be. Work on your pitch, tone, volume and timing.

## **5 Take care of yourself.**

Eat something. Drink water, avoid too much caffeine or stimulants. Take some deep breaths. Visualize success.

## **6 Show up early.**

Check out the room and make sure everything is ready and working. Talk to people as they come in. This helps put you at ease and connects you with the audience.

## **7 Talk your talk, don't read it!**

Work from an outline or notes. If you tend to talk fast, remind yourself in your notes to slow down. Make eye contact with the audience. Move around the room or podium, don't just stand in one spot.

**8****Never apologize.**

Be positive. Be comfortable with the quality of your materials. Be ready to handle equipment malfunctions and unexpected distractions.

**9****Respect the audience.**

Assume they are as interested in the subject as you are. Speak plainly and avoid acronyms and jargon. Don't use masculine pronouns for people in general--it's likely that a large portion of your audience is women.

**10****Listen carefully and answer questions thoughtfully.**

Don't put down the questioner. When you ask for questions, give the audience some time to think—count to 10 slowly. Repeat the question for those who may not have heard it. Plant a few questions to make sure they get asked.

**11****Finish early.**

The audience will be appreciative.

**Visual aids**

Don't build your presentation around slides or overheads. They should reinforce, not drive, your presentation. Always be prepared to give your presentation without them. If you use slides and overheads, use them sparingly and keep them brief. Never use them to provide detail. Projected images can convey only very limited amounts of information. More than 6 lines of type with 4–6 words each will cause the audience to strain to read and miss what you are saying. Match your visual aids to the scale of your audience and always strive for readability.

**Consider using handouts** to illustrate your points, to give greater detail, more examples, and additional resources. Handouts should be more than just copies of your notes or major points. They can add background and substance to your argument and cover items that you don't have time for in spoken remarks.

**Overheads are informal** visual aids for presentations to smaller groups (under 30). They offer an outline or highlights of your remarks. Use only good quality images. Do not copy whole pages of books, large blocks of text or complex charts with small type. Practice handling the overheads comfortably so you are not shuffling and dropping them as you speak.

**Slides are more formal, higher quality** and better than overheads for larger audiences. Like overheads, they offer an outline, key ideas and words--they can't provide much detail. Photographic images can leave a memorable impression. A drawback is that slides require a dark room, which causes the audience to get drowsy.

**Short video clips** can help add interest, focus and variation from a single voice. But showing video clips to audiences over 15-20 requires special equipment and often a second person.

**Presentation software** for creating slides and overheads can be projected from a laptop (or other computer) using a data projector. Many facilities now provide these projectors. You can store your presentation on disk, making it much more portable. Be sure your disk, software and equipment are compatible. Don't get carried away with animated gimmicks.

**Charts and graphs** can be rich with information and very effective if they are well designed. Put them in a hand-out. If you use them in overheads or slides, they should be very simple, clean and easily grasped in a few seconds. Use them to show dramatic differences, changes or comparisons.

***For more details***

on giving effective presentations, check out these resources:

**How To Be An Effective Speaker** by Christina Stuart, NTC Publishing Group, 1996  
ISBN: 0844232807

**101 Secrets of Highly Effective Speakers** by Caryl Rae Krannish, Impact Publishing, 1998  
ISBN: 1570230900

**Envisioning Information** by Edward R. Tufte, Graphics Press, 1990  
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