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| <!-- Col Count:2-->Module: | Communication and Interpersonal Skills |
| Skill: | Giving a Successful Presentation |

Overview: Giving a Successful Presentation

Any successful presenter will tell you that, with every presentation you give, you become a better presenter. In time, we all feel more confident in our ability to present well and persuade an audience. This resource is all about saving you some of that time. By giving you practical ways to improve your performance, it offers you what you need to reach your goal – giving a great presentation.

It also does more than that – it helps to make you a successful student. You may well be asked to give a formal, assessed presentation, but there will be many other situations in which you can use the skills you learn here. Standing up to give a brief overview of a topic in a seminar or laboratory, sharing your opinion in a workshop, or collecting material to defend your argument in any academic context. Your new skills will also take you beyond the classroom, to standing for election in a university or college society, or standing up to speak out at a public meeting – even giving a speech at a wedding or family event. You will feel more confident in all these arenas because you have mastered presentation skills.

Successful students tend to make successful professionals, and this is particularly the case when it comes to presenting. Being able to give an effective presentation might be a key part of your professional life, and you will be using presentation techniques every day. Want to talk up in a meeting? You need to know how to engage an audience. Want to persuade people to do things your way? You need to marshal your argument quickly. Under fire over a project you are managing? You need to know how to deal with awkward questions. The value of presentations will remain with you for decades.

Funnily enough, it does not matter much whether you are naturally adept as a presenter or whether you view the prospect with horror. Presentation techniques are so clear-cut that you can master them without any confusion. It takes some of us longer to reach our best, but that is no great trial – your studying life will give you plenty of opportunities to try out the skills discussed here and, each time you use a skill, it will become more familiar and you will become more confident about using it.

As you work through this section, you might want to think about how you can practise some of the skills in a low-risk environment. For example, you could try speaking up in a class or seminar to practise your voice control, you could work through the relaxation exercise next time you feel stressed, you could try out one of the planning methods for your next essay. To help you with some quick wins, I have included ‘improve your grade’ points. There are also some ‘notes from the field’ – quotes from seasoned students who are happy to share their experiences with you.

Suggested Readings

Becker, L. (2019). *Give great presentations*. SAGE Publications.

Becker, L., Becker, F., & Becker, A. (2022) *Acing online assessment*. SAGE Publications.

Bethell, E., & Milsom, C. (2014). *Posters and presentations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Chivers, B., & Shoolbred, M. (2007). *A student's guide to presentations: making your presentation count*. Sage Publications.

Emden, J. V., & Becker, L. (2016). *Presentation skills for students*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mccarthy, P., & Hatcher, C. (2010). *Presentation skills: the essential guide for students*. SAGE Publications.

Powell, M. (2011). *Presenting in English: How to give successful presentations (updated edition)*. CENGAGE ELT.

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| <!--Col Count:2-->Table of Contents Heading 2: | Mastering the Brief and Your Nerves |
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Topic 2.1: Getting Organised

Facing a presentation requires you to be super organised, so let's get started, with advice from a student...

[begin feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

If you have been given a presentation topic that doesn't excite you, research into it and find something within the umbrella that DOES excite you; there is always something.

[End feature box]

Checklist

You will be thinking about all these points when you face a presentation:

1. What is the title of my presentation?
2. Will I be presenting in a group or alone?
3. When is the presentation?
4. Where will I be presenting?

5. Will there be a series of presentations?
6. How long is my presentation to be?
7. Will there be questions and answers?
8. What will my mark mean for my course?

[Start feature box]

Raise Your Grade

The most important point to note at this stage is the length of your presentation: never run over on time when you present.

[End feature box]

When you are asked to present, your first query might be: Do I have a choice about the presentation topic? You might be given a list of titles to choose from, or you might be given a set of guidelines within which you can make up your own presentation title.

Making the Best Choice for Your Presentation Topic

[Begin scenario 1, Explore Your Options]

Scenario 1

Picture yourself approaching a presentation assignment for the first time. You might be nervous, which would be natural given that this is a new challenge. You might also feel daunted by the choices you have to make. You are being asked to make some speedy decisions, so let's work through some of them:

What should I do if I am given a choice of topic for my presentation?

Choose a topic that I really care about

This is a great approach to take – as long as you are ready to keep control. At first you will probably have in mind a pool of material that is too big for the time allowed: we all do it. So, you can be sure that you will spend some time during your preparation narrowing down your topic, but that is all to the good. It helps you to decide exactly what you want to say and what argument you want to make.

Look at examples of previous student presentations on a variety of topics

This can work well, as long as the presentations you are checking out are the same length as the presentation you are being asked to give. If they are more than a couple of years' old, remember that technology moves on fast, so you might be able to make even more impressive presentation slides today.

Choose a topic that I know falls towards the end of the term or semester

Avoid choosing a title just because that presentation slot falls towards the end of the term. It is far better to choose a topic on which you think you can present well, rather than just putting it off.

Decide upon a topic because it catches your eye as you look at your options

This can be a really good way to choose a presentation title. There must be something about this presentation title that appeals to you instantly. You prepare, polish, and rehearse your presentation, so having a title you love can help hugely!

[End scenario 1, Explore Your Options]

If you are not given a choice of topic, because everyone is covering the same area, you might be offered the chance (or perhaps be required to) give a group presentation: look out for the advice in the next section of this resource.

If everyone is presenting on the same topic (maybe on a class project), make sure that you are very clear about what is expected of you (are you meant to check with other students to make sure you do not all use the same examples, for instance?) and then forget about what other students might be doing.

[Start feature box]

Raise Your Grade

Knowing in advance whether your presentation mark will count towards your course or module mark/grade, and how it is divided (perhaps between your preparation, your presentation aids, and your presentation skills) will allow you to put maximum effort in at the right places.

[End feature box]

Topic 2.2: Getting to Grips With Group Presentations

[start scenario 2, Multiple Choice Questions]

Scenario 2

Group presentations can throw up new challenges; this quiz will help you master your group presentation...

Imagine that you have been asked to work in a group of four to give a 20-minute presentation. You have been given a choice of topics and you are expected to sort out all the arrangements between yourselves.

How do you choose your presentation topic?

| <!--Col Count:3-->Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| We will get together and chat through which topic we fancy. | Incorrect | Chances are, those who shout loudest will get their way, even if they have not chosen a good topic. |
| We will see who feels passionately about a topic. | Incorrect | Enthusiasm is great, but if that person is passionate but not knowledgeable, and nobody else much cares for it, you have a problem. |

| <!--Col Count:3--> Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| We will use an online poll and then talk through the most popular topic to make sure that we have made the best choice. | Correct | This approach ensures that everyone gets their say and that the topic will work well. |

How do you prepare the material together?

| <!--Col Count:3--> Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| We will divide the slides between us. | Incorrect | Until you have worked up your material, you cannot know how many slides you need. |
| We will make an overview plan and then divide up the topic. | Correct | This way, everyone is clear about the overall presentation and each person has a fair chance to contribute. |
| We will meet regularly to research and prepare our presentation together. | Incorrect | It is difficult to work effectively as a team if you are doing every single thing by committee. Some meetings are essential, but so too is dividing up your tasks. Making a plan, with deadlines, can be hugely helpful. |

How do you work out who speaks when?

| <!--Col Count:3-- >Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Alphabetical order of speakers | Incorrect | This will only work if all your speakers are equally strong. |
| Put our weakest speaker in the middle | Incorrect | This seems to make sense, but risks the presentation slumping halfway though, and that is a difficult point from which to recover. |
| Put our weakest speaker first | Correct | The reason this works is that the weak speaker can simply introduce the other speakers and the topic (the first two slides, probably) and then sit down, getting up again only at the end to field questions. |

How do you organise the rehearsals?

| <!--Col Count:3-- >Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| We will have three batches of rehearsals. | Correct | As you will probably need to make changes to your material after early rehearsals, this makes sense as a strategy. One set of rehearsals (in as single day, if you like) to master the material, one set to brush up your presentation skills, and one final run-through on the day. |
| We will meet weekly until | Incorrect | This risks you becoming overconfident or jaded, |

| <!--Col Count:3-- >Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| we feel confident. | | so you could sound bored on the day. |
| We will have a whole day of rehearsing and then meet on the day of the presentation for a final run-through. | Incorrect | You need time to develop your technique, and this is difficult to do in one frantic, exhausting day. |

How do you look good as a group on the day?

| <!--Col Count:3-- >Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| We will come into the room as a laughing group to show how close we are as a team. | Incorrect | You could alienate your audience by looking like an excluding group. |
| We will sit beside each other, and look interested in what each person has to say. | Correct | It is easy to look uninterested, because you know the material well. If you sit as a group and look at each presenter with interest, you are giving a strong signal of support and showing audience members that they should be interested too. |
| We will wear matching outfits. | Incorrect | I have seen this done really well, but it risks looking slightly comic. Try for the same level of formality in your look as a group, but |

| <!--Col Count:3--> Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | perhaps no more than this. |

What do you do if one member of the group does not contribute?

| <!--Col Count:3--> Answer Choices | Correct or Incorrect? | Feedback |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| Tell the organiser (and/or the marker) before the presentation | Correct | This gives the organiser the chance to put things right or to formally exclude the student from the project, so that there is no risk of that person turning up on the day and expecting to present, or of gaining your group mark. |
| Say nothing – these things happen | Incorrect | This is a generous approach, and might also be easier, but could risk you having to work with the same student, doing the same thing, in future projects. |
| Make sure that the organiser (and/or the marker) know after the event | Incorrect | If you wait until afterwards, the marker might not be able to remove the group mark from the member who failed to contribute. |

[End scenario 2, Multiple Choice Questions]

Topic 2.3: Reflecting on Past Presentations

Why do you need to think about presentation anxiety even before you have started to prepare? It is because nervousness that is overwhelming can get in the way of you thinking straight, preparing well, and performing at your best. If fellow students ever tell you they just turn up on the day and wing it, the chances are that they are stretching the truth or too nervous to face the challenge effectively – and you are not going to be in that category.

Thinking about nervousness early on also gives you the chance to practise controlling and using your adrenaline, so that you give a better presentation. It also makes sense, at this early stage, to think about your strengths and challenges as a presenter.

Learning From Your Past Presentations

You will have used presentation skills in the past, even if you have never given a formal, assessed presentation. If you were asked to share an outline of a project with your class, or introduce a topic in a seminar or tutorial, you were using presentation skills. If you were asked to demonstrate to newcomers at work how to carry out a task, that was presenting. If you have given a speech at a formal social gathering, that was not just presenting, it was probably especially challenging presenting.

[Insert scenario 1, Explore Your Options]

Scenario 1

Have you ever thought back to any presentations you have given in the past, in any context (school or college, social or work-related)?

I never look back – it just makes me more anxious

Unless you can reflect on what has not gone so well in the past you cannot move forward productively – you could be left with the niggling feeling that something is not quite right, and this saps your confidence.

I have not really thought about it

You have a limited amount of time to prepare for your presentation, so you need to focus your energy where it is most needed. This means knowing where you need to improve, and your experience can make that clear.

I used to reflect like this, but I never seem to have the time to do it now

Sometimes not finding the time is a sign that you are still anxious about a difficult presenting experience, and you would rather not face up to it. Being brave now, perhaps by talking it through with a trusted friend, will help you move forward.

I look back regularly so that I remember what I have done and can see how far I have come

Regular reflection like this not only reminds you of what you have done well (boosting your confidence) and where you need to do better (helping you focus your efforts) it also allows you to add your reflections on any recent feedback into the mix.

I do this all the time – I can remember every detail of every presentation I have ever given

Let it go. You cannot go back and fix past presentations, but you can move forward. Note what you need to do better in future, and what you did well, and move on firmly.

[End scenario 1, Explore your Options]

Topic 2.4: Controlling Your Nerves

Being nervous before a presentation is always a good thing. It shows that you are taking it seriously, that you have prepared, and that you are anxious to show your material – and yourself – in the best light. Once you have recognised that nerves can be your friends, you will instantly feel more positive and, oddly enough, less nervous. Your focus will be where you need it: on giving an effective presentation.

[begin feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

Once I began my presentation and I was able to demonstrate my knowledge of the subject, I managed to lose my nerves.

[End feature box]

However, being nervous can lead you to act in ways that are quite alien to you in everyday situations, so you need to look out (or ask friends to check) for any negative nervous habits you have acquired in presentations. Once a habit is pointed out to you, you can quickly get out of the habit. Watch the video for a demonstration of different nervous habits and how you can avoid them.

[Video 1](#). Avoiding Nervous Behaviour in Presentations

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[transcripts are uploaded in SMART in four formats as file type 'Other']

[video copyright info: © 2022 SAGE Publications Inc.]

Download transcript

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[Insert feature box]

Raise Your Grade

There are some expressions of nervousness over which you have very little control, such as blushing, stammering, and slight twitches. Work to accept that these are just part of you. They will not lose you any marks and accepting them will allow you to concentrate instead on gaining marks.

[End feature box]

Using Your Nerves

You will be nervous, so you can use that adrenaline to set up nervous habits that help build your audience relationship. The more you practise these habits, the more engrained they will become, setting you up for future presentations.

Learning to Relax

Nerves are good, but not if they stop you functioning well. This video describes a relaxation routine that will help keep your nerves under control and can be carried out unobtrusively in front of a waiting audience, and the handout gives you the nine steps to help you to relax. You can also download the nine-step plan into a worksheet to take to your presentations.

[Video 1](#). Nine-Step Plan to Relax

[insert video coding here as per encoding guidelines: ID is V1076017]

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[video copyright info: © 2022 SAGE Publications]

Download transcript

[insert transcript PDF: V1076017.pdf]

Nine-step guide to help you relax

[Link file: Nine_Step_Plan_worksheet.docx]

Topic 2.5: Our Bodies Talk – All the Time

Body language (also called nonverbal communication, or NVC) is fascinating; it is also hugely important. Research suggests that less than 10% of what we communicate relates to the words we say – all else relies on our tone of voice, our facial expression, and our more general NVC. Your challenge is to make NVC work for you, and to do it fast. That means you have no time to study the topic in depth, you just need to know how to avoid trouble, how to create a positive impression, and how to read basic NVC. You can read more about how your facial expressions and other nonverbal cues can have an impact on your presentation in the topic 'Be Aware of Your Facial Expressions' in SAGE Skills Business, Org Comm module, skill "Presenting and Speaking."

Avoiding Trouble

[Begin scenario 1: Explore Your Options]

Scenario 1

You will probably not want to alter your body language significantly just because you are giving a presentation. After all, you are you, a human being who can build a relationship with an audience. Avoiding trouble is about removing unconscious barriers in that relationship. The negative NVC signals highlighted here might be part of your usual way of being, and might cause no problems in everyday situations: they just need to be eradicated from your way of presenting.

Frowning [Insert GettyImages-579747374.jpg]

A picture shows a woman showing a tablet screen to a man in a suit while discussing a topic seriously, over a cup of beverage.

Source: Cecilie_Arcurs/ E+/ via Getty images.

☐ Frowning says that you are judging your audience members and they are letting you down. You may not know if you tend to frown, or perhaps frown when you get nervous. First, ask a friend to tell you if you are a frowner. If you are, try smiling – it is very difficult to frown and smile at the same time. Also check that light levels in the room are not too bright or low, and that you are not having to squint at either your audience or the screen.

Slumping

☐ Slumping says that you have little or no faith in what you are saying. You can gain confidence by preparing and rehearsing well. Then consider if props might help – dressing differently, or using prompt cards, for example. Also, work on breathing well – this will help you to stand straight.

Crossing Arms

☐ Crossing your arms says that you do not want to engage with your audience. People are often surprised that they cross their arms, so ask a friend to check if it is happening to you. If it is, deliberately place your hands in a better position, such as lightly held together on your lap or the desk. This will break the habit.

Hiding

Hiding says that you are terrified and do not want to give this presentation. Notice which way your feet are facing. If your toes are facing the audience, it is difficult for your body to be facing away from them.

Slouching

Slouching says that you are struggling to care about your presentation or your audience. Move anything that will help you slouch or lean (a lectern, table, chair, or similar) and take your hands out of your pockets.

Ignoring

Ignoring audience members says that you are too nervous to look at them or that you are lying to your audience. Remember to practise your eye contact technique each time you rehearse and present.

[End scenario 1: Explore Your Options]

Topic 2.6: Creating a Good Impression and Reading Body Language

A good impression comes largely from removing barriers between you and your audience. This relies partly on your material, the way you present it, and your presentation aids. It also relies on the NVC signals you give your audience.

- Maintain inclusive and natural-looking eye contact throughout (read more in the topic ‘Chin Up and Eye Contact<!--Q2: Production: link to topic "Chin Up and Eye Contact" in SSB, Org Comm module, skill presenting and speaking.-->’).
- Stay facing your audience, except for those moments when you move to a new slide and turn sideways to look at it briefly alongside your audience.
- Keep your body stance open: no crossed arms in front of your body or prompt cards across your face (read more in the topics ‘Poses of Power<!--Q3: Production: link to topic "Poses of power" in SSB, Org Comm module, skill presenting and speaking.-->’ and ‘Proper Posture<!--Q4: Production: link to topic "Proper Posture" in SSB, Org Comm module, skill presenting and speaking.-->’).
- Avoid accidental aggression: no clenched fists, frowning, squinting, or pointing at audience members.
- Smile regularly.

[begin feature box]

Raise Your Grade

Be brave: feel your connection to the audience and welcome it. The best way to look positive, welcoming, and enthusiastic is to genuinely feel these emotions. Being nervous does not mean that you do not want to be there, and your task will be made easier if your enthusiasm and pride in your material comes across.

[End feature box]

Reading Body Language

You need not become a body language expert. In fact, trying to read every NVC signal in a room would be distracting. Instead, take a simpler approach. First, recognise that a frown might just mean an audience member with a headache, a squint might be the result of poor eyesight, and a sigh might be tiredness. So, you need only be concerned with negative body language if you see several prolonged signals at once.

Although negative signals can be misleading, positive signals rarely are. A smile is likely to be genuine (smile back!), leaning forward shows interest in what the presenter is saying, and nodding indicates engagement and agreement. Looking down to make notes shows an engaged listener.

Beyond this, there are just two particular attitudes that should ring a few alarm bells, especially as you face the questions and answers (Q&A) section of your presentation:

Beware of an audience member looking too tense!

- Leaning forward and frowning.
- Head shaking.
- Looking away when you try for eye contact.
- Hands linked and clenched.
- Staring at you.
- Looking desperate to speak.
- Frantically making notes.

Beware of an audience member looking too relaxed!

- Leaning right back in a chair.
- Legs stretched out in front.
- Arms dangling down by the side of the body.
- Very little eye contact.
- Making no notes, or just jotting down a word or two.

If you see audience members displaying either of these types of body language, take charge:

- Do not pay them any extra attention during your presentation.
- Never pause and look at them expectantly, however desperate they look.
- Do not deviate from your planned material to try to justify your approach, even if you are being made to feel uncomfortable.
- Be ready for them to leave as soon as you finish speaking.
- If they stay for the Q&A session, be prepared to admit openly if you do not know the answer to a question.
- If they become too outspoken or critical during the Q&A or discussion sessions, trust your audience. Someone is likely to step in to avert a prolonged problem.

Raise Your Grade

Remember: your voice needs to shine as you present. Aim for speaking at around 140–150 words per minute. This little section happens to total 50 words, so you could test your pace by reading it aloud three times – it should take about a minute at ideal presentation pace.

[End feature box]

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| <!--Col Count:2-->Table of Contents Heading 3: | Preparing for Your Presentation |
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Topic 3.1: Planning for Success

Regardless of the specifics of the presentation you are preparing, this is how it might feel in the early stages:

- You have too much material.
- Your material lacks focus.
- You cannot see a clear line of argument or a logical flow of information.
- Your structure feels uncertain.

This is all good!

It is good because it means that:

- You have plenty of material available to you.
- You are ready to concentrate on your topic and be selective with that material.
- You can decide what you want to achieve.
- You are considering the best planning method to use.

[begin feature box]

Raise Your Grade

The only one of the issues above that could be a lasting problem is having too much material. Be ruthless: remember that good marks come from how you use selected material, not wading through a mass of information.

[End feature box]

[Begin scenario 1: Explore Your Options]

Scenario 1

If you are limited on time, planning is a great way to save you from wasting the time it takes to change your mind and go back to adjust or correct your presentation.

Spider/bubble chart

A spider/bubble chart helps you to:

Look at several sides of an argument or situation.

Look at advantages and disadvantages.

fx1

A figure shows a bubble chart of presentation aid options.<!--Capture as a alt-text-->

The figure shows a bubble chart that has a circle in the centre that reads, Presentation Aid Options. The circle is divided into four different boxes, namely, Prezi (or similar), PowerPoint (or similar), Demonstrations, Handouts. The box, Prezi (or similar), is divided into four other circles that are as follows: Free, Creative, Eye catching, Seasick? The box, PowerPoint (or similar), is divided into three other circles that are as follows: Creative enough? Easy to use, Familiar. The box, Demonstrations, is divided into three other circles that are as follows: Clarity, Risky, Engaging. The box, Handouts, is divided into three other circles that are as follows: Takes time to circulate, Permanent reminder, Detailed.<!--Capture as a long description-->

Flowchart

A flowchart helps you to:

Show a process/logical flow of argument or information/timeline.

See at a glance if you have missed anything out of a sequence of events or material.

fx2

A figure shows an arrow flowchart.<!--Capture as a alt-text-->

The figure shows an arrow flowchart that consists of a sequence of seven boxes from left to right. The first box reads, Understand the Brief. The second box reads, Organise Your Material and is further explained as follows: Plan, Reduce. The third box reads, Make Some Notes and is further explained as follows: Slides, docs? Prompt cards? The fourth box reads, Start Rehearsing and is further explained as follows: Revise slide dock. The fifth box reads, Prepare a Handout. The sixth box reads, Keep Rehearsing. The Seventh box reads, Present.<!--Capture as a long description-->

Fishbone/Ishikawa chart

A fishbone/Ishikawa chart helps you to:

Show how factors have come together to influence an outcome.

Demonstrate variables in a process.

Explain complex procedures or activities.

fx3

A figure shows a fishbone/Ishikawa chart.<!--Capture as a alt-text-->

The figure shows a Fishbone/Ishikawa chart consisting of an arrow pointing to the left that reads, Great Presentations. The arrow has four boxes each on either side. On the top side of the arrow, the four boxes read as follows: Clear Ideas, Organised Material, Good Planning, Well Presented. On the bottom side of the arrow, the four boxes read as follows: Strong Argument, The Right Amount of Material, Excellent Structure, Positive Body Language.<!--Capture as a long description-->

Quadrant chart

A quadrant chart will help you to:

- Show different sides of a situation.
- Visualise a situation.
- Make a well-structured and balanced argument.



A figure shows a Quadrant chart.<!--Capture as a alt-text-->

The figure shows a Quadrant chart that consists of four boxes. The box on the first quadrant, titled, Weaknesses reads as follows: Not sure of the details yet. Not enough time to rehearse properly. The box on the second quadrant, titled, Strengths reads as follows: Clear brief and title. Enough to say. Keen to persuade. The box on the third quadrant, titled, Opportunities reads as follows: Chance to get more presentation practice. Hope to gain a good mark. The box on the fourth quadrant, titled, Threats reads as follows: Will the rest of my group be ready? Will there be any questions?<!--Capture as a long description-->

[End scenario 1: Explore Your Options]

[begin feature box]

Raise Your Grade

If you are giving a presentation on work that you have already produced in another form, try ‘reverse engineering’ that work by reading it through and reducing it back into plan form as part of your presentation preparation. That way, you avoid grappling with too much material as you present.

[End feature box]

Topic 3.2: Knockout Presentations Aids

The section is full of expert tips on how to make a good impression (and so get a good grade), whatever presentation aid you are using.

PowerPoint is still seen by many presenters as the standard package to use. It looks like a series of document pages on the screen and has a range of features. Google Slides and Apple Keynote are not dissimilar and may be as familiar to you.

- It is free to use and download with standard software packages.
- It is available in an online version.
- It is straightforward to use.
- It will generate a transcript for you.
- Your slides might look a bit boring unless you are careful.
- You can be tempted to make your font too small (check this as you rehearse).

Getting it right:

- If you embed a link, make sure that it works on the day and in the room in which you are presenting. Get the website up and ready, minimised on the screen, in case the link fails.

- Always use a san serif font (such as Arial and Calibri).
- Avoid colours that fade on slides (such as red and yellow) and experiment with the best text and background colours.
- Use minimal punctuation and be consistent.
- Always produce an introductory slide or two, to help you and the audience settle.
- In a group presentation, use one slide show, with the same theme/colour throughout.
- Check the light level – can your slides be seen easily from all points in the audience?

Creative Presentation Packages

You can find online presentation packages that allow you to move beyond the more traditional slide features. These would include options such as Powtoon (for fully-animated presentations), Prezi (if you want to escape from the format of standard slides), and VideoScribe (if you like the idea of an automated slideshow with text and other features).

You can rely on a creative presentation to engage your audience well.

- Creating the slideshow can be great fun.
- There is a wide range of features available to you.
- Unless you pay, there are likely to be some features you cannot access.
- Some audience members might find it distracting – even nauseating – if you get too creative and swoop around your slides at speed.

Getting it right:

- As with all technology, have a backup plan – maybe screenshots on a handout that you can use.
- Just because you can use exciting new functions, you do not have to use them all. Your first focus is always on presenting well.
- If your group is considering using creative presentation software that you all love, you might want to subscribe for a limited time.
- Always check what packages your university offers for free.
- Most of these packages are offered on 30-day trials with full functionality for free.

A Demonstration

If you have made something, or designed a process or experiment, a demonstration could be a good option. You will need to make sure that the setting of your presentation allows for a demonstration, that every audience member can see it and that you have time to give the demonstration.

- It is exciting for an audience to see a demonstration.
- Often, you can demonstrate something more easily than you can describe it.
- You have the chance to show off the end product of your hard work.
- You might be more nervous if you demonstrate rather than just talking.

- It might not work on the day.

Getting it right

- A demonstration needs a purpose.
- Make it clear *why* you are giving your demonstration.
- Just in case it fails on the day, *always* have a backup ready, such as a film of your demonstration that you can show.

Handouts

Handouts are the standard, traditional presentation aid and they remain popular as an accompaniment to, or instead of, a presentation slide show.

They are low-tech and straightforward to prepare.

- Audience members find them reassuring.
- You can include additional material ready for your Questions and Answers session.
- It can take far longer than you expect to produce a brilliant handout.
- It takes a surprisingly long time to circulate a handout around an audience, so you need to decide in advance on the best moment to do this.

Getting it right:

- Remember that your handout will be a permanent record of your presentation, and the marker will re-examine it in detail.
- Take the time and trouble to make it as good as any other piece of written work you submit – good handouts gain you marks.

Your Environment

The room in which you are presenting is also a form of presentation aid. Just like any aid, it can help – or hinder – your audience members as they focus on your ideas.

- The right light levels are crucial – always discover how to control the lighting in the room and take the time to adjust the levels if needs be.
- A well-aired room aids concentration, so open a window before you present if you think the room is too hot (making sure that, if it starts to feel too cold, you invite someone to close it again).
- Seating can help you. Every audience member needs to be able to see you clearly and have enough space to make notes without feeling cramped.
- Noise around your presentation room is not always easy to control, nor is it predictable.
- The environment might change during your presentation (a noisy aircon unit might cut in, or the sun might suddenly come out). Do not let yourself become flustered by it, but fix it if you can.

Getting it right:

- You cannot control every aspect of your environment, but you can make sure that your presentation area is clear.

You need never present awkwardly because you are avoiding a poorly placed chair as you move about, or you are having to talk around a lectern that has been set too high or in the wrong place.

It takes a moment to fix this: always move the moveable to help you present better.

You

All the presentation aids discussed above are useful, but the most important presentation aid you have will always be *you*.

Get used to the presentation room so that it feels like ‘your’ space.

Audience members like to know that you care, so dress and present yourself in a way that shows you value this chance to impress.

You need to know in advance what technology is available to you and exactly how to use it.

Minor distractions and tiny errors can seem huge when you are presenting. If you remember to smile, they will shrink instantly as the audience smiles back at you.

With so much depending on you, you are bound to feel pressure to perform. That is why rehearsals are so important, and so they are the topic of the next section of this guide.

Topic 3.3: Rehearsing for Maximum Impact

Every presentation that you give will make you a better presenter. It makes sense, then, that every rehearsal will make each presentation better and that is true, to a point. The secret to effective rehearsing is to know when to start and – just as importantly – when to stop. An over-rehearsed presentation can sound rather listless. You might begin to rehearse before you produce any slides, so that you can get a good sense of whether you have the right amount of material, and how it will all hang together, before you commit to making slides.

[begin feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

Even practising just once will immensely improve your presentation and boost your confidence.

[End feature box]

Making the best of rehearsing relies on knowing what you are trying to achieve in each rehearsal. Watch the video for a demonstration of the six full rehearsals you will need to be fully prepared for your presentation.

[Video 1](#). Six Rehearsal Steps for A Great Presentation

[insert video coding here as per encoding guidelines: ID is V1076016]

[transcripts are uploaded in SMART in four formats as file type ‘Other’]

[video copyright info: © 2022 SAGE Publications Inc.]

Download transcript

[insert transcript PDF: V1076016.pdf]

[Start feature box]

Raise Your Grade

When you have worked through this rehearsal schedule and feel ready to present, STOP REHEARSING! Just leave yourself space to have a final run-through just before the event, as a confidence boost.

[End feature box]

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
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|---|---------------------------|

Topic 4.1: Working the Room

Picture the scene: you enter the room and see a HUGE auditorium filled with chairs. Soon, a spotlight will shine down on you and you have to present to a sea of faces, none of them with a smile.

[Insert gene-gallin-rm8xmlIWShe-unsplash.jpg]

A figure shows a bubble chart of Presentation Aid Options.

Source: Photo by Gene Gallin on Unsplash.

This dream is common for those facing a presentation, but it would be wrong to call it a nightmare. An experienced presenter would tell you that an audience of forty is easier to face than a small group of six, and an audience of sixty is even easier.

Once you realise that any audience is a good size of audience, you can turn to a far more positive thought: how do you give your audience members the chance to help you?

There are four excellent ways to help an audience to help you:

- Be prepared
- Know your audience
- Look at your audience
- SMILE!

[Insert feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

Your audience isn't a dead wooden board, you have to be interesting!

[End feature box]

Be Prepared

An audience is never scarier than when you feel unprepared. Your hard work will fix that, but you could also try some tricks that good presenters use:

- Learn how to create 'hidden slides'. That is, slides that you only use if you speed through your presentation too quickly and need more material; presentation software such as PowerPoint lets you do this as a standard function. You might also produce a 'semi-hidden slide'.

This is a slide with just a few words on it that can either be used to sum up a section you have just covered, or give you more material if you are going too fast.

An example of a 'semi-hidden slide' would be...

[TS: the below should be an image]



Is this you summing up what you have just said in your presentation, or is it a starting point to allow you to add a few more sentences and a little bit more material? It could be either: that is the beauty of the 'semi-hidden slide'.

Make sure that you have opening and closing slides with easy to grasp information. A first slide with your name and the title of your presentation, a final slide with something as simple as 'Thank you for listening'.

[begin feature box]

Raise Your Grade

It is amazing how often presenters seem surprised by their last slide and try to click on to the next slide before realising that they have actually finished presenting. This is usually down to nerves, but it always looks unprepared, and you will lose the good impression you are making, so make a final 'thank you' slide.

[End feature box]

Make a note, in large text, of your key points (no more than six) on a piece of paper and have these in front of you as you speak. Avoid the temptation to pick up this piece of paper, but glance at it from time to time if you need a reminder.

- Be clear from the outset about the structure of your presentation. Audiences need to know how long they will have to listen, what you will be covering, and when they will be allowed to ask questions.

Know Your Audience

Regardless of whether you know your audience members personally or not, you do need to know *about* your audience.

Questions to answer about your audience:

- How large will it be?
- Will I know everyone?
- How expert is this audience on my topic?
- How many people are marking my performance?
- Will someone be filming me?
- Will there be audience members giving me formal feedback afterwards?

Look at Your Audience

Here are four myths about making eye contact with your audience:

Sweep your glance from side to side, so that everyone feels included.

No! You will look as if you are watching a tennis match.

Look at the wall just above the heads of audience members, so that you look engaged.

No! The audience always spots this straight away.

Imagine your audience naked or in funny clothes, so that they are less intimidating.

No! This puts you in the wrong frame of mind.

Look at your slides as you present, so that you seem interested.

No! the audience just sees your back, not your face.

There is a much better way to make good eye contact. Find two people who look keen and friendly – you may already have chatted with them before your presentation. Ideally, they will be sitting at different points in the audience (if you like, ask your study friends to take on this role). As you begin to present, smile at them after your first smile at the whole audience. In the first few minutes, look at them again, but this time widening the reach of your gaze so that it includes a few of the people around them (or just the people sitting right next to them, in a small audience). As you gain in confidence, expand the scope of your gaze until it includes the whole audience.

Once you have included everyone, you must keep up that eye contact, making sure that you notice the ‘hard to reach’ places in the audiences (right beside you, off to the far left or right, directly in front of you) and keep those deliberately in your eye contact from time to time.

[begin feature box]

Raise Your Grade

Never lock eyes with the person marking your presentation. The occasional polite glance is enough. Beyond that, act as if the marker is a regular member of the audience.

[end feature box]

Smile

You will understand your brief, know how the marks are allocated, have planned your material, produced beautiful slides, and practised your presentation. All of this is essential, but if you only do this you will be ignoring what audience members want most: they want to see you SMILE!

[insert GettyImages-98680802.jpg]

A picture shows a woman speaking on the microphone, in a conference hall, while the others are seated, and listening to her.

Source: Jacobs Stock Photography Ltd/ DigitalVision/ via Getty Images.

Smiling at your audience members shows that you might be nervous, but you are also determined to work with them to give a good presentation.

When to smile:

Whilst you wait to present, so that you look engaged, especially in a group presentation.

At the beginning of your presentation, so that everyone knows you are ready, but not with a fixed smile as you wait for complete silence: this can seem patronising.

If the technology fails, or you drop your notes, or anything else goes wrong, so that you reassure the audience that you are still alright (smile and say little is the best way).

- At the end of your presentation, to show that you have finished.
- When you tell the audience that you are happy to take questions, and keep smiling even if you have to wait a while for those questions.
- As a way to control questions (a smile whilst firmly breaking eye contact is the best way to move on to the next question).
- At the end of the event, until the audience applauds, or you are invited to return to your seat. This smile can be one of relief, but not so obviously that the audience thinks you hated the whole experience.

Topic 4.2: Taking Control – and Keeping It

[Begin scenario 1]

Scenario 1

Each presentation you give will be unique, but some things never change, so here are some 'must do' rules...

Introduce yourself

It's important to introduce yourself because audience members want to know who you are, and the marker might not instantly recall your name. Before you begin your presentation, say your name and also put it on your first slide.

Share your structure

You want your audience to focus from the beginning of the presentation and a good way to do this is to share the structure of your presentation. Make sure that your second slide contains your presentation structure and explains what is going to happen in your presentation.

Making the most of your slides

Your slides can create impact whilst taking the spotlight off you for a moment; they contain a wealth of information and they can act as prompts for you. Every time you move to a new slide, turn to look at it with the audience. Read it through, take a moment, then turn back to the audience.

Be flexible

Being flexible demonstrates that you are eager, well prepared, and confident in your material. You can demonstrate your flexibility by responding positively to hurdles that are thrown your way. For example, if you are asked to present later than planned, or the technology does not work, or you have to move rooms, take a moment and smile at everyone before doing exactly what is needed – this will guarantee audience goodwill.

Engage

If you do not engage with your audience members, they will struggle to listen to you and will get bored; a marker whose attention drifts might mark you down for that. Get into the habit of surveying the room every now and then. If you judge that too many people are disengaged, take a momentary pause, move forward a little and smile as you brightly make your next point.

Close strongly

A good presentation can easily lose marks for a poor last impression, and if you mutter ‘That is about all I have to say’, the audience might not be sure that you have actually finished the presentation. Practise your closing remark repeatedly so that you end with a clear and positive point, such as ‘Thank you for listening to me. Are there are any questions?’.

[End scenario 1: Explore your options]

[begin feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

Use questions! They force the audience into a more interactive role, rather than just staying passive.

[End feature box]

Making a Success of the Q&A Session After Your Presentation

Q&A sessions can be scary as you are opening the space to your audience, who might ask anything, and that is challenging. You can reduce your anxiety, and make your Q&A more successful, by following these guidelines:

- At the start of your presentation, explain when the Q&A session is to be.
- Close strongly, reminding the audience how long the Q&A session will last.
- Smile – this will encourage questions.
- Let the silence happen – questions will come if you simply wait.
- In a group presentation, have one person to field questions, directing each to a group member.
- Read the NVC so that you are ready for each questioner.
- Begin each answer by looking directly at the questioner, but then let your gaze encompass the whole audience.
- If you receive a gem of a question, try to avoid answering at great length – others want their turn.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, adding that you will look into it later.
- If a questioner tries to take over, explain that you find the topic interesting, and that you would be happy to talk about it further after the event.
- Stick to the time allowed for questions. If you run over on time, the audience might become anxious. A glance at the organiser or marker will usually bring help in drawing the event to a close.

[Start feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

Think about what the audience wants to hear from you, and the goals of the presentation.

[End feature box]

Topic 4.3: Looking Ahead

[Begin scenario 1]

Scenario 1

Congratulations – you have given a great presentation! So, what should you do next?

Two minutes after your presentation

Make sure that you have your memory stick, prompt cards, and demonstration material with you. If not, you will know to collect them after the event.

Five minutes after

Reengage, if there are further activities after your presentation. You want to be supportive of others, especially if your mark is based partly on your participation.

An hour after

Take any congratulations on offer and then move on with your day. Analysing exactly what happened, especially with fellow presenters, might leave you unnecessarily concerned with one tiny aspect of your performance.

The evening after

If your presentation was filmed, look at it now so that you can note any areas for improvement. Doing this now, when the experience is fresh in your mind, means you can judge your performance in context.

A week after

Forget it! But only after you have spent no more than 15 minutes in quiet reflection. Is there an aspect of your presenting style that you really want to focus on for your next presentation?

A month after

Sign up to give as many presentations as you have time to prepare. Practice is the best way to improve, so you need to take these opportunities when you can.

[End scenario 1]

[Start feature box]

A Student Asked Me to Share

Everyone has something they could have done better in their presentation, but this can be identified and strengthened through reflection and comparison and you'll get better next time!

[End feature box]

It is a great feeling, knowing that you have given a good presentation and will be more confident next time, and this moving ahead will take you beyond your life as a student. Your professional success is also likely to rely on your ability to articulate your ideas clearly and persuasively. You might first use these skills professionally when you try to win a placement whilst you are still studying, and you will certainly use them at interview, regardless of whether a formal presentation is involved. Throughout your career you will return, again and again, to the skills you first learned here: mastering those skills is a great way to start a successful career.

Skill Self-Assessment

1. I have very little experience of giving presentations. (maps to Topic 2.1, Getting organised)
2. I am not sure about group presentations. (maps to 2.2, Getting to grips with group presentations)
3. I have never reflected much on my past presentations. (maps onto 2.3, Reflecting on past presentations)
4. I get really nervous even thinking about giving a presentation. (maps to 2.4)
5. I worry about what my body language (NVC) says about me. (maps onto 2.5)
6. I want to come across well, and I sometimes struggle to read how the audience is responding. (maps onto 2.6, Creating a good impression and reading body language)
7. I do not know how to plan a presentation. (maps onto 3.1)
8. I am not very experienced at making presentation aids. (maps onto 3.2)
9. I am not sure how to make rehearsals work for me. (maps onto 3.3)
10. I am dreading facing a room full of people. (maps onto 4.1)
11. I want to get the best possible grade on the day. (maps onto 4.2)
12. I cannot see how my hard work now relates to my future success. (maps onto 4.3)