

English presentation skills

At some time or other, most of us will have to give a presentation. The idea of speaking in public can be frightening enough if you're a native English speaker, but it's even more so if English is your second language.

In this first article on presentation skills, we show you how to take the stress out of giving presentations with eight tips to help you plan a perfect presentation.



1. Know your audience

To give an effective presentation, you need to know something about your audience. How good is their English? How much do they know about the subject of your talk? Why will they be interested in listening to you? It's a good idea to find out who is attending your presentation so that you can make the information relevant and interesting to them. For example, a presentation on your company's financial results to financial analysts will focus on results, reasons and analysis. A presentation on new auditing software will focus on the benefits and features of the

software.

Also ask yourself what you want to achieve from your presentation. Sales presentations are different from information-giving presentations, for example. It's always a good idea to work out what you want your audience to think or do at the end of your talk, as this will help you focus on the language and content of your presentation.

2. Use a strong opening statement or question to interest your audience

The first minute of your presentation is crucial. In this time you should interest your audience and give them a reason to listen to you. What you say in the first minute depends on your audience and their interests, but it must mean something important to them. Perhaps it is a problem that you know how to solve, or a fact or statistic that they need to know.

3. Don't forget the physical details

You'll need to make sure the room is big enough for the number of people attending, and that you have all the equipment you need. Find out when you are giving your presentation ? your audience may be less attentive if it's right before lunch or at the end of the week and you'll need to make especially sure that the presentation is interesting if it's at a difficult time.

4. Plan the content of your presentation

Planning helps you focus on your presentation goals, and minimises the chances of anything going wrong.

If you know who you are talking to and why you are talking to them, you can put yourself in your audience's position. You can decide what information to include and how to order it.

Aim to speak for no longer than 30 minutes, and leave time for questions and answers at the end. Remember that it's difficult to absorb lots of new information, so don't aim to include too much.

Many presentations are divided into five areas:

a) The introduction (Get someone else to introduce you to the audience. This gives you credibility as a speaker and means that you don't have to waste time telling

people who you are and why you are there)

b) The overview

c) The main body of the presentation

d) Your summary

e) A question and answer session

Make brief notes about all the points you want to make in your presentation and make a plan. Organise your presentation into main points and supporting evidence.

During the presentation, remember that it is a good idea to refer back to your opening statement and remind your audience why they are listening to you.

5. Use index cards

Put your points on individual index cards to help you during the presentation. If you put the key words onto cards (1 card for 1 key word or point) you can refer to them at any time if you forget where you are in the presentation.

Use your index cards for any words that you might find difficult to remember, or words that are difficult to pronounce.

You can also use the index cards to write the links between points, such as:

?this brings me to??

?now I?d like to move on to..?

?Right??

6. Keep visuals simple

Don't put too much information in visuals and only use them to illustrate information that would otherwise take too long to explain.

Simple graphic visuals such as pie charts and bar graphs work better than visuals with lots of labelling or words. Use colour and different fonts to help information stand out.

7. Practice makes perfect!

Practise your presentation as often as you can using your index cards. By practising, you will know how long it will take, and where the difficult areas are in your talk. The more you practise, the more confident you will feel!

8. Prepare questions and answers

You're likely to have questions at the end of your presentation, so try to think of some in advance, as well as possible answers. The more you prepare these, the better you'll feel able to deal with them.