

HOW TO GIVE A GOOD PRESENTATION

Published by Norma Hart

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Remember your audience:

This is about your audience listening and your thinking about why they should. You have to interest them at the very start and find ways of making them want to listen. Think about how you might intrigue them, puzzle them, contradict their expectations, be controversial or entertaining. Think about what they already know and how they might relate to what you have to offer. In other words think about your audience and not just about your material.

Get the amount of content right:

Inexperienced presenters almost always have too much material and rush through it, overburdening the audience and talking for too long. 15 minutes is the maximum that most of us can concentrate even if the presentation is riveting. Cut down on the content and slow down the rate of your presentation. Practice your timing by talking in front of a mirror. Give yourself time-fillers such as extra examples, something for the audience to read, or ask for questions part way through the presentation. Don't use time-fillers unless absolutely needed.

Make sure you have a clear structure:

It's difficult for an audience to listen if they don't know where you are going with your talk or why so make this clear at the outset. Say why you are doing what you are doing and what is going to be involved. For example, will you be giving your audience an opportunity to ask questions? At what point? Will they have anything to do by themselves? What and when?

Give them things to look at:

Simply listening is very hard work. It's easier if your audience also has something to look at (a copy of your slides for example). Handouts are also useful. Use a flip-chart, whiteboard etc. to illustrate examples/key points or for audience feedback.

Give them things to do:

Just listening is also dull. Give your audience something active to do. For example, to read a short handout, an activity of some kind, analyse a piece of text or photograph; something related of course to what it is you are talking about.

Invite your audience to ask questions:

Make contact eye contact with your audience and from time to time give them an opportunity to ask questions of you / to clarify issues they might be unsure of.

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Ask your audience questions:

Make sure you ask open questions and leave your audience plenty of time to think about their answers. Don't be afraid to leave plenty of time even if the silence may feel a little threatening to you. You might consider asking them to write answers down. Make sure your [body language](#) is open and smile - reassure them you are not asking 'trick questions' in order that they are happy to answer.

Provide a summary:

Don't just stop! Summarise the key points of your presentation - give your audience a clear overview. Thank them for listening and ask if they have final questions. If appropriate you can invite a discussion.

Don't EVER read out your notes in full:

This is so boring for an audience. If you know your 'stuff' and you should - all you need are your key points and then you can talk around each point in a very natural way. Your audience will recognise that you know what you are talking about and will appreciate it.

Go for an occasional laugh:

Presentations don't always have to be straight-faced and serious. Don't of course, tell jokes but you can be light-hearted from time to time (remember though you are not a stand-up comedian). This will help your audience relax and show you are confident.

Be responsive and flexible:

If you can see that things are not going to plan don't just plough on regardless. You'll lose your audience completely. Think about how you might change direction. Ask your audience what might help them get the most out of your presentation. The overwhelming majority of people are more than willing to help/do this. They don't want to be bored or whatever and they won't want you to fail!

Finally - get feedback:

Ask for feedback at the end of the session. Don't be afraid to do this - you need to learn what you did well and what less well. We all learn all of the time no matter how experienced we are!