



Top Tips

JB Communication's Top Tips for Presenters



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No.1: It takes time to sound spontaneous

Preparation is the foundation of any good speech or presentation. You've got to think about your audience, how you want them to think or feel differently after you've presented to them, and what the best ways of getting your message across are.

Don't open PowerPoint straight away. Stop and ask yourself a few simple questions:

- Do you know what you want your audience to think, do or say differently once they've seen and heard your presentation?
- Do you know what your two or three top messages are, and have you written them down yet?
- Have you considered how the audience will respond to your key messages, do you think they will be friendly to them or will your points cause confrontation or, at least, a lively discussion?
- It's important that you work out what's in your presentation for the audience: what's the benefit to them?
- Check who else is presenting. Are you speaking alone, or with other presenters? Are you first, last or somewhere in between?
- Is there an overall theme to the event at which you are speaking, what's the mood and tone of the theme and can you use it to illustrate your message?
- Have you checked how long you have to present and what time of day you will be doing it? Is it first thing after the night before's sales party? If so, think about how to engage and energise the audience!
- Have you considered what the presentational environment will be like? Is there a big set or a flip chart? Think about how you can stand out by using the stage and environment differently without relying on buckets of charts to do the job for you.



No.2: Developing & structuring your messages

Effective communication depends on structure. The best speeches concentrate on two or three key messages that make the audience see the world your way, and act differently once they've heard your presentation. Many professional speechwriters say that the best way to structure a presentation is simply to 'tell them what you're going to tell them (the subject), then tell them, (the subject in detail), then tell them you told them (the subject summarised and linked to actions)'. It works.

- Start by writing down your top key messages using clear, concise sentences. Create a presentation that flows. Think of the six P's: preface, position, problem, possibility, proposal, and postscript.
- Think about what your audience knows and doesn't know: do they have a detailed knowledge of the subject you're going to talk about? If they don't, then lay out the subject simply and effectively.
- What are the key facts that support your key messages? Brainstorm these and think carefully about what facts your audience **MUST KNOW**, the ones they **SHOULD KNOW**, which you can include if you have time, and the ones that would be **NICE TO KNOW**, which you should probably leave out!
- Order your presentation using your key messages (supported by the most relevant and powerful facts) and remember the old cliché, 'Less is More'. Effective politicians (and there are some!) use facts and figures very sparingly.
- Make everything you say relevant to the audience before you. Put any drawbacks they might have in the first half of your sentences, and then turn them into advantages or positives if possible.
- Have you kept it 'Simple and Straightforward'? Don't baffle your audience with jargon or convoluted thinking. Simple language always works. Remember, they are not **READING** your presentation, they are **HEARING** it. It's as if you are **TALKING** to them in a conversation. It is **NOT** a lecture.



No.3: Turning your messages into a presentation

Communication is all about clarity. It's hard to be clear if you use too many words, or long ones, or go into too much detail. Your language needs to be natural and add some drama to the presentation: give the audience high points that communicate your passion for the subject.

- Keep sentences short. Approach the presentation as if it's an article in a mass-market paper or magazine. A good sentence length is 20-25 words. Most professional speechwriters keep their sentences even shorter!
- Think about the overall length of the speech. You'll speak at about 120-150 words per minute. So calculate the amount of time you have and the corresponding number of words you need.
- Check your facts. You will soon lose the respect of your audience if they feel you don't know your subject thoroughly.
- Make a powerful opening statement, consider making it provocative! A big, controversial statement at the start always gets the audience's attention.
- Think how you could show empathy with the audience, but only do it if you believe it will get them on your side.
- Consider the shape of your speech. Know where the highpoints are in your presentation and hit them.
- Create a close to your speech that summarises and captures the essence of what you want this audience to think, do or say differently.
- Let the script reflect your style, your passion and your enthusiasm for the subject. Don't let the script style strip you of your personality. The words have to sound like they're coming from YOU, not someone else.



No.4: How to visually support your presentation

It's been proven that when you combine the verbal and the visual, your presentation is more effective. Many experienced presenters use words, pictures, video or other media to bring life to their message. Simply, visuals make messages more memorable and that's the point of the whole exercise: you want your audience to remember what you said. So, it's a chance to use your imagination.

- Avoid putting your script onto your slides: if you do, the audience will try to read and will not be listening to you.
- Use strong, simple visualisation of your key points. This will be a prompt for you and help to keep your audience's attention.
- The average person recalls information in the following way:

	After 3 hours	After 3 days
Tell	70%	10%
Show	72%	20%
Tell + Show	85%	65%

- Use headings on your slides that help to move the story along.
- Think about using other support material like photographs, illustrations, cartoons, graphics, animations or even real props.
- A colourful image or one that's humorous gets the audience to renew its attention.
- Think about how short videos can help endorse your messages and bring another voice to the presentation. Video can easily set up a problem, illustrate insights, animate a reveal moment or summarise the presentation. Video is great for delivering, clarity, consistency and a WOW factor.
- Have you thought about building audience interaction into the presentation? Getting the audience to participate is a powerful way to get them to discover and take ownership of your message for themselves.



No.5: Refining your presentation

Refining your presentation should be a combination of re-writing, editing and polishing your words, and practising them out loud. You need to be able to move slickly from visual to visual, slide to slide, or video to video. Rehearsing your speech also gives you the chance to change it and make it better.

- Read your presentation out loud, then convert the written sentences into the spoken word.
- Learn your presentation. You will not be able to present well unless you know your speech. Just reading it out is a presentational disaster!
- Now practise the presentation again but slow it down. A lot of presenters tend to speed up when they're on their feet. By slowing it down at this point you'll avoid going too fast on the big day.
- Check that you have clear signposts within your presentation to help you lead the audience through it. Get someone to listen to you and watch your visuals – do they get it? If they don't, change the presentation.
- Note in the script and slides where you want to deliver greater emphasis for your major points.
- Use pauses in your speech so that the audience gets a chance to digest what you've just said.
- If the slides don't give you the confidence you need in terms of remembering where you are, then use cards. Most professional presenters do.
- Remember that you know more than your audience. Only you know what you are going to say! Show passion and excitement for your subject. This communicates more powerfully than words ever can.



No.6: How to warm up your body and voice.

Presenting is a very physical thing to do. It taxes your body and your vocal chords as well as your brain. So, it's a good idea to be in the right shape and frame of mind as you walk out into the spotlight. Here are some tips about how to do just that.

Physical warm up exercises

You wouldn't think so, but doing physical warming up exercises can be make-or-break before any presentation – literally! Warming up your ankles, for instance, helps prevent any nasty trip-ups as you make your way to the stage. Here are a series of tip-to-toe exercises to get your body warmed up.

- Feet a foot apart, shoulders down, back straight, head looking forward. Then head slowly down wait a second, rotate to the left and then lift head up looking over your left shoulder. Head down and rotate back to the centre with your chin on your chest slowly bring head up and look forward. Repeat this sequence to the right. Then repeat total left and right in turn 6 times.
- Roll your shoulders forward and back 8 times
- Put your left arm straight above your head with your right grasping it at the elbow. With your shoulders above your hips bend to the right and hold for 10 seconds. Change your hands over and bend to the left and hold. Repeat set 3 times.
- Rotate and bend your hips from side to side
- Put your legs together and, with your hands on your knees, bend and rotate your knees 4 times in each direction.
- Rotate each ankle 8 times clockwise and anti-clockwise.
- Once you have done all those exercises have a very good shake all over.



No.6: How to warm up your body and voice (cont...)

Vocal warm up exercises

Most professional presenters and speakers go through a series of exercises before they face their audiences, and all of the ones we've outlined here are familiar to actors and actresses too. If you're not relaxed and in the right frame of mind when you start to speak you could come across as either nervous or wooden, and that will get in the way of your message.

- Place your hands on your lower ribs. Slowly breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- One great exercise for pitch and breath control is to hum any simple tune you know with an 'M' sound. Don't push the voice from the throat, breathe easily and hum gently. Without changing the pitch increase and decrease the force - this exercise also helps improve your breath capacity.
- Articulation and diction is essential to making sure your audience can all understand you - say each one of the following sounds as fast as you can, repeating them for as long as you can... in a single breath!

P F TH T S K H

- Here's another great articulation exercise: Read the following out loud, making sure you pronounce all the consonants clearly...

In Tooting, two tutors astute
Tried to toot a Duke on a flute
But duets so gruelling
End only in duelling
When tutors astute toot the flute!



No.7: How to control nerves

Have you ever experienced the following: shallow breathing, palpitations and a rising feeling of panic? Your hands are clammy and shaking, your knees shake a little too, your legs seem to have a life of their own, and you sweat profusely... And then you find that you are 'umming' and 'ahhing' all the time, your mouth is dry and you can't remember the next thing you want to say... It could be a nightmare! But it needn't be.

Remember

- Fear is a normal experience. If you have it, you are like lots of other presenters.
- The tension you feel at the beginning of your presentation is helpful and the adrenalin can help sharpen your delivery.
- Don't drink too much coffee or reach for an alcoholic drink to control your nerves – even biscuits are not a good idea because they can make you cough!

Take action

- Prepare your notes, slides and handouts meticulously. 90% preparation results in just 10% perspiration.
- Look great: good grooming sends out messages about how you value yourself and works wonders on your confidence levels.
- Warm up the body and the voice (see our last set of Tips).
- Rehearse thoroughly and make sure you read your speech aloud. Visualise yourself doing a great job.
- Perfect your opening line. Get this right and everything else should flow.
- Concentrate on the audience rather than yourself. Present initially to those with smiley faces and who seem engaged in your presentation.
- Use positive language, be enthusiastic and be friendly – it will rub off on the audience. Even consider a smile!



No.8: How to present at a conference

Professional presenters often say that they engage their audience as if it were a person. They make sure that they regularly make eye contact with the audience and they always speak up, and speak slowly. Talk **to** the audience, don't talk **at** them.

- Stand tall – make sure you adopt a good posture. Keep your head up and look at the audience and pause before you begin.
- Adopt a 'professional style' that's assertive but friendly and enthusiastic. Never be dogmatic and always speak up! If you have a microphone, it can't amplify a voice that is not there!
- And as you do... slow down! The overall pace of your speech should be 30% slower than normal conversation. That will feel slow at first but will be right for the audience.
- Avoid speaking in a monotone. Change your pitch and pace, intonation and inflection, and add force or volume to help the audience take in what's really important .
- Use pauses to help dramatise your points or to change subject.
- Never look over the audience's head or, worse, lock your eyes downwards. Present to all four corners of the room. Make the audience believe you are talking to each of them individually, even if the stage lights prevent this!
- Connect with the audience by using body language. This will be easier if you are not behind a lectern. If you prefer to stand behind one, then don't stoop and grab the sides of it.
- Use gestures for emphasis. Make them big and use open gestures which are more relaxed, graceful and slower than your normal ones.
- Work the stage: think about how you could dramatise your presentation by the way you move around it.



No.9: How to use prompting

Prompting is a very useful tool but not everyone likes to use it. Try it out and see if it helps you, and if you like the certainty it brings (you'll never forget your words!), then here are a few simple tips on how to make the most of the technology.

- Start with a full script that has been written for the spoken word, not to be read.
- Use two screens when you are based at a lectern. If you are one of several speakers that day, then the screens should be on motorised 'rise and falls'.
- If you want to walk around, use large plasma screens. These should be positioned as close to your eye line with the audience as possible.
- Make sure you learn your script. The more familiar you are with it, the better your presentation will be.
- Rehearse your presentation a couple of times with your script on the prompting system. When it's transferred, your script will, at first, look totally alien. The physical layout of the text will be very different and the words will be white on black.
- You control the speed of the words going through on the screens. The prompting operator is following you, you must control the pace!
- Try and add emphasis. Highlight key words on the screen so that you know where you need to deliver with emphasis. Also add in dots when you want to be reminded to pause.
- Think about the audience that's between the glass screens or to each side. Present to them too.
- The most common error when using prompting is to forget about facial expressions, so make sure your face is animated and alive to the script.
- Still use gestures and think about how you are standing and what your body language is saying. Be yourself, be energised and enjoy the experience.



No.10: How to take questions.

A well run Q&A session can really help persuade and win people to your cause. But a baldly run Q&A session can undermine everything you have worked for, so be prepared. As we said in the very first set of Tips: preparation is vital in terms of framing your message, and so preparation is vital too when it comes to defending and selling your message once you've stopped speaking.

- Once you've prepared your presentation, think about the people you are going to present to and what questions they might ask. It's useful to prepare a range of relevant answers.
- When you're taking questions, the most important thing is to stay calm and listen to the WHOLE question. Don't jump in – you may be answering the wrong question and alienating the questioner.
- Repeat the question in your response, in case some audience members did not hear it.
- Don't rush your answer. Take your time – a questioner will almost always prefer a considered response.
- Audiences respond better if they feel you value their questions. Thank individuals for their questions, consider using phrases like 'that's a very good question you've raised here' or 'I'm glad you asked that question'.
- Use the person's name in the answer, if you know it.
- Avoid sounding like a typical politician – answer the question, rather than evading it. If you don't have an answer instantly, say you will come back afterwards with a full response.
- Don't let a tricky, aggressive or barbed question derail you – don't get personal. Give yourself time to reply, and maintain your dignity and professionalism at all times.