



The 15-Minute, 6-Step Solution *for Delivering the Best Presentations*



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Some people are born with a natural stage presence.

Most aren't. But that doesn't mean you can't *learn the skills necessary to be an awesome presenter.*

Once you have these tools in your kit, **you'll be able to confidently speak to any group – no matter the size.**

You'll discover that each presentation you give should have a defined purpose, as well as the importance of effective beginnings and action-based endings.

Knowing how to breathe properly and the right way to practice are also vital skills for you to possess.

As you learn to read your audience and speak with confidence, you'll be ready to tackle any presentation.

This guide to giving stellar speaking presentations will equip you with the tools you need. So let's get started!

1. Purposeful presentations

You never want to give a presentation without a purpose.

Even if your presentation is extremely entertaining, if you don't have a purpose, the audience will walk away without applying the information.

And that's really the key to a good presentation.

Know your audience

Figuring out who your audience is and why they're in attendance are crucial elements upon which to base your actions and purpose.

Focus on:

- **Who?** Are you speaking to schoolchildren, executives, or senior citizens?
- **Why?** Is this audience there because they're required to be or was attendance optional and they're just excited to learn?

Understanding the audience mindset can help you achieve your purpose.

Prompt action

What do you want your audience to DO as a result of your presentation?

Think of your purpose as the "so what?" for the audience. Build your goals around this.

Ask yourself questions such as:

- What would you like to have happen?
- What change will happen as a result of you taking the time to talk to people?
- How will the actions of your audience be different when they walk out the door after your presentation?

Focus on driving them to take action.

Maybe you want to:

- Persuade a committee to raise your budget by 15% for the following quarter.
- Encourage a group of college students to exercise their opportunity to vote.
- Convince a client to start doing business with you as opposed to their current vendor.

Create a targeted goal

Did you notice how specific and targeted each of these goals is?

When the purpose is tied to an outcome, it directs the content and flow of your presentation.

With purpose, you can be so convincing that your audience is moved to:

- Sign off on hiring more people for your project.
- Take on a new exercise regimen.
- Give you a raise.
- Stop littering and start recycling.

Whatever the goal (or purpose), you owe it to your audience to have a “so what?” moment.

How do you do that?

Just keep it simple.

Everything you talk about and all of your visuals should point to one clear purpose.

What you want them to DO.

If you can accomplish that goal, and remove the fluff that distracts, you’ll be a successful presenter.

2. Keep your focus while presenting

Now that we’ve discussed purpose, let’s cover three more important factors – **breathing, having confidence, and practicing** – that will help you focus on the goal.

Using your breath

You’ve probably heard at least one person brag about not getting nervous before giving a presentation.

They’re either lying, or they’re a “presenting unicorn.”

Nearly everyone gets nervous about presenting, so stop thinking you shouldn’t be stressed out and focus on what to do about it.

One of the best weapons for dealing with nerves is...your breath.

Breath is an important tool for anyone speaking in front of a group. Actually, it's the source of your power – if you know how to harness it.

This is how actors, dancers and athletes power through challenging performances, and you can use these techniques to drive yours.

Think about it: When you're nervous, the first thing to go is your oxygen level. Your breath becomes rapid and shallow. You involuntarily hold your breath, and in some cases, maybe even pass out!

We've even seen a CEO faint under the pressure!

Breathing deeply is a great way to calm these physical reactions.

Breathing technique example

Here's a technique you can use before presentations to harness the power of your breath (based on Dr. Andrew Weil's breathing exercise called "4-7-8").

After trying this exercise, people reported feeling focused, calm, and clear-headed.

Be sure to sit down the first time you try this:

- Breathe in through your nose while counting to four.
- Hold that breath for a count of seven.
- Let the breath out slowly, releasing it through your mouth for a count of eight.
- Repeat four times.

Now, you can step onto the stage with poise.

Building confidence

The best presentations are not just about the information you want to relay.

Sure, your presentation should be hefty on relevant ideas or concepts, but if your delivery is missing one key component, confidence, it'll detract from the value of your presentation.

Use body language to your advantage.

There's a way to instantly boost your confidence level. ***All you have to do is make your body look confident.***

This concept is similar to the "power pose." Just by changing the power and confidence conveyed in your body language, you can change the way you feel inside.

And, amazingly enough, you change the perception of the audience. Even if you are shaking inside, if your body language exudes confidence, they will believe it.

Essentially, if you send a message to your body, it'll eventually find its way to your brain.

Try these poses on for size.

Strike a power pose.

- Stand up and take on a confident posture: Push your chest out, put your hands on your hips or up in the air, and make sure your spine is erect.
- *How do you feel?*

Now, try a non-power pose.

- This time, take on a diminishing pose, maybe sitting with your arms and legs crossed and your head down. Basically, this position is a protective one.
- *How do you feel?*

Before you take the stage or get up in front of a group of people, practice confidence-building:

- Take up space.
- Stand up straight.
- Look people in the eye.

- Keep your chin up.
- Smile.

Breathe deeply and let that breath relax your shoulders.

Notice a difference in your confidence?

As a matter of fact, these rules apply even for a sit-down meeting. Plant your feet on the ground, sit up straight, and make eye contact around the table.

Keep rehearsing these body movements and incorporate them into your next presentation.

Practicing your presentation

You've been duped.

The longstanding advice to rehearse your presentation in front of a mirror is the worst advice we've ever heard!

Here's our best piece of advice: Ditch the mirror.

Think about it: You stand in front of a mirror (your pretend audience), about a foot away, and practice watching yourself. You can't speak to the audience member at the back of the room or off to the side this way.

Get in front of an audience after rehearsing in front of the mirror, and you'll be ill-prepared to deliver a presentation that wows. You'll be wondering how you look and will be thrown off by watching others.

No wonder so many presentations fall flat.

And toss the perfection aside, too, when you ditch that mirror. Audiences prefer real over perfect.

A better rehearsal strategy

Here's how to start:

- Find a larger room to rehearse, like a conferenceroom or your hotel room.
- Stand in the space and look around. Take your eyes to the back of the room and the sides, and then the front.
- Project your voice and energy to all of these spaces.
- If one is available, gather an audience of friends, family or colleagues, and watch their reactions. Make eye contact. Be energetic. Interact.

Practice. Practice. Practice. And you'll improve! There's no getting around it -- only on-your-feet practice really makes you better. And you'll improve!

Even low-key practice improves your skills

If you have your eye on presenting to larger audiences and moving on from

small in-house presentations, **look for a low-risk opportunity**. When there's not so much at stake, you can take chances.

You don't even have to present in a professional setting to improve. Look for local groups where you can deliver a speech or a group that shares your common interest or hobby.

After practicing in these kinds of situations, you'll have a better skillset to deliver bigger-impact presentations to a work committee or at an organizational meeting.

3. Great presenters read the audience

Once you've got a handle on who your audience is, why they've come to hear you speak, and your purpose is firm in your mind, you need to assess **how the audience is responding to you**.

Not sure what an engaged listener looks like?

Here are some hints:

- Are they maintaining eye contact with you?
- Are they nodding in agreement?
- Are they leaning forward?

These are signs that your audience is hooked!

But. And this is a pretty big but...

What if you look at your audience and see yawns, a lot of fidgeting and glazed-over expressions?

You have to change course. Improvise.

Remember – the needs of your audience come first.

Keeping your audience absorbed

If they're not engaged, it's up to you to shift your behavior in order to reconnect with your listeners.

If you find yourself in a tough situation, here are some things you can do to draw your audience back in.

Make them actively participate by asking them to raise their hands in answer to some questions.

For example:

- “How many of you are familiar with this particular research?”
- “We’ve just covered an important technique. Can someone from HR show us an example of the method in action?”
- “I have two more techniques to cover. Which would you like to hear about first?”

It really is that quick and easy to recreate a connection with your audience.

4. Be a presenter who speaks with confidence

Presentations aren't just about the words you say and the interesting slides you show, but rather they're all about what your body is communicating to the audience.

Your audience may not even be doing it consciously, but they're watching what you do with your body and they're picking up subtle clues that you're giving off.

Here's what you can do to become a confident speaker – aside from using your body.

Understanding action vs. information

If your main purpose is simply to relay information, you're better off writing an email.

However, you have a bigger fish to fry when you're in front of an audience.

Leverage that power to make your audience do something – such as considering a new idea or even getting angry!

The point is that you want to make an emotional connection with the audience that will cause them to follow through on your purpose for them.

Save the information transfer for the internet and use your presentation to motivate your audience to take action.

Learning the power of bookends

Maybe you haven't given it much thought before, **but the way you begin and end your presentations has significant implications for the strength of your presentation.**

You can think of your beginnings and endings as bookends.

Starting out with a bang

It's crucial that you grab your audience's attention right away – as soon as you take the stage.

You have a short window of opportunity with which to pull them in and after that, you risk losing them.

Here are some ideas for getting your audience in the palm of your hand right away.

- **Start with a startling tidbit of information in the form of a rhetorical question.** For example, "Did you know Ben and Jerry learned how to make ice cream from a \$5 Penn State correspondence course? I'm Cindy and I'm here to talk about entrepreneurship."
- **Engage your audience.** "Raise your hand if you took a multivitamin today. My name is Marc, and I'm here to talk to you about the reasons you should be taking vitamins."

- **Take them by surprise.** If you come into the room for the first time, singing at the top of your lungs, do you think your audience will remember it? Do you have another talent that you could share as you make your entrance?

Starting your presentation in an exciting way lets your audience know that they're in for more than the same kind of boring talk they've experienced over and over again.

Ending on the right note

You always want to send your audience out with something that they can think about long after they've left. And most importantly, take action upon!

Take a look at some ideas for ending your presentation well.

- **Quickly summarize the information you went over.** Repetition is key for getting information to stick!
- **Conclude with a call to action.** It can be powerful to end your speech with a directive for your audience. Inspire them to take action.

When you begin and end your presentation the right way, you can be sure that your audience will walk away with real value.

5. Awesome presenters provide the optimal environment

As you're honing your speaking techniques, don't forget to give some serious thought to the location in which you're delivering the speech.

You've probably been in a situation yourself in which you were too warm so you were nearly nodding off.

Or maybe you found it hard to pay attention because the acoustics in the room were off and you could only catch snippets of what was being said.

An uncomfortable audience is a distracted audience – the exact opposite of what you want!

How to control your presentation's physical environment

It's up to you to make sure the venue is up to your high standards and that your audience is going to have an excellent experience. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to ensure that the environment will enhance – not detract from – the presentation.

i. Is the room big enough for the amount of people you're expecting?

If your audience is too cramped, they won't be able to pay attention.

Feel free to ask to be moved to a new room if you're not comfortable with the space-to-people ratio.

ii. How is the temperature of the space?

When you get there, gauge the temperature of the space, keeping in mind that a room full of people will be much warmer than one that's empty.

It's a good idea to ask if you'll be able to adjust it if needed.

iii. What's the seating arrangement?

You should be able to see the faces of the audience members and they definitely need to be able to see you.

One's mind can easily wander if they're stuck staring at the back of someone else's head!

iv. Where should you stand?

After you're happy with the arrangement for your audience, think about where you'll be standing.

That doesn't mean you aren't free to move around, of course, but you should have a sort of "home base" as you're speaking.

Take the time to walk around on the stage and check out how it feels before people arrive.

v. Where are the cords located?

It may seem trivial, but tripping over cords is NOT what you want the audience to remember.

Ask that the cords be taped down to ensure safety.

vi. What's the noise situation?

The last thing you want to do while you're giving an awesome presentation is compete with outside noise that will draw attention away from your message.

When you're giving the space the once-over before your audience arrives, pay attention to any distracting noises that may be coming from outside the room.

If you notice anything, ask for your event to be moved to a different room or if there's a way for the sounds to be quieted while you're speaking.

vii. What about helpers?

Setting up chairs and moving things around are difficult for you to do when you're preparing to present.

Find out if the venue has someone who does these types of tasks. If they don't, ask if it's possible for them to provide someone.

Make sure you're courteous enough to make this request far enough in advance that you're not putting a strain on anyone.

It's up to you

Remember that it's up to you to make sure the space in which you're presenting is free of distractions and is an optimum environment in which your message will be received, loud and clear!

6. You're ready to rock your presentations

Having the tools you need to confidently make a presentation can make all the difference in the world as you prepare to take the stage.

Ensure your presentation has a purpose, keep your focus, and read your audience. Don't forget that being aware of your body language will help keep your confidence up and the audience engaged and interested in everything that's coming out of your mouth.

You know how to breathe, how to practice (NOT in front of the mirror!) and how to put your audience first, and take steps to control the environment to your advantage.

With these tips in hand, you can confidently step out and do your thing!

About ImprovEdge

ImprovEdge offers business training founded on improvisation and business acumen to help your organization succeed. An award-winning business training company that's leading the way, we employ innovative strategies and techniques to help the employees and teams at every level of your organization think on their feet, come up with side-door solutions, and communicate in ways that bring people together.

Boost Your Presentation Skills

Train Your Team