

Presentation Skills

In conjunction with



Version 8.15

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Coping with Nerves

When giving a presentation most people usually suffer from nerves. It is important to realise that nerves are a necessary part of giving a presentation as they give the speaker energy which he/she needs in order to give a good performance.

Nerves are caused through adrenaline flowing through the body which can result in various reactions such as: shaking hands, twitching face, quivering voice, sweating palms, knocking knees etc! Understand how nerves affect you personally and try to come to terms with the physical manifestation of those nerves. Face up to your fears and try and analyse why you feel nervous.

Speakers are normally afraid for some or all of the following reasons:

- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of oneself
- Fear of the audience
- Fear of failure

In order to come to terms with your fears try and remember the following points:

1. Preparation, planning and practice will help overcome nerves.
2. Face up to your fears - acknowledge they are there.
3. Turn negative fear into positive power.
4. Remember that even the most experienced of speakers feels nervous.

When giving a presentation you set yourself apart from the crowd. You leave the pack and become exposed and isolated. Try to look on this isolation as a positive experience rather than as something to fear. Concentrate on your audience and remember that they want to hear what you have to say.

In normal face-to-face communication you will receive regular feedback which helps to support and fuel the conversation. When presenting to an audience much of this essential feedback will be missing and this can make you feel even more uncomfortable and nervous. Just because you appear to be receiving very little feedback it doesn't mean that your audience are not interested in you and your message.

Avoid letting the inner negative voice talk too strongly. Beware of talking to yourself in a negative way prior to the presentation. Do not say things like:

'I am bound to forget what I am supposed to say'

'The audience will try and catch me out with awkward questions'

'The audience will enjoy seeing me fail'

'I won't be able to stop my legs from shaking'

Give yourself a 5 minutes commercial break before you start speaking and say positive things to yourself such as:

'I will enjoy myself'

'I will present an authoritative image'

'My audience will be interested in me'

'I will be able to answer their questions competently'

Intervene and challenge any negative thoughts you may have and replace them with positive thoughts. This will help you to ooze power, confidence and authority when you stand up in front of the audience.

Relaxation

The ability to relax is a very good way to help you control nerves when you are speaking to an audience. It is possible to learn to relax and to use your powers of relaxation when in a stressful situation, such as speaking to an audience.

If you do not appear relaxed your audience will also find it very difficult to relax and give you their full attention. So try and put your listeners at

ease. Practice the following exercises and they will help you to turn on relaxation like a tap!

Relaxation Exercises

1. Lie flat on the floor. Clench each muscle in turn until the whole body is tense and tight. Count to five and then release the whole body.
Repeat.
Become familiar with the difference between a relaxed and a tense body.
2. Stand with feet slightly apart, hands held loosely by your sides. Concentrate on your breathing, listening to the sound as the breath is taken into the body and then released. Breathe in to 3 and out to 3 until you reach a rhythmical pattern.
3. Stand straight and then let your body flop from the waist up. Let your body hang loosely for a few seconds.
4. Shake the hands from the wrist and the arms from the shoulder.
5. Say 'O' 'E' 'O' 'E' silently.

Breathing

Practice your breathing so that you develop control. Good breathing is important for two reasons:

- 1. Relaxation**
- 2. Voice Production**

Deep breathing can certainly help you to relax in a stressful situation and will prove invaluable if you suffer from breath 'disappearing' as you speak in front of an audience.

Be aware of the Mechanics of Breathing and breathe evenly and deeply:

Breathing in:

The ribs move up and out and the diaphragm flattens. Air is drawn into the lungs through the nose and the lungs expand until the whole chest space is filled. The chest should expand in all directions.

Breathing out:

The chest wall and diaphragm return to their normal position and air is forced out of the lungs, the muscles in-between the ribs control how quickly the ribs and lungs collapse.

Beware of allowing the ribs to move up and down as this indicates that the breathing is rather shallow. Beware also of raising the shoulders - the shoulders should not move throughout the whole process.

The lungs are your powerhouse - use them to their full potential

Breathing Exercises

1. Place the hands tightly on the ribs and practice breathing in and out to a count of 3.
Beware of shoulder lifting!
2. Repeat the exercise breathing in to 3 and out to 5.
3. Repeat the exercise again counting out to 10, 15 and 20.
4. Repeat the exercise counting out to the days of the week and the months of the year.

Remember:

- Breathing and breath control is improved with practice!
- Beware of tension creeping into the throat and shoulders as you concentrate on deep breathing.
- Good breathing is the key to relaxation and effective voice production.

Posture

Much of the impact that a speaker has on an audience is visual impact, so make sure the visual image you project is powerful and positive.

Albert Mehrabian said that up to 55% of the impact of a speaker is purely visual. How you stand makes up a vital part of this impact.

Audiences form first impressions of a speaker and if the first impression is poor it is very difficult to persuade the audience to think positively. A large part of the visual impact is formed through the posture adopted by a speaker.

Remember that posture is an important part of the Body Language and you will begin to communicate to the audience long before you utter a word. The communication process will begin simply by the way you walk onto the platform and how you stand.

Checklist for correct posture:

1. Stand straight and tall with the weight on the balls of the feet. This will give the impression to the audience that you are leaning slightly forward and so are interested in them.
2. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.
3. Lift your shoulders up, down and back but avoid any tension.
4. Look straight ahead at and around your audience. Avoid looking down which appears negative and lacking in confidence.
5. Let the arms hang loosely by your sides or linked in front of the body, so that you can use your hands and arms to gesture when needed. Avoid fiddling with the hands as this can convey unease to the audience.
6. Do not be tempted to hide behind a table or a lectern. Always face your audience so that they can see the full length of your body - it will make you appear so much more confident.
7. Do not apologise for your presence, stand up tall with authority and look your audience straight in the eye!

Imagine you have a string running up your back and through the crown of your head. Pull the string up to an imaginary hook on the ceiling. Walk tall!

Body Language

A whole science has grown up around the study of body language. Some research indicates that body language accounts for approximately 65% of human interaction - with words accounting for the rest.

90% of the impression that we make when we first appear before an audience is formulated with the first 60 seconds. It is therefore vital to get not only the words right but also the gestures and Body Language.

Body language can also cancel or reinforce what we are saying verbally and it is essential that the two sets of messages agree.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is one of the most important aspects of body language. Eyes are the 'window to the soul' and they will inform the speaker whether their message is being truly received and understood.

It is important to maintain firm and assertive eye contact with your audience. There is nothing more disturbing than a speaker who steadfastly refuses to look at his audience or who insists on looking permanently at a point over their head. The opposite is equally frustrating - a speaker who selects a member of the audience giving them a long hard stare and refuses to avert his eyes. A happy medium is what we need to strive for where we look at all our audience for approximately 2 seconds each.

When your audience is too big for you to look at each person individually then you will need to practice making 'W' or 'M' movements with your eyes so that all areas of the audience receive eye contact.

Lack of eye contact gives the impression of lacking in confidence and general furtiveness.

Hands and Gesturing

Avoid any unnecessary hand movements such as pulling your hair, scratching, biting your nails, fiddling with a pen, jangling your loose change. These are all examples of displacement activities which we tend to resort to when we are under stress and which show that we are anxious or uncomfortable.

Keep hands at your side if you are tempted to fidget. Try to only use your hands or arms to emphasise a verbal point with a well-timed gesture - this can be very powerful.

In general the body should remain open with the avoidance of positions such as: folded arms, clamped together hands and lifted shoulders. These closed positions give the impression of a barrier between yourself and your audience.

Avoid any physical barriers such as flip charts, overhead projectors, lecterns, tables and chairs. Maintain maximum exposure to your audience. Own the space in which you are presenting. It is your territory.

Voice Production

The quality of a speaker's voice is an important factor in how successful a presentation will be. If the sound of the speaker's voice is dull and uninteresting the audience will switch off and it will be very difficult to get them to switch back on again.

Do not worry if you have an accent - accent can add a great deal of natural colour and vitality to a voice and it is also part of your personality. However, it is important to make sure that your voice is clear and that you can be understood if you have a pronounced accent.

When you are speaking always bear in mind the three 'P's:

Pitch This simply means the note at which you speak. Just as a musical instrument would be very dull if it was played using two or three notes so is the voice if a speaker has a restricted range.

Pace Pace is the rate at which you speak. It is important to vary the rate at which you speak in order to add colour and variety to your voice.

Pause Pauses are very necessary in speech for a number of reasons and these are:

1. Gives the speaker time to think
2. Gives the audience time to absorb information
3. Makes the speaker appear in control, authoritative and confident
4. Useful for dramatic effect

Nervous speakers will often resist the temptation to pause, so try to feel comfortable with the pause and do not feel you have to punctuate the gap with 'umms' and 'errs'.

Facial Expression

The overall look of your face can give nearly as much information as your eyes. If your brow is furrowed your eyes cast down and your head dropped forward you will seem defensive or worried. Tight lips, clenched jaw and jutting forward chin will indicate aggression or tension.

Try as a general rule to keep the head upright, eyebrows in their natural position, eyes open (not too widely), with a slight upward tilt to the mouth but avoiding inappropriate smiling.

Volume

No matter how wonderful your voice is, it will be wasted if your audience cannot hear you. Not every speaker is fortunate to have a microphone at their disposal and so you will have to use your natural voice and make sure it is heard by all the audience.

A loud strong voice gives an impression to the audience that you are a strong and confident speaker and well worth listening to. A quiet voice on the other hand which is difficult to listen to will encourage the audience to stop listening.

Increasing the volume of your voice will only become easier with practice, try the following exercise:

Stand in a large room and ask a friend to stand at the opposite end. Deliver your speech to your friend making sure that you do not shout and that you use lots of breath to support your voice. Avoid pitching the voice up but use the richer lower notes. Get used to the sound of your new 'big' voice!

Imagine you are rolling your voice along the floor until it reaches the back of the hall.

Articulation

It is vital to have good articulation when speaking. Articulation means pronouncing words distinctly so that the audience can understand and hear you perfectly. Articulation is dependent on how well consonant sounds are pronounced, sounds like 'B' 'D' 'M' 'W' 'C' 'T' 'L' 'G' etc.

It is the consonant sounds - which give a voice its clarity and brilliance, so work to make the consonants more precise.

Vowel sounds are the sounds which give speech its richness and carrying power. Practice opening the mouth wide and letting those vowel sounds come out.

Exercises to Improve the Voice

1. Draw the hands down the face and let the jaw relax. Become accustomed to the feel of an open jaw.

2. Practice yawning and opening the mouth very wide. Yawning also helps to prevent tension.
3. Exercise the 'organs of articulation' - that is the organs used to make speech such as: lips, tongue, hard palate and soft palate. An athlete would not run a race without warming up and you as speaker are no different. It is important to warm up the organs of articulation before you begin speaking.
4. Count from 1 - 10 and 1 - 20 up the scale and back down again. This is a useful exercise for encouraging the use of pitch in the voice.
5. Practice humming on the 'M' 'N' 'G' sounds in order to develop resonance in voice. Feel the voice really coming forward into the mask of the face.
6. Practice the following Tongue Twisters to improve articulation:

Red Leather, Yellow Leather

New York New York

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers

A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked

If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers

Where is the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

Audience

During the early stages of planning your presentation, it is very important to consider your audience and ask yourself the basic questions which are covered in the section on structuring a presentation.

If possible it is also useful to know how much they already know about the topic on which you are going to speak. If your audience has varying degrees of knowledge you can give enough background knowledge to enable everyone to understand your talk without annoying the better

informed by using phrases such as: 'I expect you are aware' and 'You probably know'.

Try to turn your audience into one person and speak to them intimately and remember that the larger the audience the more they react to the presenter and less to the presentation.

Beware of arrogance as a speaker, which can sometimes arise through nerves as this will only annoy and alienate the audience.

Remember to look at your audience and ask them questions to keep them involved. Watch out for any quizzical looks which could indicate that a member of the audience does not understand. Don't be afraid to ask individuals if they are quite happy with what you have said so far.

Structuring a Presentation

Preparation and planning are vital ingredients in structuring a presentation. You will need to consider the following points before you can start to structure your presentation:

Establish your Objective for speaking.

Your overall objective may be quite general for example to inform, to persuade, to train, to convince etc. This general objective needs to be followed by some more specific objectives.

Ascertain who your audience will be.

Analysing your audience is vital because it will help you to make your presentation relevant to that particular group. Ask yourself the following questions about the audience:

- What is their objective for listening?
- What will they expect to be told?
- What do they need to know?

- How much do they already know about the topic?
- How much do they think they know?
- How many will be present?
- Will there be 'Decision Makers' in the group?

Decide on the information you will need to give your audience in order to meet your objective for speaking.

This is probably best done by brainstorming on paper or writing out a mind map. Having committed all your ideas to paper you will then need to select which information you will need to include. Writing a Mind Map helps to free the mind and encourages lateral thinking.

Select a suitable structure for your presentation.

A structure will give the audience a framework around which to listen to your ideas. The following are some examples:

Structure	Features
Qualitative Structure	Listing points in your presentation in order of significance so dealing with the most important point first. This is quite a useful structure to use because most audiences are at their most alert at the beginning of a presentation.
Problem/Solution	The problem is examined first of all and then a solution or solutions are put forward. This is an ideal structure for a business presentation.
Chronological	A natural time sequence is used in the structure and it is useful for presentations where the objective is to inform as the content follows a very logical pattern.
Spatial	This is where the overall picture is considered initially and then the detail is examined or vice versa.

It is quite acceptable to use more than one structure within a presentation. The one(s) that are used will depend on the subject matter and the audience being addressed.

Structure of the Presentation

Complete the following sheets in order to help you structure your own presentation:

Main Objective for Speaking:

--

Type of Structure:

--

Audience Analysis: (Who are they? What do they need to know? What do they expect? How many will be present? etc):

--

Opening Statement: (Attention)

--

Benefits for audience of Listening:

--

Credentials for Speaking:

--

Key points to be covered during the Main Body:

--

Visual Aids Required:

--

Close: (Action required by the Audience)

--

Opening Your Presentation

The opening of the presentation is vital as it will set the tone for the rest of the presentation. Try to have an attention grabbing opening which will really make the audience sit up and listen and say: 'Wow! this speaker is worth listening to!'

Powerful speakers start powerfully

Adopt the following pattern when opening your presentation:

1. Get the attention of your audience.

Do not attempt to start until everyone is quiet, has sat down, has finished blowing their noses, stopped talking and are listening. If you begin before the audience has given you their full attention you will not establish your control and leadership.

2. Explain to the audience 'what is in it for them' or the benefits of listening.

Most audiences are basically selfish and are only really interested if they feel there is a tangible personal benefit in listening.

3. Tell the audience who you are why you are speaking to them.

Build up your authority - you need to sell yourself to your audience.

4. Tell the audience the direction you are going to take.

Go through the structure of your presentation so that the audience is aware of what is to follow.

Ways in which to open a presentation

Anecdote

Far safer than a joke. A well-chosen (it must be relevant) anecdote will help to relax both you and the audience. It can help you to appear more human as a speaker and get the audience on your side. They can help build empathy and rapport.

Shock Opening

This type of opening can really make an audience sit up and take notice, but make sure you can carry it off confidently. If you have any doubts opt for a safer more conventional opening.

Historical

Relating your presentation to some relevant historical fact eg '15 years ago this company consisted of 2 men and a very old and unreliable press. Today it is a thriving organisation employing 270 people and with a turnover of 43 million pounds.'

Quotation

A very neat way to open and close a presentation. Beware of using hackneyed quotations though!

Current Affairs

Referring to some relevant news item can be a good way to start as there will be commonality with the audience.

Question

Direct questions addressed to the audience helps to get them involved. Rhetorical questions are a powerful way to make your audience think.

Statement/Statistic

Avoid using too many or the effect will be lost. One or two carefully chosen ones combine the shock element with brevity.

Comparisons

Well-chosen comparisons can be very dramatic and are especially good if they relate to the audience's experience.

Tip! Keep your eyes open constantly for interesting comments and quotations in the newspaper or on the television or radio and store them in a special place. You never know when they will come in useful.

Main Body of the Presentation

Beware of trying to fit too much information and key points into the main body of the presentation. It is far better to cover fewer points and really make sure that your audience have understood than to cover too many points and leave the audience confused.

4 or 5 key points during a 20 minute presentation would be about right.

Each key point should be like a mini-presentation of its own with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Avoid the main body of your presentation being just a long list of facts. Try and vary the content and use visual aids, examples, anecdotes and quotations to bring your key points to life and to prevent dull patches occurring.

Make sure that each of your key points are linked together in a logical pattern and have your linking sentences very clearly thought out. Build bridges to help your presentation appear polished and professional.

Visual Aids should be used to help the audience understand and retain your presentation. Beware of becoming too reliant on visuals - you are giving the presentation and not the visuals.

Avoid writing your speech in longhand as the written word is very different to the spoken word and the end result especially if it is read out to the audience will be tedious, uninspiring and lacking in sparkle.

Remember to constantly summarise during the main body of the presentation especially at the end of each key point.

Ending the Presentation

The end of the presentation is rather like the opening because this is usually where you will have maximum concentration from the audience. It is surprising how an audience wakes up when they hear phrases like: 'Before we stop for coffee' and 'In conclusion!'

Your audience should expect the end so do signpost the conclusion so that you have maximum attention.

Remember the last few words said by the speaker are what tends to stay with the audience so make them memorable.

Use some of the suggested ways for opening your presentation when you close your talk as well eg anecdote, quotation, etc.

Another good way to end a presentation is by posing a question to the audience which they will want to consider after the presentation has finished or by calling the audience to action.

Do come to a definite close so that the audience knows you have finished speaking. Avoid simply saying 'I thank you' and sliding off the platform.

Hold your position at the end of the presentation. Do not appear to be in a rush to leave as this will affect your credibility rating with the audience.

Avoid losing energy at the end of the presentation. Always practice the closing sentence to ensure it is delivered with enthusiasm and energy. Do not fall into the trap of the 'That's it' end.

Think of the close of the presentation as being the 'Take Home message' - the thought that your audience will take away with them.

Visual Aids

Advantages:

1. Portray instantly and vividly things that are impossible to convey verbally.
2. Save time.
3. Create interest.
4. Bring variety.
5. Add impact.
6. Remain in memory longer than words.

Disadvantages:

1. Reduce flexibility.
2. Expensive.
3. Can divert attention from what is being said.
4. Confusion and humiliation if they go wrong.

Some common mistakes when using Visual Aids are:

1. Talking to the visual rather than to the audience.
2. Putting too much information on one visual so that the audience becomes confused.
3. Audience not being able to see the visual either through poor positioning or through poorly produced visuals.
4. Poor control of the visuals and the equipment used in conjunction with them.
5. Allowing the visual aids to become more important than you the speaker.

Producing the Visual Aids

Use some colour where possible. Colour is pleasing to the eye. It adds emphasis and helps to differentiate from one point to another.

Avoid using too much colour as this can lead to confusion.

Blue and black are good for headlines and underlining. Green is a softer colour and implies moving forward. Red is a dramatic colour and is eye-catching but it can be difficult to see when used extensively for narrative.

Beware of producing visuals which only contain black and white. They are very dreary and the content of the visual will lose impact.

Use diagrams wherever possible. Information is easier to assimilate and retain in diagrammatic form than by simply using words.

Avoid clutter in the layout. Limit yourself to no more than 7 lines. It is far better to use two or three visuals than to crowd one visual with too much information.

Achieve consistency in the production of visuals so that they appear to be linked together.

Remember the following simple rules when using visual aids:

1. Make sure you really need the visual aid and are not simply including it for the sake of using a visual. If in doubt about the relevance of the visual - leave it out.
2. Keep them simple - do not overload one visual with too much information.
3. Keep them consistent in design and medium.
4. They should visually aid your talk.

Handling Questions

Always try to anticipate questions if you possibly can - put yourself in the position of some of the key members of the audience and try to establish what sort of questions they will be likely to ask.

This will enable you to plan your answers which will help you to feel far more in control and appear more professional during Question Time.

Treat all questions with the same importance and never make a questioner feel embarrassed.

If you do not know the answer to a question admit that you do not know but commit yourself to answering the question by a given time.

Use the following techniques for handling questions:

- Listen to the question.
- Pause - give yourself valuable thinking time.

- Show Understanding - seek point for agreement initially.
- Control your audience with eye contact.
- Brevity - keep your answer short and succinct.

To find more resources on presentation skills use the Careers Library Catalogue

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/library

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