

A handy guide to: Preparing to share ideas at a public meeting

How do you feel about speaking in front of an audience? If you have spoken in front of an audience before, how did it go, and do you wish it had gone better? This handy guide shares some tried and trusted techniques for public speaking.

While this example is drawn from making a formal presentation these are the same ideas that you need to consider in making your point and opinion heard in meetings and groups. A really good idea is to take an issue you want to speak about, prepare what you want to say, and practice in front of friends.

The idea of practicing with your friends might seem slightly embarrassing but it gives you a safe place to practice talking concisely and passionately whilst keeping to the point. It also helps you get a sense of pace and speaking with clarity. Remember - great orators practice.

Presentations and speaking in a group can be daunting. For some, speaking in front of people comes more naturally, to others it doesn't. However there are some important things that you can do to make it easier. Good presentation skills develop with practice. The tools below will help, but make sure that you give yourself every chance to practice them. Get some friends or colleagues together to hear your ideas and delivery. Get their feedback and thoughts. Then after you have delivered to your audience, reflect on what worked and what didn't. Learn what works for you and what doesn't and you'll get better and better. Virtually every great speaker has improved over time through learning, planning and practice. Some sort of training is helpful, but the skills to use are set out below:

Planning

Planning is the most important part of any presentation. A well-planned presentation feels good, looks good and it shows that you've made an effort to give and receive information.

Key questions that you should ask yourself before planning a presentation include:

- What do you want to achieve?
- Who will your audience be?
- What does your audience already know and what will interest them?
- How will you achieve what you want?
- What information will you need to achieve your purpose?
- What visual aids will you need?
- What will you need to make your presentation space right for your needs?

- How will you make your presentation accessible (for example translations, access around the room)?

If you want an easy to remember checklist to go through, try this:

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

A key part of planning a presentation is to develop a structure or plan of how it will all work out. This should include how long you will speak for, what points you will make and how you'll summarise what you said with opportunities for questions and discussion.

Every presentation should have a clear structure, purpose and time. There should be clear points that you want your audience to hear. You should clearly set out any actions you want to achieve and who will do them. Give yourself time to research and practice so you know your subject matter fully.

Delivering a presentation

- Give yourself time to think about what you want to say and the point you are trying to get over.
- Arrive in plenty of time.
- Ensure that you're physically comfortable in your setting, remember your presentation style and make sure everything's right for you.
- Be confident when you start speaking and maintain this throughout and never ever start with an apology.

It is important to remember that while you are presenting, the attention of your audience will waver. The attention of people can be influenced by external factors beyond your control, such as a lack of sleep, sickness, stress at work or at home, or who won the football match. Below is a list of tools that you can build into your planning and delivery to help maintain their focus on what you are saying

- **Eye contact:** Do not just speak to the back of the room, the flipcharts or your feet.
- **Humour:** Helps to increase understanding.
- **Enthusiasm:** If you are interested, others will be.
- **Questions:** Including a question keeps people engaged and thinking about the implications of what you are talking about
- **Stories:** Make what you're saying is real by adding your experiences or anecdotes but make these succinct and ensure they illustrate your point.
- **Pauses:** A pause here and there helps people digest what you're saying.
- **Rapport:** How can you build a relationship with the listener?
- **Be confident and be yourself:** While you are speaking, you are the boss.