

how to produce a presentation

1. What is a presentation?

Many people use the term presentation to describe a talk supported by visual aids or multimedia, but it can also take the form of a speech or unaccompanied talk. A good presentation encourages interaction between presenter and audience, so that the audience takes interest in the message being communicated. A presentation should have a purpose, even if it is simply pure enjoyment, and in business this will usually be to inform an audience or persuade it to take action.

2. Why do I need a presentation?

Presentations are an effective means of communicating messages to groups of people and are especially useful at:



- Conferences or trade events: _____
- Sales launches or customer events: _____
- Shareholder meetings: _____
- Employee meetings: _____
- Other events: _____

3. What do I need to produce my presentation?

Be clear about when and where you will be presenting, who you will be presenting to and what you need to say. Identify:

- The date: _____
- The occasion: _____
- The format: _____
- Your audience: _____
- Expected duration: _____
- Your message: _____

The answers to the above are explored in more detail in questions 4 to 8, enabling you to draw up a schedule for creating and rehearsing your presentation in question 9.

4. When will I give my presentation?

How long have you got to prepare? If you have months or weeks, you have lots of time. If you have days or hours, you must make best use of all the time you have available. The success of most presentations depends on preparation of:

- Your speech or spoken text: _____
- Your personal delivery: _____
- Your visual/multimedia materials: _____
- Your handouts/supporting materials: _____

Your spoken text and personal performance must take the highest priority.

5. What is the occasion on which you are giving your presentation?

The nature of the occasion will determine what message you want to communicate and how you deliver it. For example, you might not want to reveal confidential information at a press conference with journalists present, although you might want to share this with your colleagues at an in-house event.

- In-house event: _____
- Press conference: _____
- Event for external audience hosted by you: _____
- Event hosted by another organisation: _____
- External exhibition: _____
- Other: _____

6. What format will my presentation take?

Will you be speaking to a small group or addressing an audience of hundreds? Will it be in a small seminar room or a large auditorium? The answers will determine whether you present informally or speak into a microphone, whether you can write on a flip-chart or require graphics to be projected on to a cinema screen.

- Size of audience: _____
- Type of venue: _____
- What presentation equipment is required? _____
- Sound system required? _____

Check what facilities are provided at the venue so that you can provide or hire all the equipment you need.

7. Who are my audience?

The composition of your audience will help to determine the style of language you use in your presentation. Are they?

- Existing customers: _____
- Potential customers: _____
- Industry colleagues: _____
- Employees: _____
- The public: _____
- A mixture: _____
- Other: _____

8. How long should my presentation be?

Ideally, as short as possible. Take as much time as you need, but don't string it out with waffle, as your audience will become bored.

If you are speaking at an event where you are allocated a specific length of time, you will have to plan your presentation to fill this time. If you do not want to speak for all this time, you could end with an interactive question and answer session.

A five minute presentation will differ considerably from a one hour talk, although both require the same standard of preparation. You may find you have scarce time to say everything you want in a few minutes, while it can be a challenge to keep the interest of any audience for a whole hour.

The time at which you are to give your presentation is also important. After lunch, an audience tends to feel sleepy; people will also be tired when they have been listening to speakers all day long at a conference. If you think your audience will be tired, you need to ensure your presentation is lively enough to keep everyone awake.

- Length of presentation: _____
- Time of day: _____

9. How do I plan my presentation?

Use your answers from questions 5 to 8 to draw up a schedule so that you have everything you need and have rehearsed your presentation in good time.

- ___ / ___ / ___ : start writing speech/spoken text
- ___ / ___ / ___ : start producing/commission visual/multimedia materials
- ___ / ___ / ___ : complete writing speech/spoken text
- ___ / ___ / ___ : complete visual/multimedia materials
- ___ / ___ / ___ : start rehearsing speech/spoken text
- ___ / ___ / ___ : start producing handouts/supporting materials
- ___ / ___ / ___ : complete handouts/supporting materials
- ___ / ___ / ___ : everything complete
- ___ / ___ / ___ : date of presentation

10. Who can write my presentation?

If you are able to write your own speech or spoken text, do it yourself. If not, ask a specialist writer to write it for you. Make sure you brief the writer with full and precise details of the message you want to convey and the length of the presentation, and give sufficient time for them to write your speech.

11. How do I write my presentation?

When you know what your message is, who it is aimed at and how much time you have for your presentation, you can start writing your text.

Use a style appropriate to your audience. If you are addressing the general public, don't use industry jargon or include specialist technical detail. If you are addressing industry specialists, it is more acceptable to include technical details, but do not assume that everyone understands jargon. Make sure you explain everything clearly, whoever you are addressing.

Make sure your speech focuses on the main message you aim to communicate, and make it both interesting and entertaining. It is easy for an audience to feel sleepy when seated in a warm venue listening to a speaker, so make sure your words grab their attention and keep their interest. Don't waffle or discuss irrelevant topics, but stick to the point.

Use humour where appropriate, but think how your audience will respond to it. Is it really funny? You don't want to offend them.

12. Who can produce my support materials?

If your slides or visual material are simple, produce them yourself. Most organisations include their logo and branding on slides to reinforce their corporate identity.

If you require sophisticated graphics, video, animations and/or audio, use a specialist animator or presentations company to produce your material for you. Clip-art and badly drawn graphics create a cheap, very poor impression that will undermine your position. Use only high quality graphics and photographs, and commission these from specialists, if required.

13. How do I produce support materials?

Audio-visual support materials can either reinforce your message effectively or distract your audience from what you are saying. Try to minimise your use of support materials and ensure that they emphasise the message in your text.

If you are creating written “slides”, use short phrases for bullet points to reinforce your words or emphasise key facts. Do not use long sentences or repeat your text verbatim, as audiences will read the slides first and not listen to you.

If you are using animations and sound, these will need to be co-ordinated with your speech/spoken text to create a true multimedia experience for your audience.

14. How do I produce handouts?

You could give each member of the audience a copy of your speech and/or your slides, but very often these will not work effectively, as bullet points can lose their meaning when read out of the context of the presentation.

Ideally, handouts should be produced separately and should convey your message effectively to any reader, whether they saw your presentation or not. Handouts can include far more detailed material than you have time to give in your presentation and can serve as a reference work for the reader.

Handouts give you an opportunity to create a lasting impression with your audience when they are useful and of a high quality, as your audience will be more inclined to keep them and refer to them.

When you are presenting, inform your audience what form of handout you are providing, but don't give it out until after your presentation. If you do, many people will read the handouts before you speak and will be bored by your presentation, because they will know in advance what you are going to say.

15. How do I practise giving my presentation?

- Read your speech aloud to colleagues and ask for their comments. Does it communicate the precise message you want to convey to your audience? Will they understand it? If not, edit your speech and support materials so that they say what you mean clearly.
- Listen to your own voice as you read your speech. If any words sound uncomfortable, change them.
- Time yourself to ensure that your speech is the right length. If it is too long, you can cut it to fit. If it is too short, you could ask the audience for questions for you to answer to fill up the time. Think up likely questions in advance.
- While it helps if you can memorise your speech in its entirety, it is more practical to familiarise yourself with the main points. When you are delivering your presentation, it is good to make eye contact with the audience: try using prompt cards with bullet points or get to know your speech well enough so that you can look up from the text frequently to connect with your audience.

16. How do I prepare in advance?

- Make sure you have the right date, time and venue.
- Ensure that the venue has all the equipment you need, eg flip-chart, projector.
- Ensure that any equipment you are hiring is confirmed for delivery to you or the venue.
- Plan your travel arrangements and book any transport you require.
- If there is an opportunity to rehearse at the venue in advance, take advantage of this.
- Be prepared to speak without any support materials, as presentation technology is notorious for failing at the moment you need it. As you are the most important focus of your presentation and are fully prepared, you can speak successfully with or without support materials.
- Are you confident in the content of your presentation? Can you answer any questions you could be asked? If not, research the topic and ask colleagues for advice on any difficult areas of knowledge.

17. How do I prepare on the day of my presentation?

- Ensure that you set out with everything you need.
- Arrive at the venue in good time.
- Familiarise yourself with the stage and venue.
- If you will be using a microphone, try to test this in advance.
- If you are using projected support slides, check that these work.

18. How do I prepare myself before I speak?

Many people are nervous about giving presentations, so you're not alone.

- Do not drink alcohol or take other stimulants to boost your confidence.
- Remain calm by breathing deeply and slowly.
- Calm yourself by going for a walk outside.
- Sip water to prevent your mouth from going dry.

19. How do I deliver my presentation?

- Walk slowly to the stage or presentation area.
- Speak clearly and project your voice so that everyone in the room can hear you.
- Speak with enthusiasm in your voice so that the audience is interested in what you have to say.
- Do not speak too fast or people will not be able to understand you.
- Sip water if your mouth becomes dry.
- Introduce yourself, your organisation and your topic.
- If you lose your place or forget what to say, do not panic. Refer to your notes and continue. Few people will notice.
- Refer to your notes or prompt cards, but do not read off projected slides.
- Make eye contact with the audience as much as possible.

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- If you are using slides, have a colleague manage the projection, so that you are free to talk and engage with your audience.
- Many speakers prefer to answer questions at the end of their presentation. You may choose to do this or you may prefer to answer questions as you go along. Make sure that you are not sidetracked from your presentation and that you do not bore the majority of your audience with discussions about obscure aspects of your topic relevant only to a small minority.
- If you are asked a question that you cannot answer, say so. Ask the questioner to give their details to you after the presentation so that you can get the answer for them. No one knows everything and it is perfectly natural to be asked a question that you cannot answer.
- Enjoy yourself and the applause at the end.

20. How did I do?

If you prepare well for your presentation, you are more than half way to success. The more you have prepared, the more confident you will feel. This will enable you to inject energy into your speech and make it stimulating for your audience.