

Guidelines for Presentations

1. Hand out a handout.

Invest some energy in a good-looking handout, containing the essential points of your presentation and literature for further reading. You can also include other elements you think will be helpful for the audience to follow you in what you want to say, such as pictures, timetables and diagrams. Don't overdo it, though.

2. Over head? Overhead!

Apart from making you appear more professional, a well-done overhead transparency is an important aid in your presentation, because it can show things to the audience which stress or exemplify what you're saying at the same time. Use a large enough font size, don't cram the transparency with information, and your audience will love you for it.

3. Speak, don't read.

Try to speak freely without looking at your notes too often. Spoken language, with its redundancies and lively intonation, is far easier to listen to and to understand over a longer period of time than its written form. If you're just going to read out a written text to the audience, you could as well give them your script right away and call it a day.

4. Play in time.

For most presentations your time is limited. Therefore time management is a crucial thing, especially if there are other people who want to give their presentation after you. Overrunning your time limit either results in using up the others' time as well and thus robbing them of the chance to give a good presentation, or in the tutor interrupting you before you could come to your conclusion.

5. Relevant points make a presentation, too many points just make a heap.

There are few things more annoying than watching a film that's out of focus. The same goes for presentations. So while collecting material for your presentation, keep asking yourself: "Is that important for my topic?" If we believe that the average audience can only take in a very limited number of points, you'd better stick to the essential ones.

6. Even Shakespeare practised his part.

Practise your presentation before going "on stage". That way you will be calmer when it comes to the "real thing". You will know how much time you need and whether you have to shorten your part. You can think of how to express the things you want to say and improve your style. And you can go through the things you have to do while speaking, for example change overhead transparencies or write at the board. Come to think of it, practice in advance is the solution to most of the problems connected with giving a presentation.

7. Plan the structure of your presentation with your team-mates.

If your presentation runs smoothly, it looks far more professional. What is more, hissed discussions and occasional fist-fights "on stage" are quite an ugly sight...

8. Educate and entertain.

What was true for the ancient Romans is also true for us. You might have important things to say, but if you bore your audience to tears, they will find other ways of employment during your presentation. While preparing your presentation, imagine you yourself had to listen to it. Bear that in mind while speaking as well.

9. Include some audience participation time.

Allow some time for questions and discussion at the end of the presentation or individual parts. Try to think of questions that might trigger off some participation from the audience. You don't have to know the answers to them all yourself, mind you.

10. Be prepared.

If you need special equipment for your presentation, make sure everything is ready for use before you start. This is particularly important for technical equipment such as overhead projectors and computers, but also for the "little things" like chalk that can sabotage even the most fanciful presentation.

11. Act Cool.

Of course, your ultimate goal will be to provide the audience with a smooth-running, well-prepared, professional-looking presentation. However, there might be problems you didn't reckon with (Now where was that transparency again?). In this case, try to uphold the impression that everything is under control. Don't let on that you're out of your depth, for example by humming while searching for papers or by oopsing and swearing. Remember: There's no business like show business.

12. It's a presentation, not a confession.

The story of how you came about the facts you are presenting and, particularly, which information you could not find might sound interesting to you. But not to the audience. Honestly. So, go tell it on the mountain – but cut it out in your presentation.