

5.1 Tips for Making Presentations

The following is the structure of this section.

5. Presentation Techniques

5.1 Tips for Making Presentations

5.2 Oral Briefings

5.3 Quick Reference: Walk with me Briefing

5.4 Presenting Data & Visualizations

Making presentations can be scary, especially if you do not have a lot of experience. There is no magic here, except to say that everyone can do this but that styles differ. Finding the right style and working through the best technique takes time and experience. It also takes overcoming concerns about how good you will be and how effective. Experiment, but above all find the right voice for the right occasion. Perhaps

the greatest weakness in making presentations to audiences, to small groups and to individuals is to ignore who you are speaking to, fall in love with your own words and forget why you are there. What follows are some tips to help you.

I am afraid to speak in public?

Don't be fooled. Despite how confident a speaker may appear, she is or has felt stage fright, hesitation and nervousness at some time. Just remember, such feelings are natural signals to you to up your game and focus on the work at hand. And that is probably the key to overcoming your latent fears: this is a piece of work. You are presenting because it is part of your job, so apply your professionalism to the task and get on with it. Your focus has to shift from you to the work at hand.

Here are some tips for getting yourself out of the nervous zone into the working zone:

- Feeling nervous before, even during, a presentation is normal and helpful: adrenaline energizes you. I
- Interpret your nerves as a sign that you care about your topic, audience and doing well.
- Recognize that most of your audience wants you to succeed.
- Remember you are better prepared than anyone else in the room to handle the topic.
- Think of the information and expertise from the audience as useful, not threatening.
- Focus on your purpose for speaking, not on the words you say
- Take your time: set your own pace and, above all, do not rush, speak too quickly, or focus on just finishing.

Key Questions to Ask if Getting Ready

- **Why Do This?** What is the purpose of the presentation: to inform, to convince, to debate, to get a decision? This will affect what you prepare.
- **Where, When, & How?** What are the logistics and circumstances of your presentation? A large audience or small. Open or closed. Conference or meeting. Formal or informal.
- **What is the Topic?** Is this focused on a specific issue or event or is it general and expansive? This will focus what to prepare.
- **Who are You Speaking To?** Who is your audience and what are their interests? Is it one person, a decision maker, or a general audience with little background about your topic. Find out as much about them as possible to be able to tailor your presentation to their needs or interests.

Presentation Style Pointers

All presentations should be adapted to the purpose and audience. Avoid, above all, a mismatch such as an elaborate, highly visual and complex presentation for a small audience with a specific focus. Present to the context. Here are some pointers to help:

- For small audiences, keep it simple, focus more on dialogue, keep PowerPoints limited and focus on give and take.
- For larger audiences, think in terms of creating both a more formal presentation and any visual material should be a potential take-away.
- Understand how you present most effectively such as the use of stories. Avoid jokes or insider references.
- Treat your audience with respect. Start by telling them what you are going to do and what your main messages are.
- Make it clear if you invite questions or comments during your presentation. This will be dictated to a degree by the venue. For instance, in making a presentation to a small group of your superiors, you are hardly able to stop them interrupting, unless you can block it off by referencing material to come to deal with the question.
- Know your venue. Be in the room a bit of time before your presentation, especially if it is a large setting. Sit in on the session before yours just to get a feel for the room.
- Make sure the equipment works. Know where to get help.
- Use humour carefully but use it. As noted, jokes are a problem. However, gentle humour, especially of the self-deprecating kind, can be effective.
- Don't complicate your presentation with lots of technical outtakes, special effects etc. A recipe for disaster.
- Learn how to use a microphone. Don't try to eat it. Most systems are designed for a normal distance. It is fine if unsure to ask if you can be heard at the back of the room.
- Keep your back to the wall. Do not start writing on flipcharts or turn to your PowerPoint and reading it and lose contact with the audience. Have a hard copy of your PowerPoint on the podium and keep your eyes forward.
- Check your body, hand and arm movement and keep it natural. Avoid being too jerky with your movements, avoid unnatural moves, but also avoid being catatonic with no movement.
- Scan your audience as you speak, moving around the room. Avoid speaking to one person.

- Are you going to be introduced or do you have to introduce yourself? If the later, make it brief on only information that is pertinent to why you are standing there as some form of expert. Keep it short.
- If you have time or want to have questions and answers, this is good. However, be prepared to be surprised. You have no control over what will be said. Above all, avoid being combative or too judgemental of comments. And remember, in the end, you do not have to answer the question or challenge. Taking note is a perfectly legitimate strategy.