

**HOW YOU CAN
IMMEDIATELY IMPROVE
YOUR PRESENTATION
SKILLS**

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you've got a big presentation coming up. Maybe it is in a large conference room. Perhaps it is online and being delivered through Zoom or Teams.

It could be a crucial business meeting.

How are you feeling?

If you recently had presentation skills training, you should be all set for success.

But what if you haven't and don't have time to arrange training before the event?

Don't panic – we've got you.

We've pulled together some of the knowledge, tips and advice from our training course to give you ideas and tips you can use now to present with clarity and confidence. And be the powerful presenter you want to be.

WHY LISTEN TO US?

Well, we have a long track record of delivering presentation skills training to big-name brands, public sector organisations and charities.

We've been doing it for 40 years.

During that time, we've worked with CEOs, senior executives, business executives, team leaders and aspiring leaders and managers to win new pitches, communicate ideas and initiatives with clarity, attract investors, grab attention in meetings, motivate teams, increase collaboration and thrive when the stakes are high.

This eBook is no substitute for our bespoke training courses. But it is packed with hints, tips, tricks, and ideas you can use now that will help you deliver more memorable, inspiring, and persuasive presentations.

Shall we get into it?

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

In this eBook, we will guide you through:

- How to nail your preparation
- Understanding your audience and your personal brand
- Message development
- The structures for presentation success
- How to persuade and engage your audience
- Managing audience questions
- What to do about slides
- How to deliver a winning presentation
- What to do after your presentation

PREPARATION

Good preparation lies at the heart of every great presentation.

You can't wing it – it will lead to rambling concepts, unclear messages, forgotten content and a dissatisfied audience. But what is 'good' preparation, and what does it include?

AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION

It starts with thinking about your audience.

Who are they?

What are they likely to know about your subject?

What will they already know about you and your organisation?

The more you can identify your presentation audience, the better.

During our presentation skills training courses, we ask delegates to create a one-sentence description of who they will be talking to.

For example: Senior managers of a large university hospital, aged 40-55, mostly male and all with business degrees or MBAs.

Give it a go.

PERSONAL BRANDING

It is just a marketing term, right? No.

It means thinking about how you want to come across when you deliver your presentation. It can be as simple as choosing three words.

For example, you might want your audience to view you as clear, calm and friendly.

Maybe you want to be seen as inspirational, supportive and relatable.

What words would you choose?

ONE MESSAGE IS ALL IT TAKES

Once you are clear on who you are talking to, you can focus on what you want to tell them.

What is the main point you want people to take away?

How do you want them to feel?

What do you want them to do?

You need to boil this down to one clear, concise and compelling message.

Not messages - less is always more.

Your message should be capable of being spelt out in a single sentence of fewer than 20 words. Otherwise, it is likely to be too complex for people to remember. That will feel daunting.

But once you've nailed it, you can weave through the presentation.

STORYTIME

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

Let's say you are in the audience of a presentation on the dangers of smoking and the need for tougher regulations.

The presenter says: "I remember very vividly as a young doctor having been involved in an operation to remove a patient's leg because smoking had clogged up her arteries.

"And this patient had to go outside and light up, weeping as they did it because they were trapped in addiction.

"That is not choice. It is an addiction that is doing enormous harm."

It's a harrowing human story. And it will stay with you far longer than facts and figures about the dangers.

This is a real example used in a media interview by Professor Chris Whitty – remember him?

It would work just as well in a presentation. Stories like this are needed to support messages, bring them to life and make them resonate.



STRUCTURE

Presentation structure is easily overlooked.

But you can't just throw your ideas out there – you will lose the audience.

When a presentation is structured well, the audience can follow what is being said and are more likely to leave inspired, motivated and clear on what they should do next.

So, think about how you will structure what you have to say.

There are plenty of options you can choose from. These include:

- Logical / Linear
- Problem-solution
- Story
- Demonstration
- Opportunities-Benefits-Numbers
- Pyramid principal
- Explanation

You can find out more about these in the blog section of our [website](#) by popping 'structure' into the search.

But if you are pressed for time, how about using one recommended in the TED Talk speaker guide?

TED is a great source of inspiration for presenters, and its guide says this structure “works particularly well”.

- Start by making your audience care, using a relatable example or an intriguing idea.
- Explain your idea clearly and with conviction.
- Describe your evidence and how and why your idea could be implemented.
- End by addressing how your idea could affect your audience if they were to accept it.

TED has another excellent presentation structure tip.

It says: "Your structure should be invisible to the audience. In other words, don't talk about how you're going to talk about your topic – just talk about it." Lovely stuff.

SLIDES AWAY

Many people dive straight into creating a deck of slides when they need to deliver a presentation. It's often the presentation preparation starting point. But it shouldn't be.

We recommend you use as few slides as possible for your presentation. Or, better still, avoid them altogether. Now, we understand that can feel a bit daunting and alien. But there are significant benefits.

When you present without them – or use just a few - the audience focus will be on you rather than a screen. And, because most people present with them, not using slides makes your presentation stand out.

You also don't need to worry about technology letting you down as you go through your presentation – a big fear for many public speakers.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of not having slides is that they can often hinder speakers. They fall into the trap of just reading them and using them as a crutch.

And the spoken word is different to the written one.

Not ready to ditch them altogether?
We get it – it can feel like a lot.

So, focus instead on using as few slides as possible. Try to stick to ones that show the odd headline statistic or tagline, which will support and underline your message.

THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS

Presenters worry about questions.

What if you are asked something you don't know how to answer? What if someone asks something awkward?

You might be feeling the stomach butterflies just thinking about it.

But you don't need to dread them.

Firstly, a good presentation will attract questions as people try to tap into more of your knowledge.

And questions are not as unpredictable as you might think – they can often be anticipated.

As part of your preparation, spend time considering likely questions and thinking about how you would answer them.

Always consider how you would manage the question you really don't want to be asked.

DON'T OVER PREPARE

So, this is where it can seem a bit weird.

We've spent all this time telling you how to prepare. And now we are telling you not to overdo it.

Confusing?

The difference between being prepared and overprepared can also be a thin line. But it is crucial you get this right.

Over-preparation can cause a robotic, scripted performance devoid of spontaneity and a dull experience for the target audience – and no one wants that.

So, let's be clear. You are over-prepared if:

You are lying awake at night thinking about presentation styles and trying to memorise your presentation verbatim.

You have written and memorised answers to every likely audience question.

You have rehearsed the facial expressions and gestures you will use at key moments.

You have put your entire presentation into slides.

YOUR PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Do you feel confident about delivering your presentation?
- ☐ Are you clear on the message you want to get across?
- ☐ Do you know how you are going to support it?
- ☐ Do you know how you want the audience to feel?
- ☐ Are you clear on how you want to come across?
- ☐ Does your presentation follow a clear, easy-to-understand structure?
- ☐ Have you anticipated the questions you could be asked?

WHAT ABOUT YOUR DELIVERY?

A successful presentation is not just about the quality of the content.

How it is delivered is crucial.

You need to engage your audience, stimulate their interest, and make what you say memorable.

How can you do it?

START STRONGLY

First impressions are a vital part of a good presentation. The audience will form them almost immediately. They will then look for proof that their initial assessment is correct.

It's called confirmation bias. And, while it may sound horrible, everyone is susceptible to it. Think of it like the introduction to a story, film or article - the beginning draws you in.

How do you create the right first impression and start your presentation on a solid note?

Well, you need to look the part. During our presentation skills training courses, we say you want to be about 10 per cent smarter than your audience and have open and positive body language that helps create stage presence.

You should also look to make eye contact with the audience and smile – smiling will make you appear confident and suggest you are happy to be there.

If you are talking in a room, avoid starting by tapping the microphone and asking whether people at the back can hear. Not only is it boring, but it also doesn't create the impression of someone who will communicate with confidence and clarity.

Similarly, opening with phrases like, "I haven't had a lot of time to prepare", does not suggest you are taking the opportunity seriously or that the audience will get much out of the presentation.

Instead, grab the audience's attention by showing you have something valuable to offer.

Tell them something unexpected. Share a story or anecdote. Ask the audience a question. Or invite them to imagine a particular scenario.

WARM UP YOUR VOICE

Athletes always warm up before they take centre stage. And your voice needs to be warmed up before a presentation. You'll need your voice in full working order to add energy to your delivery.

There may be moments when you will want to sound inspiring, times when you will want to sound more like a friend and points at which you will want to challenge your audience.

Your voice will need to change to reflect the goals of your message.

There are many techniques you can use to warm up your voice, including humming, chanting and lip trills - find the one that works best for you.

You can also help your voice by avoiding chocolate and milk before public speaking - dairy products can build up mucous in the throat.

BE YOURSELF

Don't leave your personality behind when you take to the stage or log on for an online presentation. Or fall into the trap of thinking you must speak in a certain way.

People love speakers who sound conversational and impromptu rather than a presentation or speech that seems rehearsed, scripted and memorised.

A presenter who just reads their slides or a prepared script, or parrots something they have memorised verbatim, will turn audiences off. And they are unlikely to take much from the presentation.

Being yourself also helps with those pesky nerves, and you will come across as being confident.

BRING THE PASSION

Passion is integral to public speaking success.

It helps to build an emotional connection with your audience. It shows you genuinely care about the subject you are discussing. It ensures people are paying attention to your talk and makes them believe. It convinces and turns doubters into believers.

John F. Kennedy once said: “The only reason to give a speech is to change the world.”

That's a lofty ambition.

But if you believe in what you are saying and the impact it can have, passion is one of the best ways to tell the audience about your great idea.

WHAT ABOUT THE LAUGHS?

There's no doubt well-judged humour can work well in presentations.

People remember when you make them laugh. But your presentation is not a stand-up routine. So, don't overdo the humour and attempt to emulate your favourite comedian.

Instead of jokes, humour and light-heartedness could come from the stories you share.

And always test your attempts at being funny beforehand.

Run it past a colleague and ensure you are confident the audience will get the humour – no one wants another Ratner moment.

THE EYES HAVE IT

There's plenty we could include about body language. But we are going to focus on eye contact.

Why?

Because it plays a pivotal role in showing the audience how confident you are and in building a connection with them.

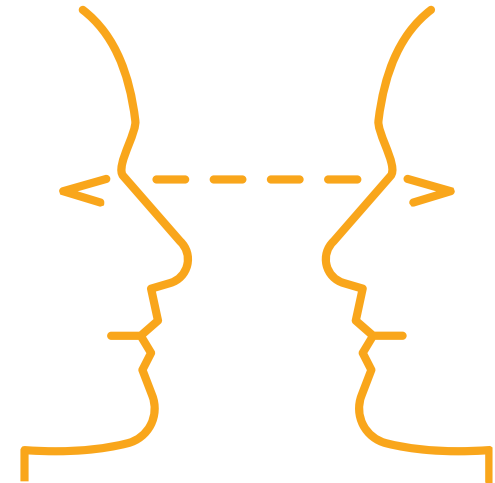
You need to ensure you make eye contact with all the audience members when you give a presentation. That sounds tricky if you are about to talk to a big crowd, doesn't it?

During our presentation training courses, we recommend drawing a W in your mind across the audience. Then work through that W, making points and maintaining that eyeline with different sections so everyone feels included.

Another option is to divide the audience into three sections. When you move that eye contact from one person to another, choose someone in a different section, again ensuring everyone feels included.

What about online presentations?

Make sure you are looking at the lens. A good body language tip here is to get post-it notes with the points you want to make and stick them on either side of the camera. That will help concentrate your gaze on the camera rather than constantly looking away or down at your notes.



THE POWER OF A PAUSE

Pauses are an excellent public speaking tool.

They build anticipation, grab attention, provide a dramatic impact, and add emphasis to a message.

It also gives people time to consider your main points. American writer Mark Twain once said: “The pause - that impressive silence, that eloquent silence, that geometrically progressive silence which often achieves a desired effect where no combination of words, howsoever felicitous, could accomplish it.”

So, are you ready to add a pause to your next presentation?

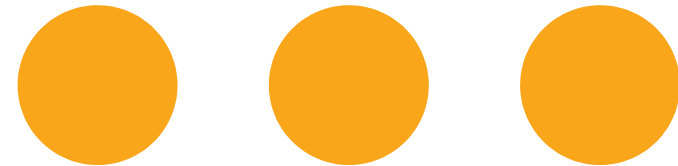
USE MOTIVATING LANGUAGE

Think about the times you have been in the audience. How often have you heard people say, "the company", "the business", or "the management team"?

Most presentations?

What about if speakers use 'you', 'we', 'us' and 'I' instead? Now, the language brings the audience into the discussion. It feels more motivating and inclusive.

Try to stick to powerful and persuasive language throughout your presentation.



CLOCK WATCHING

How painful is it when a presentation or speech overruns? We've all been there, sitting through a presentation that feels like it will never end.

You may have also seen a presentation where the presenter suddenly realises their allotted time is ending and rattles through what they still have to say in a panic.

Bad time-keeping will unsettle your audience.

If they feel you are overrunning, they will become restless and clock-watch. If you rush through the later parts of your presentation, they may also feel cheated and wonder what they would have learnt if it was given the attention it deserved.

Equally, finishing a presentation early does not create the right impression. The audience again is likely to feel short-changed and will pay attention to what key points have been missed.

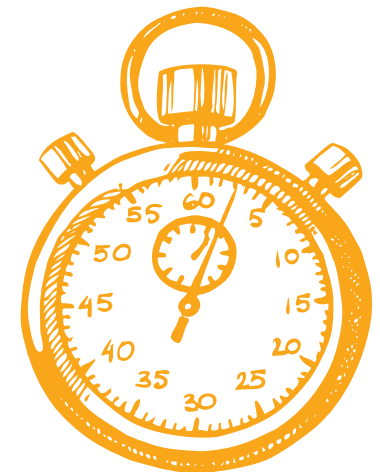
Poor time-keeping suggests a lack of preparation, and audiences find it hugely annoying.

INTERACTIVE INTEREST

If you are short on time, it may be a struggle to add polls and quizzes to your presentation. There are great digital tools, like Mentimeter, that you can explore if you are not in a hurry.

Giving people the opportunity to take part and voice their opinions can help create a more engaging presentation. If you don't fancy the tech, you could ask the audience questions and get them to respond the old-fashioned way, with a show of hands.

Questions encourage people to reflect on what has been said.



WHAT ABOUT NERVES?

Presentation nerves are real and normal.

The fear of public speaking, which can feel paralysing, even has a name - glossophobia. Speaking in front of a group is not easy, and it takes people out of their comfort zone. Even experienced public speakers find them daunting.

Changing your mindset is a crucial part of overcoming nerves and feeling more confident.

You are the expert. People want to listen to what you have to say. They want you to succeed so they learn from your experience, insight and ideas.

Also, avoid placing additional pressure on yourself by trying to deliver a perfect presentation. Everyone makes mistakes and, most of the time, they are much more minor than they feel. Often, the audience won't notice them – people won't scrutinise every word you say.

If you feel your heart is racing, take deep breaths. Breathe in for six seconds and breathe out like you are blowing a candle. It can slow your heartbeat.

Fiddling with jewellery, playing with pens (or coins in your pocket), repeatedly adjusting clothing and stroking hair and beards all suggest nervousness and should be avoided. And don't try to hide your arms behind your back – something nervous speakers often attempt. Your audience will focus on what you are doing with your hands.

But generally, nerves are not visible to the audience. So, there's no need to bring attention to them by saying something like, "Excuse me if I seem nervous".

PRACTICE MAKES....

We don't want to say 'perfect' because – as we highlighted earlier – perfection is not a realistic or healthy aim. But practice does make you better.

You may not have time to do much practice now ahead of your next presentation. But you can keep practising afterwards. Like an athlete, we need to keep our brain and muscle memory fine-tuned.

Don't wait until public speaking events are around the corner to get your skills in shape.

Pick up a video camera or smartphone and practice with colleagues, friends and family - anyone who will provide feedback (with specific examples) and tips for improving. The more you practice, the more you will gain confidence in your public speaking skills and ability. And the better you will come across when it is time to present.

WHAT ABOUT CLOTHING?

What you wear for a presentation can be a bit of a minefield. We mentioned earlier that you should aim to be 10 per cent smarter than your audience.

But we are not fashionistas, and the advice on what to wear tends to frequently vary.

Our view is simple - opt for those 'go-to' options in your wardrobe that make you feel good.

If you are comfortable in your clothing, you are more likely to feel confident - and appear assured to your audience.

A presentation is not the right time to find out if that new outfit looks as good as you thought in the fitting room. Or whether it is as comfortable as you imagined.

And, while you want to look professional, don't make yourself uncomfortable and unable to move freely. Choose clothes that don't feel restrictive.

A HAPPY ENDING

How much thought do you give to the way you end your presentations?

It is something people tend to overlook. But you must consider how you can finish your presentation with impact. A weak finish could undo your work and leave your audience feeling uninspired or confused about your key points and message.

So, ditch the dull 'thank you' slide and avoid the temptation to finish with a Q&A. Instead, consider ending with a summary or a clear call to action. Famous quotes or impactful images can work well as long as they are relevant.

If you feel confident, finish with a sound bite. This is when you condense your message into a crisp, memorable single sentence.

For example, “Men still run the world. And I’m not sure that’s going that well.” Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook once said.

Another option is to repeat something from the beginning. It is a great way of summing up your presentation without it being obvious that you are summing up.

It works particularly well if you posed a question at the beginning of the presentation, as you can revisit and answer it. Similarly, if you posed a problem at the start, now you can offer the solution.

Another good way to do it is by finishing a story you used at the start, like how a stand-up comedian might start his set with a joke and then go back to it at the end.

AFTER THE SHOW

You successfully delivered your presentation.
What now?

Time to forget about it and hope it is a long time before you get asked again?
No.

REFLECT

Spend a little time thinking about what went well and what you could do better.

Also, consider what you would do differently next time.

And, if you had been in the audience, what your impressions would have been.

Give yourself breathing space to do this.

If you do it immediately, your judgement could be clouded by your emotions of having finished your presentation.

FEEDBACK TO MOVE FORWARD

Presentation skills are honed over time. And receiving feedback can be a vital way of improving and enhancing future presentations, particularly if it gives you specific areas where you could improve.

Feedback can feel uncomfortable.

So, you must avoid being defensive or taking any criticism personally.

You can gain feedback through surveys and feedback forms. And if there are people in the audience you know, you could ask them after your talk.

BOOST YOUR EXPERIENCE

The more you present, the more you will improve your presentation skills, ease your nervousness and boost your confidence.

Rather than hoping it isn't you who has to deliver that next presentation, put yourself forward for it.
And practice, practice, practice.

WATCH THE EXPERTS

Watching the experts is a brilliant way to develop your presentation skills. There are many sources you can use, including TED Talks and YouTube.

Do the presenters have confident body language? Have they grabbed the audience's attention?

How do they answer questions? Maybe they use a little humour throughout the presentation to engage people.

Take notes on what they do well, what you like and what you think they could do better. And use those ideas to shape your future presentation performances.

Even simply attending other presentations will give you ideas.

But there is always room for improvement, and it is crucial to remember this guide is not a substitute for training.

Our practical presentation skills training courses will develop your skills further and give you the opportunity to practice in a safe environment alongside instant feedback and analysis from our expert coaches.

Our courses are bespoke, and delegate aims and objectives vary.

Depending on what you want to focus on, we will cover:

- How to find your presentation style
- The essential presentation techniques
- How to properly prepare for your next presentation
- The intricacies of different presentation formats
- Creating the right first impression
- How to build a connection with your audience
- Essential body language techniques and how to use gesture
- Storytelling techniques
- How to bring dry and complex material life
- Answering audience questions
- Building presence and gravitas while remaining authentic
- How to feel confident in your presentation abilities and manage nerves
- Coping strategies for when things go wrong

FINAL THOUGHTS...

It is time to put what you have learnt to the test in your presentation.

You've got this.

The tips and advice in this eBook will help you deliver a more confident and compelling performance.

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- ☐ Storytelling techniques
- ☐ How to bring dry and complex material life
- ☐ Answering audience questions
- ☐ Building presence and gravitas while remaining authentic
- ☐ How to feel confident in your presentation abilities and manage nerves

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT OUR TRAINING

We love to hear what our delegates think about our training.

[And the feedback](#) about our presentation skills training on Coursecheck is glowing:

“If you feel in doubt about the way you conduct yourself in presentations, Media First will allow you to find your confidence and voice in a fun, informative and engaging workshop. I have learnt so many transferable skills in this short amount of time and I just want to say thank you for not causing any death by PowerPoint!” **Matilda L**

“Empowering session, moving my presentation from corporate to personal when delivering the message.”
Kim S

“A very good and interesting course, a must for anyone who does presentations” **Marc S**

“A thought provoking experience. Insightful and informative content and a safe space to explore and experiment with alternative presentation approaches and skills.” **Norman H**

“A great use of time to understand how to prepare yourself for a presentation, structure the content and engage your audience.” **Elaine H**

“The training made me think about presentations from a new perspective. It made me consider how I can use my personality, examples and experiences in the topic that I am presenting rather than hiding behind research of the subject, the knowledge I have grasped from it and my professionalism. Going forward any presentation I do in work or otherwise will hopefully engage my audience, not just with the message, but with me!” **Carol C**

“Eye opening assessment of many different aspects of presentations. Highly insightful and enjoyable experience.”
Michael M

ABOUT US

Media First has been delivering bespoke media, presentations and communication training for more than 40 years.

In that time, we have delivered and developed a range of practical training techniques and courses that use experienced professionals, such as practicing journalists and presenters.

We have worked with press and communication teams alongside their spokespeople in over forty different sectors.

Our presentation training courses work because they are realistic and practical and fun.

If you'd like to find out more about our training courses, please get in touch:

0118 918 0530

hello@mediafirst.co.uk

www.mediafirst.co.uk.