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*A brief guide  
to*  
**Business  
Presenting**



**PRESENTING  
SUCCESS**

# A Brief Guide to Business Presenting

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# Deciding what to present

There are two possibilities. First, you may be given the topic. For example, your boss may have asked you to make a report on a specific project to a committee, or an interview panel may have asked you to present to them on a specific subject.

Second, you may get to choose your own topic. In this case, it's best to present a topic that you know. What are you enthusiastic about? Football, cookery, mountaineering, early years learning, how the stock market works?

You may not believe that you know enough to give a talk on any topic. However, it's a genuine interest of yours you probably will know enough, depending on who the audience is and how long you've got to speak for. And you will want to do some research, so I am sure you will have plenty to say.

When you're asked to present to an audience you must ask yourself **the 3 essential questions**:

- 1. Who is my audience?**
- 2. What is my point?**
- 3. How long have I got to speak for?**



The answers to these questions will help you to work out what to include in your talk and how to structure it. You will always need more material than you have the time to present. That's one of the reasons that you need to give yourself time to prepare the talk, so that you can get more ideas and material.

By the way, the time spent in preparing a talk is best spent in collecting ideas, stories, examples and other material; not in worrying about it!

## Working out the point of your talk

Unless you're speaking just for the experience of speaking, you'll want to be clear about your point. So, how do you work out the point of your talk?

Begin by considering what, *specifically* you want your audience **to know, to do or to think**?

Even if you simply want to impress your audience, such as an interview panel, it will help if you focus on a point.

One way of finding your point is to ask yourself, if I only had 20 seconds to give this talk what is the one thing that I'd tell them, or ask them?

Write it down.

That will help you to focus on it.

You may also have several subsidiary points that you want to make, which build up to your main point. Write them down so you can focus on them as well as your main point.



## Getting material for your presentation

As soon as you know that you are being asked to give a presentation you need to start preparing it.

For example, if you're being asked to present in three weeks' time, it's tempting to put off the preparation until a week before, or even the evening before. Don't put it off; do it now!

Much better to get on with the collection and preparation of your material as soon as you know you'll be speaking. Keep a notebook handy and become a collector of ideas, as they occur to you. Or use an app like Evernote. Or just put it into your notes file on your phone.

Early in your preparation create a Talk Map – see page 7. This will help you to marshal your ideas on what to include and therefore what information and ideas you'll need to collect.

If you get stuck for ideas, ask someone else you trust to help you out. Even if they don't know the topic, their thoughts and suggestions will help to get you moving.

For many presentations you will find that material that you can use for content is all around you. But you probably won't see that at first.

Just think of some of the good presenters that you have heard. They will speak about everyday occurrences and situations, even in a technical talk.



## Finding out about your audience

Your audience is key. They are the principal reason you are presenting. If you want to be successful in your presentation, you must consider what the audience wants from your talk. You must make it relevant for them. Otherwise they will ask “so what?”

You may know them, or you may not. For example, they may be a group of colleagues or your Board of Directors, whom you are likely to know. Or you may be speaking to a group of people whom you don't know, such as an interview panel or a local Round Table group.

If it's a group that's **known** to you, you will probably know what they want from your talk. If you're unsure what the group expects, then ask one of them or someone who's close to that group. Don't make assumptions. The clearer you are about what the audience wants, the easier your preparation and the more relevant your presentation will be.

If it's a group that's **not known** to you, then you must put yourself in their shoes as you think about the subject of your presentation. If you don't know who'll be in the group, ask the organiser. Also ask the organiser what they will be expecting from your presentation.

Is the group very different from yourself? Different, for example, in age, circumstance, belief, or experience? If so, seek out someone from the group, or someone who would be closer to that group than you and ask their opinion.



# Preparing your presentation

Once you've answered the three key questions (Who's my audience? What's my point? How long have I got to speak?), you will need a **structure** to help you to prepare your presentation. You need a **structure** for two reasons:

1. It helps you to organise your content, and
2. It helps the audience follow what you're saying (audiences generally want to know where the talk is going).

There are lots of structures you could choose from, or you could create one that is unique.

If you're presenting to a committee or a team (for example a management or sales team) or a Board, there may be an **accepted way** of presenting material. In this case our suggestion is to find out what the structure is and then follow that. If you don't do that, it may disturb their thinking as they're having to cope with the unusual or different. For example, if your sales manager is asking for a short report on your sales figures for the last 6 months and a projection of sales into a new territory then he or she may not appreciate a very creative presentation. But if it's your intention to wake up the audience then you'll want to be more adventurous and creative.

Examples of established structures are:

- \* Alphabetical – from A to Z.
- \* Numerical – the largest to the smallest, or vice versa.
- \* Logical sequence: if you were describing a new product, for example, you might choose to start with the need for it, then tell them about the product itself, how it works, the competition, what people have said about it, and why you believe it's going to be successful.
- \* Probably the most familiar structure is Past, Present, Future. If you're giving a project report, for example, you could describe where the project started (Past), where it is now (Present), and where it's headed and what needs to be done for it to be completed (Future). You could present these three ideas in any order and it will still make sense, though you'll usually want to finish with the Present or the Future.

## Creating a unique presentation

There will be lots of times when you will want to create a presentation that's different and 'wakes people up'. In this case, you can create your own unique structure.

Our suggestion is to create a Talk Map. This is a variation of Tony Buzan's Mind Map. Take a plain sheet of A4 paper and in landscape format draw a circle in the centre in which you're going to write the point of your point. At the top of the page write who your audience is and the time you have for the talk. This will help you to focus on your audience and the time.

Then draw about 10 'legs' from the centre circle. Write on each leg one main idea that you have for your talk. Don't worry at this stage about the order and include everything that's in your mind – you can delete stuff later. Now develop each main idea with subsidiary 'legs' and write in your secondary ideas. Before you finish you will have a page of ideas and thoughts which, even though it may look chaotic, will give you your unique structure.

When you've got as many ideas as you can, start to think of the order of these ideas. At this stage, don't worry about the Opening and the Closing, as you can add these later. What's important now is your content and making your point. Simply circle the ideas that you're going to use and number them in the order you'll bring them in.

Our experience is that this process creates lots of ideas, some of which you won't have time to use. Be ruthless about which ideas you choose to use. Beware of the temptation to fill your talk with everything you know. This will just confuse your audience. Far better to focus on your major point with a few good stories than overwhelm them with too many ideas.

Once you have your order you can then write a list. Then you can start to develop the flow of the talk and how to introduce the stories and points you will want to make.

By the way, we prefer to use pen and paper for developing a Talk Map as that's what we're used to, though there are many online versions that you can use. One that is very easy to use is SimpleMind.



# Involving your audience

Mostly, audiences love to be involved in a presentation. It engages their brains in a different way than just listening to a speaker.

There are lots of ways of engaging the audience. You might ask them a question and then take their responses. Maybe you could write up their responses on a flip chart or a white board.

You could ask them to do something – such as look in their wallets and purses or look at their watches or phones. I remember being in the audience when a famous inspirational speaker, Zig Ziglar, asked us to look at our watches and see if the dial had Roman or Arabic numerals. When we looked and then turned back to him, he then asked us what the time was. Of course, we hadn't noticed the time! Which was his point, about how we miss things if we're not focussed on them.

Or you could ask them to talk to the person next to them, or behind them. Maybe to introduce themselves and chat for a few moments, to make the point how easy it is to talk to a stranger.

Or you could ask for a volunteer to join you at the front so that you can question them.

Alternatively, you could ask them to handle or examine an object or several objects that you give them. And then answer a question about it.

Or if you were giving a talk on time management you could ask them to write a list of things to do tomorrow, or maybe write down those things that are important in their lives or jobs.

Perhaps the best way to involve your audience is to construct your talk in a way that people can identify with your points and examples. For example, if you speak about your children it's likely that the audience (if they're adults) will think about their children or when they were children.

Asking them to make notes about what they could do from the ideas in your talk, or to talk to the person next to them, or simply to think about it, will engage them and will help you to become a more effective and memorable speaker.

## Where and how do you stand?

How you stand when you're presenting is important. Before you say anything, your audience will already have judged you. They'll have noticed how you're dressed; what your face looks like; how you walk onto the stage; how and where you stand. They'll also have noticed whether you look organised and confident.

To open your presentation our strong recommendation is that you should stand strong. Feet hip-width apart; weight equally on both feet. This will give the impression of confidence and strength; you will not be pushed over.

That doesn't mean standing still, like a soldier at attention. It does mean having your feet firmly planted so you can use your body to project your words. No shuffling. No wandering. Then, once you're under way with your talk, you can move. And then stand strong again.

There are two times when this is important.

The first is when you start to speak. Giving the impression of confidence and strength.

Second, when you might be under pressure: a tough question, or a momentary loss of place in what you were saying. Stay strong. No backward movement.

Nothing wrong with movement; it can project energy and enthusiasm. But no shuffling or wandering, please.

Then where do you stand? Behind the lectern or in the centre of the stage. You choose, depending on your own confidence level and whether you want to be 'seen'.

If it's a big stage then get onto it before the audience take their seats and make it your own; get used to it, walk up and down; imagine you're presenting; even say a few words to the imaginary audience. See how it feels.



## What do you do with your hands and arms?

Use them as you would in talking one to one. Hold them down by your sides, hold them up with one hand resting in the other, one hand up and one hand down, or use them to express yourself, much as you would if you were excitedly talking about a great weekend in the surf!

Don't think about them too much; concentrate on what you have to say.

Some don'ts. Don't put your hands in your pockets; too casual and you lose the opportunity to express yourself fully. Don't put them behind your back; once again you lose the opportunity to express yourself. Don't fold your arms; too closed off. Don't cross them in front of your crotch; what are you protecting?

Overall the advice is to let your hands and arms go; let them do what they want to do!



## Where should you look?

The only place to look is in the eyes of the audience members. (Unless you're looking at your laptop slides or your notes).

Why, because that's the connection you want to make. With your audience members. One by one. Individually.

Not for long; about 3 seconds each one, at random, around the room. Look warmly into one person's eyes for about 3 seconds then move on to someone else in the room. (By the way, if it's difficult for you to look into their eyes then look at their foreheads, they won't know the difference).

Even if they're not looking at you. Look at the tops of their heads if necessary. There's little that's worse if you're an audience member than feeling that you're the only one the presenter is speaking to as they only look at you!

Keep looking and keep smiling. Look pleased to be there. Look pleased to have that connection.

And to start. When you first get 'on stage', a brief glance around the room; look at people for a moment; smile and look pleased to be there; as though you're joining a family gathering where you love the family!

And the second real advantage of looking around, apart from making a warm connection, is to be able to read the audience; are they enjoying your presentation; are they looking bored....

Of course, all this means that you will need to know your presentation very well...



# Opening your presentation

Your opening is an important part of getting your audience to listen to you in a positive frame of mind. Essentially, the audience needs to know what they are going to hear and why that's important to them and why you are the speaker.

There are no hard and fast rules around openings. You can do whatever you want to get your point across.

We recommend making an impact with your opening using an approach called **KICK**. This stands for **Key message, Importance, Credibility and Keep them interested** by telling them what they're going to hear.

For example, if I were giving a talk on presentation skills, I might say the following: **(Key message)** *"Becoming a good presenter could be a vital part of your career development.*

**(Importance)** *Wherever you are in your business, almost certainly at some point in your career you will be asked to present to a group, maybe of senior people. If you fail to do this well it may well affect your career adversely.*

**(Credibility)** *My name is Walter Blackburn – I'm founder of Presenting Success and I have taught thousands of people how to present well.*

**(Keep them interested** by telling them what's coming next) *This afternoon I want to share with you some of the presentation secrets used by great presenters and show you how easily you, too, can become a great presenter. I'll be speaking for about 15 minutes then there'll be a chance for questions."*

There are many other ways of opening a presentation – using objects or stories or by asking a challenging question, or by making a challenging statement.

Whichever way you choose to open your presentation our recommendation is that you write it out and then learn it. It should be less than a minute. You must practice saying it, out loud, until you can say it with energy without looking at your notes or slides.

# Closing your presentation

Closing your presentation is perhaps the most important part of the presentation. And actually, the easiest.

**Most important** because it will contain either the idea or the action that you want the audience to consider or to act upon.

**Easiest** because you'll have already introduced the idea or the action and the close is simply a summary of that.

So, your close needs to be clear, short and motivational, even inspirational!

You have a few options:

Give them a summary of what you've said – *“so, in summary, we've seen that...”* This should be short and clear. Don't go over all the logic of your argument again, just give them the points. An effective visual aid is to count off the points on your fingers.

You can finish as you started. If you started with a Key Message, end with that. Or if you opened with a quotation then end with it.

You can challenge them to consider your points, or more probably, get into action. *“So, I challenge you to..... let's get out there and do it!”*

Or you can use a combination of these ideas. So, a summary followed by a challenge, followed by the simplest close of all: *“Thank you”!*

Whatever close you choose, plan it carefully making sure it is an effective close for your talk. And then practice saying it.

Learn it word for word so you can look into the eyes of your audience as you urge them into action!

# Using PowerPoint successfully

PowerPoint is a wonderful tool for bringing colour and clarity to a presentation. But it is just that; it is a tool. It is not **the** presentation. **You and your words** are the presentation. Many presenters wrongly believe that they must have PowerPoint slides, otherwise it isn't a presentation. Unfortunately, many businesses seem to require presenters to use PowerPoint slides. However, an effective presenter will be able to present in an interesting, informative and even inspirational way without using PowerPoint.

If you want to be effective in using PowerPoint, you must think about it from the perspective of your audience. Generally, they will have two questions in their minds about your slides.

Can I **read** the words and figures on your slide? Are they big enough and in sharp enough focus for me to read easily? And,

Does it make **sense**? We want to make sense of things when they're presented to us. If it's a complex slide, i.e. with many components, then use the build feature to simplify it so that the audience can see how the elements fit together.

These are important considerations because if your audience has to struggle to either read or make sense of your slides, they are **not listening** to you.

Use **bullet points** on the slide, not sentences. A bullet point is 3 or 4 short words, no more. You need to enable the audience to read your bullet point at a glance. Again, if they have to spend time reading a long sentence, they are not listening to you.

Use **graphics and pictures** to bring your material to life. But please make sure the picture is relevant to what you're saying.

Finally, practice presenting with your slides and remember to look at the audience while you're speaking about the slide, not at the screen!

## Using props and exhibits

One of our clients is a major business creating and marketing household products. They have a wonderful array of products in colourful and interesting packaging.

Sometimes they will present these as photo inserts in PowerPoint.

But when they present using the product itself both the presenter and the presentation comes alive. It becomes interesting and therefore more memorable. It's not just another 40 PowerPoint slides that the audience must watch.

Maybe the audience get to touch the products, even drop them on the floor to see how robust they are and so on.

There are a few rules about using an object in a presentation. Practice using it. Keep it hidden until you're ready to use it. Hold it high so that the audience can see it. Talk to the audience, not the object. When you've finished with it, put it down.

Even if you don't make physical objects in your business, you can use everyday objects to make your point. A wallet or purse to represent investment or spending. A fire extinguisher to represent immediate access to help. A mobile phone to represent the speed of modern communications. A table or chair to represent the need to be supported by several 'legs' – too few and it falls over.

It takes imagination and confidence to use objects in a presentation. But you probably have more of both than you realise. So, for your next presentation, choose some props and see the difference.





## Make your point clear through analogies

Here's an analogy we use when we're describing what it's like learning to present.

*“Remember what it was like learning to drive? Although you wanted to, it may have seemed quite difficult. For example, three pedals (in a manual car), two feet, how does that work? And you'll have had many other questions. Because it is complex. That's why someone experienced needs to sit next to you as you learn. But now as an experienced driver you don't think about these things unless there's a problem.*

*And so, it is with presenting. At first it seems complex and difficult, but with good guidance, feedback and practice you can become a good and effective presenter who doesn't worry about it. You can even learn to enjoy it.”*

This is an analogy. Whenever you have an idea that is difficult to explain you can use an analogy. And in doing so you take people from **what they know** to what they **don't** know. You make it clear for people so they can say “I get it”.

So, for example, you might be describing your firewall software as like a window. *“It lets in the light and the sunshine and keeps out the wind and the rain. And in the same way our software lets in your essential communications and keeps out the viruses and worms that you don't want in your computer”.*

If you talk about your business to clients or prospects now you probably use analogies. Listen to what you say. If you don't, begin to think about how you could use them to make clear the more complex parts of your service – the parts that people don't always **get**.

And you'll be a more interesting and effective presenter.

# Using humour in your presentation

We are often asked: “Should I use humour in my presentation?”

Usually the answer is yes. Unless it’s a very serious subject, or you’re unsure of how your audience might react to your humour.

But we’re speaking of the humour that comes from situations and life – preferably your life. Not jokes.

The problem with jokes is that they need to be told well to be funny, and some of your audience may well have heard them before. Comedians get away with it because that’s what the audience expects, and the comedian has put in many hours of practice.

A business audience, on the other hand, expects to be informed, not entertained. If there’s natural humour in the presentation that may be a bonus for them. So, if there are funny moments in your presentation, arising from everyday situations then allow the humour to come through. Or if you’re naturally funny, then allow that side of you to come out.

Overall, it’s up to you to enjoy your presentation, with or without the humour, then you’ll seem comfortable and confident and that’s what every audience wants.



## Bringing your presentation 'alive'

At the heart of any good presentation is a story. Stories are the life-blood of presentations. So, one of the best ways to bring your presentation 'alive' is to include some good stories. They may be personal stories of your own experience; or business stories about specific customers, products or the progress of the business; or seemingly unrelated incidents which you can use to make a point.

Often, it's the stories that people remember from a talk, not the PowerPoints or even the speaker. A good story may live with members of the audience for a long time. And remember that if you're wanting to move your audience you won't do it with facts and figures – no one ever said, 'she moved me with her logic'. Move your audience with emotion. This is perhaps the real reason stories are so powerful – a good story will move us.

The challenge of the presenter is two-fold: which stories to choose, and how to tell them so people get the points you want to make.

Great storytellers make their stories come alive firstly by being specific and secondly by making the story relevant to the audience. So, for example, if you were giving a talk on Safety at Work tell the story of a specific person who was injured, or who just missed being injured, by an accident at work. Or if you're looking to inspire a sales team talk of your own experiences, not just of your success, but also of the times you've failed and what you learned as a result. Use these incidents to make your point.

So, the keys to a good story:

- Choose a story that makes the point you want to make,
- Choose a story that the audience can relate to
- Make sure that it's true – the audience may sense an untruth and may not believe other 'facts' that you tell them
- Be prepared to tell it in under a minute
- Start the story in a strong way – jump into the action – all the best films do this – they start in the middle of the story and then go back and explain the start
- Don't say 'I'm going to tell you a story', just do it
- Tell it with emotion (passion, energy, feeling)
- Make a strong point at the end of the story

## Should you learn your presentation word for word?

The quick answer is a resounding NO.

For new speakers there will be a temptation to learn their presentation word for word. This will never work unless you've practiced giving it so much that it looks and sounds completely natural.

Remember that you're giving a presentation, not delivering a Shakespearian speech. And remember that the presentation is not just the words, it's also your energy and voice: the way you bring it *alive*.

Very occasionally you may be asked to give a presentation where the words are very important, such as in a legal setting or when you're speaking someone else's words. In this case, you will want to read out your presentation. But this is rare.

Great speakers will know their presentation so well that they can give it without notes. But this takes some time and effort. Any great speech you have heard has, almost certainly, been given many times. That's why it seems so good: the speaker is practiced in delivering it.



## Making and using notes

Any speaker needs to have a way of remembering what they want to say. Ideally, you'll want to know your topic so well that you need no notes. But you may not have time to do that. Often, in real life, we're asked to give a presentation at short notice. Or you can use your PowerPoint slides as prompts (though **don't** get drawn into putting lots of text on your slides). Or you can use notes.

If you choose to use notes, our suggestion is to use either 3x5 or 8x5 index cards rather than an A4 sheet which can seem like a barrier between you and your audience. The advantage of the cards is that you can hold them in your hand or, preferably, put them on a lectern in front of you. This means you can glance down at them as you speak, you can use your hands to express yourself and the audience aren't distracted from your speaking.

On the cards write your prompts for your talk: the points you want to make, the examples and the stories. Write bullet points, not sentences. And make the writing big enough so you can read it from a distance. A good test is to drop the cards on the floor. You should be able to read the cards standing above them.

Finally, you'll want to number your cards in case you drop them. While you're practicing with your notes it may be helpful to punch a hole through your cards and put a tag through them so they're always in order. But if you're using them in the actual presentation it's not helpful to have them tagged – it's easier to be able to just slide the next card into place rather than having to pick up the set and turn to the next one. And number your cards backwards so that your final card is number 1. Then you're counting down to 1: often when you're in the middle of the talk it's helpful to be able to look at your cards and see from the numbers how much of the presentation you have left.

# Practicing and rehearsal

The more you practice the better you will be. The better you know your presentation the more you can put the right emotion and energy into it, and ultimately focus on the audience, not on trying to remember what comes next. Notice the way that actors work. They spend hours and hours learning their lines. Only when they know the words so well can they concentrate on the emotions that bring the words truly alive. Only when they know the words so well can they make the audience believe that it's real.

***You cannot over-practice.*** You may feel that by saying it time and time again you'll get bored with it. This is just familiarity, not boredom. If you really are bored with it, don't do the talk. Ask yourself what else you can say because if ***you're*** bored with it, what chance have you got of convincing or persuading an audience?

***Practicing*** is saying the words out loud. ***Rehearsing*** is practicing in the venue where you'll be speaking as if the audience is there. Ideally you need to do both, particularly if it's an important presentation or to a large group.



Use cue cards or your slides to prompt you as you speak. When I'm asked to give a presentation, I start the preparation by drawing a talk map, and then writing the points, examples and stories in bullet points onto 8x5 cue cards. I then talk it through in my head a few times until I'm happy with the flow and the links, and that I'm making my point. Then I'll start speaking it out loud using my cue cards (or slides if you're using slides) as prompts. I find that as I start to remember the words, I can reduce the number of bullets on the cards. Eventually, just a glance at my card will give me the clue I may need to deliver the next point.

Record yourself on your phone at some time but don't do this too early. You need to wait until you are fluent. If you do record yourself when you listen back listen for when you need to pause, what to emphasise, what to make clearer – where are you not making yourself clear?

Do practice in front of others you trust to give you honest feedback. But you know what you want to achieve so while their suggestions may be very helpful, ultimately, it's your talk.

Listen to any great speaker (see TED.com for many examples) and you may wonder why they are so good. These talks have been practiced and rehearsed, over and over. And if we go back to Martin Luther King ("I have a dream" speech) and Winston Churchill's wartime speeches we know that they were practiced before. This will be true of every great speaker and every great speech.

Practicing and rehearsal is a key part of your preparation. Many speakers without proper practicing will tell themselves, after they have given their presentation, that it could have gone better. Don't skip this important step.

# Using your voice well in a presentation

Your voice is more important than you probably realise. It is unique. It will bring your presentation alive, or not! It may well make the difference between an ordinary presentation and an outstanding one.

Just think of the radio and TV presenters that you listen to or watch. How different are their voices? How easily you recognise them from their voices. How a good broadcaster can bring a programme alive. And, on the other hand, those that put you off by their voice or the way they speak.

Your voice will tell your audience *almost immediately* how confident you are; how excited you are; how passionate you are; or the reverse.

So how do you use your voice in a presentation? Unless you've been trained as an actor you will not be able to change your voice, except momentarily. But. If you ARE genuinely confident; if you ARE genuinely excited; if you ARE genuinely passionate, then you will show it. You will show it in your voice. You will show it in the way you stand. You will show it in the way you look at the audience.

So, our suggestion is to become all of those things. Be genuinely excited and confident about your talk and it will come through in your voice.

And you can make a difference in other ways. Most speakers could make more impact by speaking LOUDER, and by varying the loudness and quietness of their voice. They could make their presentation more interesting and engaging by putting more EXCITEMENT into their voices. They could put in more PAUSES which would make the audience listen more closely to what they're saying.

Record yourself as you prepare your next presentation. Speak louder. Speak slower. Use more emphasis and listen back to the difference these things make. But remember the key to speaking success is to have a great presentation which you feel great about, and it will show in your voice.



# The difference that more energy makes

Don't be a boring speaker. Nobody wants to listen to a boring speaker. Be alive and interesting. Be compelling!

It's the difference between the audience looking at their watches wondering when your presentation will end, and them being totally engaged and absorbed with what you're saying.

How do you become alive, interesting, even compelling?

The first thing is to be fascinated and deeply involved in your topic. This can lead to a genuine feeling of enthusiasm. And, you need to be able to express that enthusiasm, more so than will probably feel comfortable to you.

Most of us will need some help in being more energetic. Most of us have a belief that we need to be 'normal' and 'controlled' in our presentation. And while there will be situations where you will want to be more formal, you certainly don't want to be boring!



## Dealing with nerves

Every speaker is nervous. It's said that "it goes with the territory".

The question is what you do with your nerves. Do you let them hold you back, or do you use them to help you to create a great talk?

Our experience is that the best way to deal with nerves is good preparation and practice. Plus, experience.

Again, like driving. Almost all new drivers are nervous, because they haven't yet got the experience and the confidence that comes from doing it.

Our advice is to make sure you know what the audience are expecting. And then make sure that your talk will deliver that. Then get practicing. And more practicing. Until you know it very well. Not word for word, but well enough that you know what to say, and what comes next. And that you have a back-up in the form of some form of notes, if you should forget a part of it.

My own experience, years ago, was getting a dry mouth when I literally 'dried up' – I had nothing more to say to my Board of Directors after 3 minutes of a 20-minute presentation. That memory still lives with me and very occasionally I will get a dry mouth when I'm presenting to a big group. Now I keep a few small mints in my pocket and keep one in the side of my mouth before I start to speak. That does the trick, until I've got going.

And there are other techniques, such as deep breathing before you speak, getting physically active before you speak, reminding yourself that you can do this, and visualising a great finish,

Find out what works for you. Do enough of the thinking, the preparation, the practice and the rehearsal to lose most of the nerves.

Maybe even enjoy being a little nervous, as you would when you first drive a car in a strange city; but know that you can do it, and that it will be fine!

## What to do after your presentation

Great presenters are experienced. They learn from each experience; each time they present. They note what went well and they note what they'd do differently next time.

So, when you're on the train home, or the next day, if you're driving, take a moment to capture those thoughts.

You may have had some feedback from individual audience members after your presentation. Note what they said. You may not have agreed with their viewpoint, but it may be worth considering.

Find somewhere to capture your thoughts, where you'll find them again. Maybe you could keep a journal of your thoughts, where you could include ideas for the next talk.

If it went particularly well, you'll be enjoying the moment. If it didn't go so well, you'll be doing more 'soul searching'. Either way, there's a value to reflection.

Mark Twain, the American author, said "All great speakers were poor speakers once". They had to learn. Just like you and I.



## About Walter Blackburn



The author, Walter Blackburn, is the Founder of Presenting Success. For over 35 years he has been training people in business to present well. Having struggled with making presentations in his early career he understands how challenging it can be for many people who don't find it easy. He has created a unique process for helping people to learn to successfully present with confidence and runs both open and in-company programmes through Presenting Success. He has trained bid teams and helped major corporations win million-pound bids. Walter is available for personal presentation skills coaching at any level, from beginners to major key-note speeches.

Visit [www.presentingsuccess.co.uk](http://www.presentingsuccess.co.uk) for more information or call on 020 7100 2520.

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