

Hints for Writing a Good Presentation

Presentations (and the associated skills) are needed in a variety of situations you may find yourself in. From putting your business case forward to making a pitch for a new job, how you present sets up a view of you in your audiences eyes, so getting it right is very important. As they say, you only get one chance to make a first impression!

Purpose

Start by establishing the aims and objectives of your presentation. You will usually be presenting for one of three reasons:

- To Inform – relay new working practices or procedures, or explain information that you have prepared.
- To Sell – either your ideas or your services.
- To Persuade – gain commitment to a proposal you are making.

Before you begin to prepare your presentation, be clear about what you want to achieve. This will help ensure that your content remains relevant.

Style

Work out the characteristics of your audience in terms of:

- size
- age range
- gender mix
- educational level
- level of seniority
- level of knowledge of the subject
- likely boredom threshold
- expected reaction to the presentation

This will enable you to pitch the content appropriately.

Content

The guiding principle here is to think from the audience's perspective – *what do they want to know?* rather than *what do I want to tell them?*

Take your list of objectives and key issues or arguments and work out what you will need to cover during the presentation. Brainstorm everything you want to say and then evaluate your ideas against your objective. The following framework may help:

- Essential to know (must be included)
- Should know (make it easier to understand, give context)
- Nice to know (include if time allows)

Timing

Audiences are most alert during the first ten minutes of a presentation, and then their interest fades until they sense the presentation is nearing an end. So keep your presentations short and sweet!

Your presentation should have no more than four or five key points. As a rule of thumb, allow a minimum of two minutes per point.

Be careful about your timing. We think more quickly than we speak, so when rehearsing, ensure you do so out loud (in front of a mirror helps). Time your presentation, and allow for contingencies as well as questions.

Structure

Work out a structure for your presentation, bearing in mind that, generally, you need an introduction, a main body and a conclusion:

Introduction –

- Position the subject you are going to talk about.
- Explain who you are and why you're there.
- Give a summary of the flow of the presentation.
- Tell the audience the approximate length of presentation.
- Position how you want to deal with questions (as you go through, or at the end).

Main Body -

- Make your key points clearly.
- Ensure you cover in your content the perspectives that will be important to your audience.
- Give examples relevant to the audience.
- Bring your content to life with images, stories or analogies.

Conclusion -

- Remind the audience of your key points.
- Clarify any action required or next steps.
- End on a high.

