

Tips for improving your presentation skills



Watch your course trainers:

They are expert presenters – listen carefully but also think about how they are presenting!

Practice!

Naturally, you'll want to rehearse your presentation multiple times. While it can be difficult for those with packed schedules to spare time to practice, it's essential if you want to deliver a rousing presentation. If you really want to sound great, write out your speech rather than taking chances winging it – if you get nervous about speaking, a script is your best friend.

Some acting strategists suggest rehearsing lines in various positions – standing up, sitting down, with arms open wide, on one leg, while sitting on the toilet, etc. (OK, that last one may be optional.) The more you mix up your position and setting, the more comfortable you'll feel with your speech. Do a practice run for a friend or colleague, or try recording your presentation and playing it back to evaluate which areas need work. Listening to recordings of your past talks can clue you in to bad habits you may be unaware of, as well as inspiring the age-old question: "Is that what I really sound like?"

Transform nervous energy into enthusiasm:

Studies have shown that an enthusiastic speech can win out over an eloquent one, and you do not need to be the Winston Churchill of presenters. Make sure that you are as enthusiastic and energetic as possible before beginning. Of course, individuals respond differently to caffeine overload, so know your own body before guzzling too much coffee.



Attend other candidates' presentations:

This shows respect for your fellow presenters while also giving you a chance to feel out the audience. What's the mood of the observers? Are folks in the mood to laugh or are they a bit stiff? Are the presentations more strategic or tactical in nature? Another speaker may also say something that you can use later in your own presentation.

Adjust to your surroundings:

The more adjusted to your environment you are, the more comfortable you'll feel. Make sure to spend some time in the room where you will be delivering your presentation. If possible, practice in the room. Be aware of any distractions potentially posed by the venue (e.g., a noisy road outside).

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Use positive visualisation:

Whether or not you're a Zen master, know that plenty of studies have proven the effectiveness of positive visualisation. When we imagine a positive outcome to a scenario in our mind, it's more likely to play out the way we envision.

Instead of thinking "I'm going to be terrible out there" and visualizing yourself throwing up mid-presentation, imagine yourself getting tons of laughs while presenting with the enthusiasm of Jimmy Fallon and the poise of Audrey Hepburn (the charm of George Clooney wouldn't hurt either). Positive thoughts can be incredibly effective – give them a shot.

Remember that most audiences are sympathetic:

One of the hardest fears to shake when speaking in public is that the audience is secretly waiting to laugh at your missteps or mistakes. Fortunately, this isn't usually the case. The audience wants to see you succeed. RED want to see you succeed! In fact, many people have a fear of public speaking, so even if the audience seems indifferent, the chances are pretty good that most people listening to your presentation can relate to how nerve-racking it can be. If you start to feel nervous, remind yourself that the audience gets it, and actually wants to see you nail it.

Take deep breaths.

The go-to advice for nerves has truth to it. When we're nervous, our muscles tighten--you may even catch yourself holding your breath. Instead, go ahead and take those deep breaths to get oxygen to your brain and relax your body.

Smile:

Smiling increases endorphins, replacing anxiety with calm and making you feel good about your presentation. Smiling also exhibits confidence and enthusiasm to the crowd. Just don't overdo it – no one enjoys the maniacal clown look.

Don't be like this guy.



Work on your pauses:

When you're nervous, it's easy to speed up your presentation and end up talking too fast, which in turn causes you to run out of breath, get more nervous, and panic! Don't be afraid to slow down and use pauses in your speech. Pausing can be used to emphasize certain points

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and to help your talk feel more conversational. If you feel yourself losing control of your pacing, just take a nice pause and keep cool.

Don't try to cover too much material.

Yes, your presentations should be full of useful, insightful, and actionable information, but that doesn't mean you should try to condense a vast and complex topic into a 10-minute presentation.

Knowing what to include, and what to leave out, is crucial to the success of a good presentation. We do not suggest you skimp when it comes to data or including useful slides but I am advocating for a rigorous editing process. If it feels too off-topic, or is only marginally relevant to your main points, leave it out. Keep the information relevant.

Actively engage the audience.

People love to talk and make their opinions heard, but the nature of presentations can often seem like a one-sided proposition. It doesn't have to be, though.

Asking the audience what they think, inviting questions, and other means of welcoming audience participation can boost engagement and make attendees feel like a part of a conversation. It also makes you, the presenter, seem much more relatable. Don't be put off by unexpected questions – instead, see them as an opportunity to give your audience what they want.

Be entertaining:

Even if your presentation is packed with useful information, if your delivery bombs, so will your session. Including some appropriate jokes is a great way to help the audience (and yourself) feel more comfortable, especially when presenting them with a great deal of information. However, it's important to maintain a balance – after all, you're not performing a stand-up routine, and people didn't come to your presentation with the sole intention of being entertained. That said, don't be afraid to inject a little humor into your talk. If you're not sure about whether a presentation is "too much," run through it for a couple of friends and ask them to tell it to you straight.

Admit you don't have all the answers:

Very few presenters are willing to publicly concede that they don't actually know everything because they feel it undermines their authority. However, since we all know that nobody can ever know everything about a given topic, admitting so in a presentation can actually improve your credibility.



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If someone asks a question that stumps you, it's okay to admit it. This can also increase your credibility with the audience, as it demonstrates that, no matter how knowledgeable a person might be, we're all learning, all the time.

Use a power stance:

Practicing confident body language is another way to boost your pre-presentation jitters. When your body is physically demonstrating confidence, your mind will follow suit. While you don't want to be jutting out your chest in an alpha gorilla pose all afternoon (somebody enjoyed *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* a bit too much), studies have shown that using power stances a few minutes before giving a talk (or heading to a big interview) creates a lasting sense of confidence and assurance. Whatever you do, don't sit--sitting is passive. Standing or walking a bit will help you harness those nerves. Before you begin, strike your best Power Ranger stance and hold your head high!

Drink water:

Dry mouth is a common result of anxiety. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water before your talk). Keep a bottle of water at arm's reach while presenting in case you get dry mouth while chatting up a storm. It also provides a solid object to hurl at potential hecklers!

Don't fight the fear.

Accept your fear rather than trying to fight it. Getting yourself worked up by wondering if people will notice your nervousness will only intensify your anxiety. Remember, those nerves aren't all bad – harness that nervous energy and transform it into positive enthusiasm and you'll be golden.

Don't read word for word from slides:

**Test of Coaching Ability**

- The examiner/assessor will set the scene;
 - “I would like you to assume that I have been sent to you by my company for a driver assessment and development of my driving skills”
 - “I drive various types of lease vehicles in my job, covering about twenty thousand miles per year”

Your audience can almost certainly read so please do not bore them by reading sentences verbatim from the slides. It is fine to pause and let them have time to read certain points. If you really feel the need to do this (because you are avoiding the silence) try to rephrase the content:

Using this slide as an example: You could simply wait while the audience reads it . . . OR

Or you could say something like . . . *“This is one example of how the examiner may set up the session”*

Don't walk in front of the projector:

This is most distracting for the audience. It blocks their view of the screen and it is a common pitfall.