

Making a Presentation: What's the point?

A definition.

presentation (noun) [press'n taysh'n]

- **prepared report read before an audience**
 - *a formal talk made to a group of people e.g. on somebody's recent work or some aspect of business, often with handouts, diagrams, or other visual aids e.g. He gave a presentation on modern irrigation methods.*
- **prepared performance for audience**
 - *a performance, exhibition, or demonstration put on before an audience.*

Being able to give a presentation is not just a form of torture, dreamt up to inflict stress upon students. It is a really useful skill to have in life and essential in some jobs and careers. It allows you to talk to a group of people about the same subject all at the same time. Imagine if all communication at college or work took place only as one to one conversations.

Exercise (for class work or self study)

Think of situations in life where people may be asked to give a speech or presentation. Note down your ideas here.

What occupations have presentation skills as a major part of the job?

If we think of presentations as being just another way to talk to people then they are much less mysterious. Anybody can give a presentation. You can make it a good presentation by learning the best way to do it.

What do you want your presentation to achieve?

Different people and different situations require a different approach. The purpose of the talk is the first and most important factor. So you need to decide what you want to achieve by the end of it. Then you can plan how best to deliver.

Exercise (for class work or self study)

Below is a list of different roles where presentations are given. What could the purpose or purposes of the talk be? I've given some suggestions to choose from but you can also use your own ideas and words. Note them down next to the job title.

INFORM INSPIRE PERSUADE INSTRUCT EXPLAIN
CONVINCE ENTERTAIN AMUSE

Tour Guide

Lecturer

Politician

Salesperson

Best Man

Newsreader

Barrister

Ecologist

Inventor

Making a Presentation: The Essentials

Before

Be Prepared.

- Research your subject thoroughly.
- Practice your presentation.
- Time your presentation, so that you can stay within the time limits set.
- Be prepared to answer questions.
- Pitch your talk to meet your audience's level of knowledge about the subject.
- Ask yourself what they need to know and what you want the talk to achieve.
- Make an effort to relax before the talk.
- Be in the room before everyone else so you can take control of the space, check seating arrangements and that you have everything you need.
- Have a cold drink available.
- Dress carefully so that your clothes don't distract from what you are saying.

REMEMBER

Preparation Prevents Pretty Poor Performance

During

Be structured

- Smile and introduce yourself with confidence.
- At the beginning, summarise what you are going to say and in what order you will say it.
- Make it clear whether questions should be asked during the talk or at the end.
- Go through your notes or slides in turn. Pause between each point.
- At the end, briefly sum up what you have said.

REMEMBER

Tell them what you are going to tell them
Tell them it.
Tell them what you have told them.

- Prepare a good line to end with.
- If you're not sure how to end then – Simply Smile and Say 'Thank you'.

Be Professional

- Don't read your presentation but talk to your audience and engage with them.

- Use notes as a prompt when needed. One method is to use the Postcard Technique for notes.
 - Break your talk into sections
 - Give each section a heading
 - Write one heading, and a few easily read prompt words, onto each postcard
 - NUMBER THE CARDS in the order that you want to introduce the points.
 - These will give you structure and confidence that you know what you want to say.
- If you *have* to read from notes
 - Write them out in full
 - Number the order of the pages clearly
 - Look up frequently
 - Keep them on a lectern or, if not available, hold at waist height.

Be interesting

- People's attention can wander so vary the way you deliver.
- Relevant stories or case studies can make a point better than pure statistics.
- Humour can win over an audience, helping them remember what you have said.
- Use visual aids as supplements to what you say, not replacements.
- Choose appropriate aids such as handouts, charts, PowerPoint, or items to pass around.
- Make sure the audience can see the visual aids wherever they are sitting.
- Don't make the visual aids over complex and distracting from what you are saying.
 - Use large text.
 - Avoid gimmicks for the sake of being different.
- Show your enthusiasm
- Use your voice effectively by varying the tone and speaking clearly.
- Make sure everyone in the room can hear you.

Involve your Audience

- Look around the room so that everyone feels you are talking to them.
- Make eye contact with at least two people.
- Encourage active listening by using simple exercises to illustrate what you have said.
- Ask questions that your audience can answer.
- Positively seek their questions and comments.

After

- Offer to be available after the talk for further questions.
- Point them to other reliable sources of information so they can research the topic further.
- You could provide a handout which could include recommended reading, a summary of the talk, organisations they can contact, more detailed discussions than could be covered in the time available, websites to browse.

Recommended Reading

COTTRELL, Stella. *The study skills handbook*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Notes: Covers a wide range of Study Skills in understandable and approachable ways. Chapter 5 "Working with others" includes a useful section on Oral Presentations.

NORTHEGE, Andrew. *The good study guide*. Milton Keynes : Open University, 2005.

Notes: Chapter 7 "Learning Through Talk" section 7.3. A thorough step by step guide.

Further Reading

LUCAS, Stephen. *The Art of Public Speaking*. Wisconsin: McGraw Hill, 2004.

Notes: An interesting read if you want to really understand the methods behind giving great presentations.

McCarthy, Patsy and Hatcher, Caroline. *Presentation Skills: The Essential Guide for Students*. London: Sage Publications, 2002.

Notes: A comprehensive, informative and understandable book. Worth reading cover to cover if public speaking will form part of your career. Dip in to it for useful help if you want tips and advice.

Making a Presentation:RELAX - Ways to Keep the Butterflies at Bay.

Even the most laid back of people can feel stressed before giving a presentation. The idea of giving a public speech causes more people anxiety than heights, snakes, spiders, or even death.

*"According to most studies, people's number one fear is **public speaking**. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."* Jerry Seinfeld

Knowing that it's not just you is a good place to start. What regular nervous speakers do have, are methods to cope with the additional stress.

The night before.

- Stop thinking "I can't..." or "I'm useless". Start telling yourself "I can..." and "I am going to..."

- Be organised. Know where you are supposed to be, when you are supposed to be there and what you have to take with you. Have a plan for what you have to do and when. Take control of your time to avoid last minute panics.
- Get a good night's sleep. Stress is easier to cope with if you aren't tired. If you find it difficult to sleep then take a bath before bed, have a warm milky drink, listen to relaxing music and practice a relaxation techniques (outlined below).

On the day

Simple relaxation techniques can help you stay on top of anxiety. Practice these regularly and you will be able to use them whenever you need to: - exams, interviews, driving tests and presentations.

Relaxation Exercise 1 – Release Tension

1. Lie down with your back to the floor or sit in a comfortable chair.
2. Close your eyes and breathe in to the count of five and out slowly to five. Do this several times.
3. Start to be aware of where your body is holding the tension.
4. Curl your toes up tightly, count to three, then release. Repeat several times.
5. Move up your body, clenching and relaxing your muscles.
6. When you reach the shoulders, pull them up and let them drop. Roll them around gently and slowly in the sockets.
7. Pucker up your mouth in a big kiss, and then relax. Frown, relax. Now do them both together, and relax. Finally open your mouth in a big yawn. And relax.

Relaxation Exercise 2 – Breathing

You can do this in combination with the relaxation exercise above or use on its own.

1. Still in a comfortable position, concentrate on your breathing.
2. Breathe in to the count of two and out to the count of four. Keep doing this steadily and slowly.
3. Imagine that as you breathe out you are letting go of any stress you may feel.
4. As you practice this exercise (or if you already have good breathing from sport or performing arts) you can breathe to a longer count. Never let it get uncomfortable, forced or strained though.

Relaxation Exercise 3 – Quick Fixes

If tension starts to affect you before a presentation then:-

- Breathe slowly and regularly.
- Put your arms by your side. Make your hands into fists imagining all your tension is in your hand. Then relax your hands. Stretch out the fingers and imagine the tension trickling out of your hand.
- Smile. Maybe think of something or someone that can make you smile – a place, person, song.

- Put it into perspective. This is just a presentation. Ask yourself these questions.
 - What is the worst that could happen? Think about it. Does anybody's life depend upon your presentation?
 - Are you expecting too much of yourself? One mistake will not mean the whole speech is ruined. We are all humans and make mistakes. Let yourself be less than perfect.
 - You are always more aware of how nervous you are than other people. The audience will probably not see the shaking hands, wobbly legs nor hear the quivering in your voice that seems so obvious to you. So don't worry about it.

