

40 Tips for Better Presentations by George Olds

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Before you present

1. Prepare a proper introduction that will set you up as an expert on the topic, set your topic up to be of interest to the audience, and set the audience up to hear your message. Do not rely on the introducer to find out the things you want him/her to say about you.
2. Prepare the presentation – plan what you want to say, how you want to say it, and in what order.
3. Design the presentation with a purpose in mind. What do you want them to know/learn/feel/take away about your topic?
4. Develop the content, format and style so that your message is simple and easy to understand.
5. Practice your presentation – in front of a mirror so you can see what the audience is going to see.
6. Decide whether or not to use notes. Notes are not the same thing as the written speech. They should be no more than a word or two to jog your memory about the point(s) you want to make.
7. Many people have the will to succeed. Not nearly as many have the will to prepare. And it is preparation that will help you succeed. “Praemeum est paratis.” – The prize is for the prepared.
8. Greet as many of the audience members as you can before you speak. This way, you aren’t talking to a room full of strangers but to people you’ve already met.
9. Structure your presentation. It should have an opening, a body and a conclusion. (And yes, in that order.) Tell them what you’re going to tell them (the introduction), tell them (the body) and then tell them what you told them (the recap/conclusion).
10. The opening should be punchy, memorable. One to two minutes is sufficient. It doesn’t have to be funny; thought-provoking is just as good. Statistics will help with this.
11. The body is where you will make your points. Each point should have a story or anecdote that illustrates the point. Practice your stories, not the speech.
12. If you have three points, you should have three stories. If your opening is 1-2 minutes, and you have 3 points (at 1 minute each) and a 3-5 minute story to illustrate each point, a 2 minute recap and a 1 minute memorable ending, you’ve just created a 15-30 minute speech/presentation.
13. Time your presentation.
14. Don’t forget to do your research.

15. Arrive early to check out the space and deal with any technicalities (sound, lights, heat, etc.)
16. Prepare sufficient handouts if you're using them. I like fill-in-the-blanks; they keep the audience involved physically as they listen to you.
17. Remind them (or have the introducer remind them) to turn off their pagers and cell phones.

While you present

18. Stride confidently to the lectern when you've been introduced.
19. Take this time to breathe – deep, slow breaths will calm your nerves. And remember to keep breathing. I sometimes write the words “Remember to breathe!” on the top of each note card.
20. Smile. The audience is actually on your side, and they love to listen to people who look friendly.
21. Remember, you know more about the topic than 97% of the audience (that's why **you** were asked to present and not them).
22. Project. The deep breathing will help with this.
23. Vary your rate of delivery. Important thoughts should be expressed more slowly than lesser ones. People who speak too rapidly often say things they haven't *thought* of yet.
24. Use pauses frequently. This gives audience members' brains time to absorb the points you're making. It also gives you time to compose your thoughts.
25. Vary your tone of voice.
26. Emphasize words that matter. Try this exercise: Say the sentence, “I never said you lied.” 5 times, and emphasize a different word each time. The sentences will have completely different meanings when you do. “I never said you lied.” means you never said it, someone else did; but “I **never** said you lied.” is an emphatic denial of the accusation. “I never **said** you lied.” means you implied it (or perhaps wrote it down). “I never said **you** lied.” means you said someone **else** lied; and “I never said you **lied**.” means you might have said the person stole something or cheated someone, but never *lied*. See/hear the difference? Your audience will too.
27. Don't be afraid to use your hands. We also gesture naturally when we speak. The key is being natural. Practice in front of a mirror will help make your gestures smooth and natural to the audience.
28. The best tip I have for people who are afraid to speak to a group of people is not to. No, I don't mean don't give the speech, but speak to one person – **at a time** – in the group. Pick a person and speak directly to that person for approximately 10-15 seconds at a time and let the others in the room listen. Then pick another person and repeat the process. Soon, you'll have covered half the people in the room and realize that you are communicating quite successfully.
29. Make eye contact. At least 10 seconds per person. And, from farther away than 10 feet or so, no one can tell if you're actually looking at their eyes and not their nose (or the tip of their glasses, or eyebrows, etc.) In other words, you don't really have to look them in the eye if you aren't comfortable.

30. Enunciate. Practice this by repeating phrases that are dense with consonants and sounds that will force your lips into energetic movements. (“We require really weird re-wiring.” “Bubblegum, gumdrops, baby buggies and watermelons.”)

31. Make your movements on the stage/presentation area purposeful. Don’t shift from one foot to the other; stand still until you have a reason to move. Picking a ‘new’ person to talk to in the audience is a perfect reason to move – you’ll want to get closer to make better connections.

32. If you aren’t naturally funny, don’t try to be funny when you present. You will feel awkward and the audience will know it.

33. If you choose to use notes, small cards or paper laid flat on a lectern and slid to the side when you’re done with each is the least obtrusive method.

34. Do not memorize your presentation. Memorize the points you want to make, and the order you want to make them in, and then use the words that come naturally to you to make those points. It will sound like you are just talking about something you love with some friends.

35. Love the topic. Be enthusiastic about it. If you aren’t, why should your audience be?

36. Enthusiasm masks a lot of nervousness. If you can convert any nervous energy into apparent enthusiasm, you’ll have them enthralled.

37. Do NOT apologize. For anything! (Except being late.) If you forgot a sentence, you will probably be the only one in the room who knows. If you lose your place, simply pause, breathe and go pick up your notes, find your place and resume.

38. If you truly blank, don’t be afraid to be self-deprecating. Tell the audience, “Oops. Seems I just had a brain fart. Now where was I?” They’ll see you as human, have a bit of a chuckle, and – here’s the best part – they will tell you what you were saying or where you were in your train of thought.

39. Watch your filler words, the “ums” and “ahs” and the “you knows”. They are an expression of nervousness, and once you are aware you’re using them as a crutch, you will learn to simply say nothing, but rather, simply pause until the right word(s) come to you. Tape yourself to become aware of any filler words or phrases you may overuse. (Or, have a friend be brutally honest with you. Taping’s easier on the ego.)

After

40. Be prepared to take questions. This helps ensure the audience ‘got’ what you were saying and gives an opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings.

Bonus tip: Join Toastmasters. It’s the best organization I know of that helps people build communication and leadership skills. Almost every professional speaker I know has been through their (very low cost) program. It’s a self-pace, safe environment to practice public speaking and get supportive feedback on your skills as they build. ***Good Luck, Friends!***

George Olds is a Distinguished Toastmaster, and the President of Go4Results. He helps simplify the business processes of communication, customer service and sales to help groups get more happy, satisfied, repeat customers. He’s the author of the National Post bestseller, **Never Say “NO COMMENT” – How Spin Doctors Answer Questions**. His newest book is **In the Shoes of the Customer: Simple Customer Service Solutions for a Complex World**. Visit his website at www.go4results.com or contact him at goldsgo4results.com .