

# Delivering a Presentation

## Communication Skills

Team FME

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ISBN 978-1-62620-966-4

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ISBN 978-1-62620-966-4

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## Preface

This eBook follows on from 'Planning a Presentation' and 'Preparing a Presentation,' which explain how to organize your material in a way that works as a presentation to an audience.

You will learn how to:

- Develop a persuasive delivery style that demonstrates ownership of the key message
- Eliminate any verbal mannerisms you may have and to use positive body language and eye contact to engage the audience
- Read the audience so that you can set the pace of your delivery to match their understanding
- Prevent your presentation being hijacked by an unexpected or controversial question from the audience
- Manage the question and answer session so that people feel that your presentation was important and relevant

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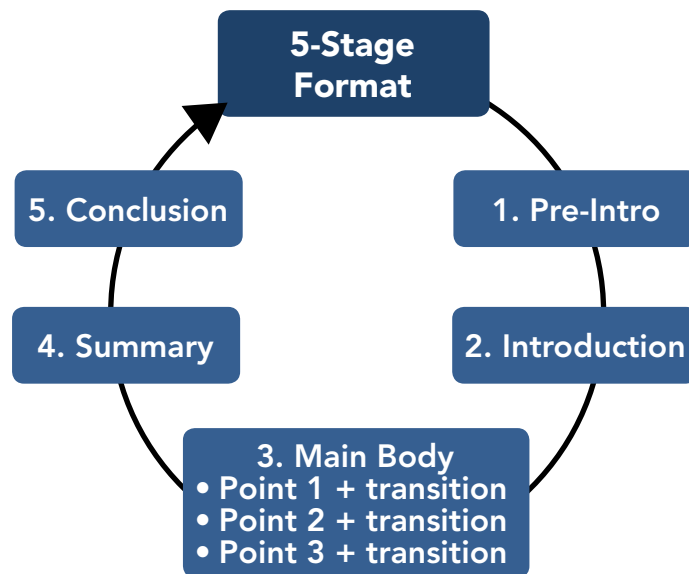
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## Introduction

Presentations are part of everyday life for a manager and being able to communicate effectively in this way is indispensable. Before focusing on your delivery style you will need to plan your presentation. This is dealt with in the eBook 'Planning a Presentation,' which explains how to identify your aim, analyze your audience, define your key message statement, and outline the scope of your presentation.



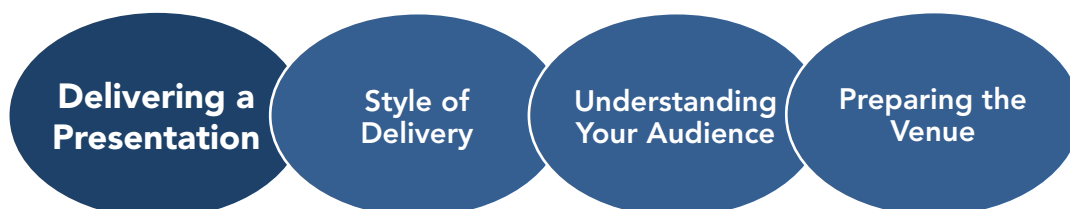
The second eBook in the series, 'Preparing a Presentation,' explains how to decide exactly what you are going to say and how to structure the points that support your key message statement. It recommends a five-stage format for your presentation, as shown below.



An effective presentation requires a certain amount of repetition in order to get the message across to the audience. You should 'tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and finally tell them what you've told them.' The first iteration serves to orientate the audience as to who is presenting what, and why. The second represents the substance of the presentation. Finally, you need to review the most important points, restate why they are relevant to the audience, and bring the presentation to a logical close. You need to be aware of this need for repetition and to factor it in to your time allocations.

This eBook concentrates on the three key elements of delivering a presentation:

- Your style of delivery
- Understanding your audience
- Ensuring the venue supports your message



Using natural conversational language assisted by pre-prepared cues is almost always the best way to present as it allows you sufficient flexibility in your delivery to take account of the needs of the audience. Presenting in this way allows the audience to view you as someone who owns the information and is knowledgeable about it. However, the effectiveness of this approach is directly related to the amount of time you devote to preparing and rehearsing.

Rehearsal is important because it gives you the opportunity to see if your points are clear when spoken aloud, to perfect your transitions, and to check your timings. If you rehearse in front of a colleague or video yourself, you can also eliminate any annoying verbal mannerisms you may have. Many people do have these, and whilst they may go unnoticed in conversational speech they tend to become more apparent in a presentation when people are nervous as a result of being the sole focus of an audience.

This eBook also describes how to stay in control and to manage questions that come up whilst you are speaking. It also covers managing the Q&A session, which is important because it is the last thing people remember. A poor Q&A session can undermine an otherwise excellent presentation.

### KEY POINTS

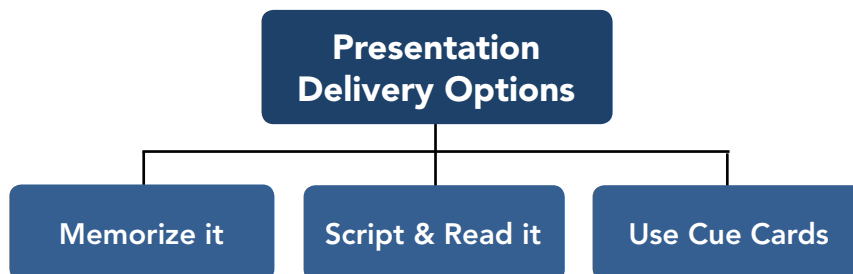
- ✓ This eBook follows on from 'Planning a Presentation' and 'Preparing a Presentation,' which you can download free from this website.
  - ✓ It focuses on the aspects of your delivery that get your key message statement across to as many people in the audience as possible.
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## Styles of Presenting

The way that you deliver your presentation has an effect on how engaged your audience will be and consequently how much of your message they take on board. There are three presentation styles that you can use:

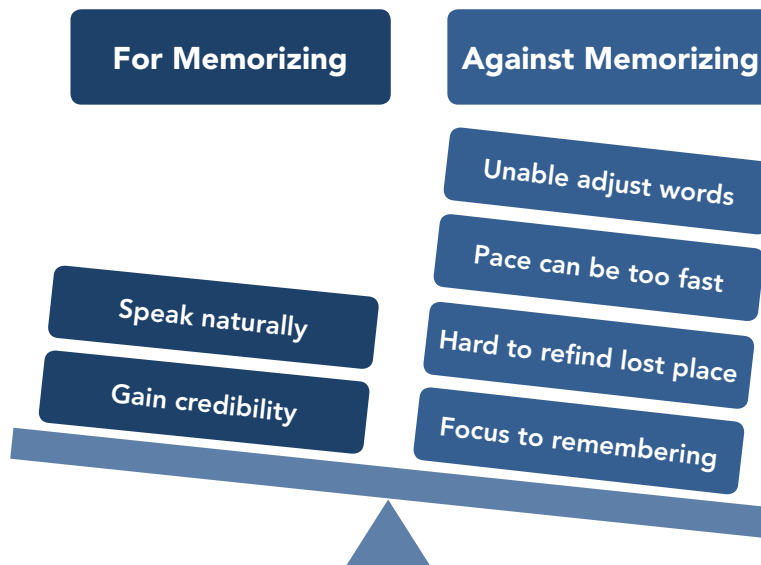
- You could memorize the presentation
- You could write a full script and read from it
- You could use free, conversational speech aided by some form of notes or cue cards



### Memorizing

Committing a presentation to memory represents an enormous overhead in terms of time and effort and is unnecessary except in situations where you need to present the same thing regularly. Safety briefings and some types of sales presentations fall into this category and if you are someone who finds it easy to memorize a presentation you could find that your credibility benefits from being able to give a smooth delivery of your content with plenty of eye contact.

One drawback of a memorized presentation is that you have to concentrate so hard on remembering what to say that your delivery style can become unnatural. Another is that if you forget where you are in the presentation, the results can be disastrous as you flail around trying to remember the next part. In addition, you will not be able to alter the words you use to match the level of knowledge of the audience.



These factors coupled with the long preparation time involved usually render this technique impractical for most of the presentations that you will give as a manager. However, you may want to memorize the introduction to your presentation as this can give you a minute or so to settle down and get into the flow of speaking to the audience.

### Reading a Script

Reading directly from notes is something that should always be avoided as it gives the impression that you are simply a messenger delivering someone else's content. It also makes it look as if you do not know enough about the topic to present it naturally.



However, it is perfectly acceptable to read part of your presentation if it is a quotation from someone else or if it has complex wording or figures. If this is necessary then you should make it clear that you are reading something verbatim and explain the reason for doing so.

Many public speakers use a script read from an autocue. This makes it look as though the presentation is being done from memory, as well as allowing the speaker to focus on the audience. This impression of a lot of eye contact combined with relatively free head movement can facilitate a much more professional delivery than simply reading from a hard copy script.

If you are making your presentation at a conference and an autocue is available, then it may be worthwhile experimenting with it to see if it suits you. If it does, you will need a full rehearsal with the autocue operator who will support you in the actual presentation. You should make sure that they can recognize occasions where you ad lib and pause the machine accordingly.

If you are not experienced in using it, then an autocue can result in a delivery that is dull and fails to engage the audience because it can be difficult to remember that you are there to communicate a message and not just read a script. This is something that can happen when you are presenting to a large audience in a darkened room.

Other disadvantages are the unnaturally fast pace this style of delivery can create and the inability to modify your language to accommodate the audience's understanding of the material—something that may only become apparent as the presentation progresses.

### Using Cue Cards

The use of cue cards enables you to employ natural conversational language assisted by pre-prepared cues that hold the main bullet points, notes, and transitions that you need in order to deliver the content of your presentation. With a little practice your delivery will sound normal, natural, and spontaneous, creating a less formal and more relaxed relationship between you and your audience.

The size of a cue card comes down to the personal preference of the presenter—some like 'index' cards, others prefer A5 or A6. They are so widely used that it is usually acceptable for the presenter to hold them in one hand and refer to them openly, as required.

At this stage of your preparation you should have your key message statement, a series of key points, and the detailed script that you need to present. These need to be converted into a series of cue cards that contain sufficient detail to allow you to deliver a spontaneous-sounding presentation.

Cue cards should only hold the level of information necessary to prompt you as to what to say next. This enables you to present in a natural and seemingly spontaneous way. The amount of detail you require will depend upon the nature and complexity of the material you are presenting, your level of familiarity with it, and your experience and confidence as a presenter.

When planning your delivery consider how it will sound to your audience and where you should break for the audience to take a point on board or in order to emphasize what you have just said.

Add these pauses to your cue card by writing 'pause' at the appropriate place. A pause within a presentation should last longer than a break in normal speech—it should typically be between two and three seconds. You will be able to review the effect of this technique in the rehearsal phase and adjust it accordingly.

Another benefit of using cue cards is that if you use one card per key point then changing cards can remind you to make an explicit transition between them. These transitions are an important part of any successful presentation and are explained in detail in the other presentation eBooks available from this website.

The type of phrases you can use as transitions are:

*'As I've just explained... (summarize). This brings us on to the next point ... (introduce)' (Between key points)*

The reason for explicit transitions is that they enable individuals to follow the logic of your presentation even if they have gotten lost during some of the detailed parts. Your transitions offer the audience a chance to 'replay' what you've just told them and help them understand the points you are making.

### KEY POINTS

- ✓ There are three presentation styles that you can use: memorizing the content, reading from a full script, or using free, conversational speech aided by cue cards.
- ✓ Memorizing a full presentation is usually impractical unless it is something that you will deliver regularly.

- ✓ Nevertheless, it can be worth committing the introduction to memory as this can give you time to settle down and get into the flow of speaking to the audience.
  - ✓ Reading from a script makes it look as though you are delivering someone else's message or that you don't understand the material very well.
  - ✓ Using natural conversational language assisted by pre-prepared cues is almost always the best approach.
- 

### Cue Card Guidelines

To maximize the benefits of cue cards there are several basic guidelines that you should use when creating your own:

- 1.** Clearly number the cue cards
- 2.** Only write on one side
- 3.** One key point per card
- 4.** Each card should contain adequate support and cues
- 5.** Information levels can be shown by alterations in font size, spacing, color, or highlighting
- 6.** Include timings and pauses.

The first principle is to ensure that a clear and unambiguous numbering convention is applied to all of the cards so that if you drop them you can quickly re-arrange them into the correct sequence.

By only using one side of each card you avoid the distracting behavior of flipping and manipulating cards. It helps prevent you wondering whether or not you have addressed both sides of each card. Clarity is further supported by only communicating one theme or idea on each card.

This way, when you have covered the point you will be confident that you can move on to the next card without having to re-scan the cards, which can be very distracting. It also stops you putting so much detail on the card that you end up reading from it or continually referring to it. This would be distracting and would also reduce your eye contact with the audience.

Cue cards usually evolve during the rehearsal stage and become simpler as you become more familiar with the material. So don't worry if initially they appear to have too much information. You will often find that after two or three rehearsals they are much briefer, with only one or two words where you previously had a sentence.

### **Guide for Cue Cards**

**Clearly numbered**

**Only write on one side**

**One theme / idea per card**

**Show timings & pauses**

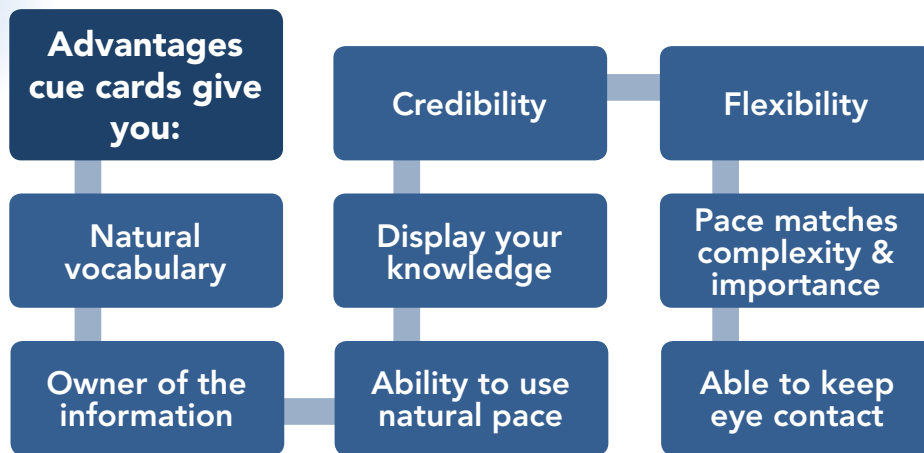
**Have sufficient support & cues**

**Use font, color, space to show levels**

Use a large font and double-spacing so that the cue cards are easy to read, enabling you to take in the information at a glance. Use color-coding to identify lower-level information that could be dropped if the allocated time is suddenly shortened or you find yourself overrunning. For example, you might use black for all the essential information and red for topics that could be omitted without compromising the integrity of the message.

Many presenters have their own personal shorthand system—for example, a smiley face symbol could be placed at strategic points on your cue cards to remind you to make contact with the audience and smile. This is something you can develop yourself over time.

The effectiveness of your delivery when presenting from a list of points is directly related to the amount of time you devote to preparing and rehearsing. You need to plan sufficient time so that you become familiar with the content and your words flow naturally.



Presenting in this style allows the audience to view you as someone who owns the information and is knowledgeable about it, as opposed to someone who is simply passing on information. Cue cards also enable you to adjust the way you speak with regard to your use of technical terms and jargon to match the level of understanding in the audience.

Cue cards enable you to maintain eye contact with the audience and to speak at a fairly natural pace. Because the words are coming from within you, you will be able to naturally change the way that you put the material across in real time depending on the feedback you receive from the audience. This also means that you will have the opportunity to go over certain key points if you feel that they have not been well understood.

Pace plays an important part in the effectiveness of your delivery. It is usually quite clear when the audience wishes you to speed up or slow down and explain points more fully. You will find that when you come to a difficult point you naturally slow down because the words do not come as easily to you. The audience will respond to this change in pace by concentrating a little harder on what you are saying because they intuitively know this is an important or difficult point they need to understand.

Similarly, when you are covering material that is relatively straightforward, the words come more easily and you speak more quickly. This is perfectly acceptable to the audience because they are not struggling to understand something complicated. Nobody expects you to deliver your presentation at exactly the same pace from start to finish. In fact, the presentation will have much more impact if you change the pace to match the complexity or importance of the points you're putting across.

Allocating sufficient time to rehearse your presentation ensures that you are familiar with the topic so that you don't need exact wording on your cards. This familiarity prevents you from becoming lost for words or interrupting the flow of your presentation, reducing the likelihood that you will become flustered.

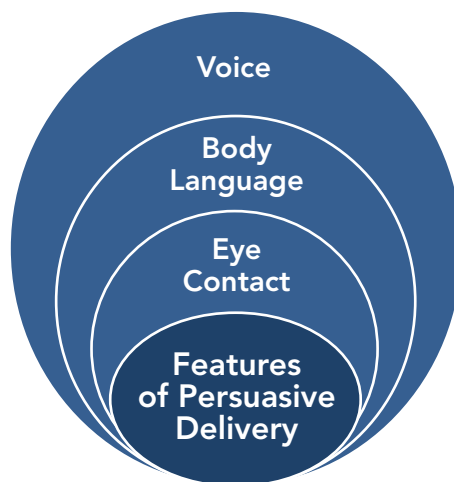
### KEY POINTS

- ✓ Cue cards should be as easy to use as possible, which means they should be sequentially numbered, only one side should be used, and each card should deal with only one key point.
  - ✓ Presenting in this style allows the audience to view you as someone who owns this information and is knowledgeable about it.
  - ✓ The effectiveness of your delivery when presenting from cue cards is directly related to the amount of time you devote to preparing and rehearsing.
  - ✓ This approach allows you some discretion in how you get the information across in that you can slow down and use more explanation where audience feedback indicates that this is necessary.
-



## Developing a Persuasive Delivery Style

Developing a persuasive delivery style takes a lot of practice and involves working on your voice, body language, and eye contact with the audience. The different aspects of your delivery may have to alter depending on the size of your audience, so ensure your style is flexible.

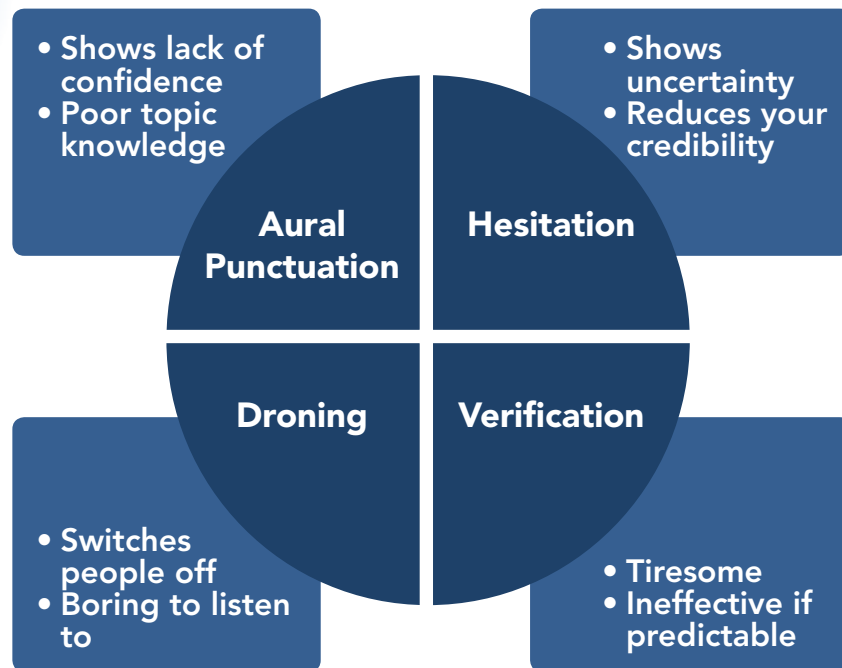


Most people are aware that they have certain mannerisms or modes of speech that whilst being perfectly acceptable in conversation can become irritating when they are making a presentation. Some of these mannerisms are the result of nerves and will disappear naturally as you gain confidence, whereas others can only be eradicated by conscious effort and practice.

### Voice

One aspect of presentation delivery that almost everyone needs to focus on is avoiding inappropriate verbal mannerisms. These usually take one of four forms: droning, aural punctuation, hesitation, or verification.

Droning refers to speaking without varying the pace of delivery. This is very boring to listen to even if the underlying subject matter is interesting. Try to speed up your delivery when you are saying something relatively straightforward—speeding up when something is easy to understand is quite acceptable.



A simple technique to vary your pace is to use a pause. Pauses can be quite dramatic and good attention-getters, but presenters are often wary of using them. The pause may seem endless to you as a presenter, but in reality it gives the audience time to take your last comments on board and to build up their expectation about what is coming next.

Many presenters fall into the trap of using aural punctuation such as inserting 'Err,' 'Ah,' or 'Um' every time they come to the end of a sentence. One of the most effective ways to break this habit is to take the end of a sentence as a cue to do something else—for example, closing your lips or rubbing your index finger over your thumb.

Hesitation is something else you need to avoid when presenting because it will lower the audience's belief in your knowledge of the topic. It is normally caused by uncertainty about precisely what to say next. The best way to reduce hesitation is to ensure that you are familiar with the material and have conducted adequate rehearsals.

Try to avoid aural punctuation and hesitation, but don't worry too much about them unless you use them to the extent that they become a distraction. You will naturally use them less as you become more experienced and confident as a presenter.

Good presenters often use the occasional verification to confirm that the audience has understood the point made. It usually takes the form of 'Okay?' or 'Right?' You need to ensure that you have eye contact with your audience so that you can see their confirming nods and smiles. You must avoid using it systematically or it will become predictable and tiresome.

If you really want to verify something with your audience then use a more meaningful method—try asking them a question or involving them in a point of conversation. Where you are presenting to an audience that is too large to interact with you should gauge their understanding by reading their body language and facial expressions and by maintaining eye contact.

Most presenters will be concerned about coming across as very different from their normal day-to-day personality because of the risk of appearing slightly ridiculous to people who know them. This is not something you really need to worry about. Even people who know you well accept that when you are making a presentation you will need to appear to be more extrovert and outgoing than normal.

### Body Language

Research has shown that body language is an important part of any presentation. Body language can mean different things in different cultures. This section explains aspects of body language communication as it applies in Western society.

You need to be aware of your body language from the moment you stand up until your presentation is complete. Members of your audience will analyze your body language, even if they are unaware of this at the conscious level.

You will probably be aware of the concept of personal space—that area around an individual into which other people should not venture uninvited. Audiences too are very conscious of this space and when presenting you should avoid standing too close to the audience. This distance also creates an effective stage area in which you, the presenter, can perform.

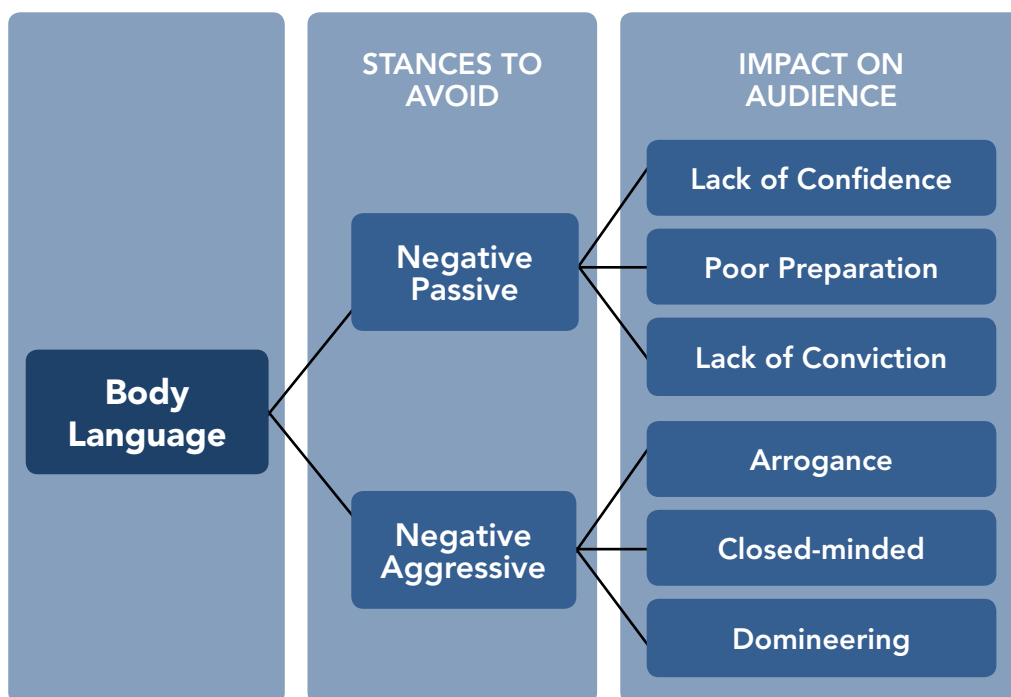
Once you are positioned in the correct zone—this will be further away the larger the audience—there are four main aspects of body language that you should consider: what to do with your eyes, what your facial expressions indicate, the positioning and movement of your body and limbs, and your hand gestures.

The way that you move your body and limbs will have a major influence on how your audience perceives you. When presenting, you will normally be standing, and an ideal stance is with your feet close together and your weight evenly distributed between them.

It is important not to grow roots—don't stand in one position, but try to inject movement as you speak. This helps to add a natural animation to your presentation as the audience will have to adjust their gaze to follow you rather than stay looking at a fixed position.

By developing a practiced way of moving you can add a confident and professional air to your presentation style. Precisely how you choose to move is a personal thing, but try to develop and rehearse your style so that you end up moving without conscious effort.

Whilst it is a good thing to be animated, don't walk around too much or the audience will find it distracting and annoying. One of the best tactics is to use the main features of your presentation as cues for movement. Until you have developed this skill it may be worth annotating your cue cards with movement cues or symbols.



There are two stances that should always be avoided: the negative passive stance and the negative aggressive stance.

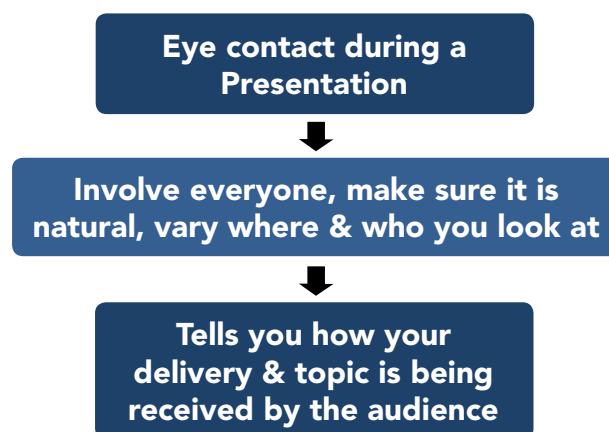
The negative passive stance involves you adopting an unbalanced position—perhaps leaning on one leg, with the arms crossed low in front of the body in a protective way. This stance will often be accompanied by lack of eye contact and a nervous vocal style.

It will portray a lack of confidence, often associated with a lack of preparation. Your audience may also see this as a sign that you do not really believe in what you are saying.

The negative aggressive stance involves standing uncomfortably close to the audience with hands on hips and is associated with an arrogant, closed-minded, and domineering attitude. It should be apparent that this style of presentation will not be well received and is unlikely to deliver the intended message. You may occasionally see this style of delivery used in a deliberate way by someone in authority in order to intimidate his or her audience.

### Eye Contact

A great deal has been written about eye contact and there are various schools of thought regarding the best ways of using it to engage your audience. Generally speaking the audience will do what you do: if you look out of the window or stare at the floor the audience will do the same thing. If on the other hand you look at members of the audience then they will return your eye contact.



Do not worry too much about the number of seconds that you spend maintaining eye contact; the most important thing is to make eye contact with everyone in the room before your presentation begins. This does not need to last more than a fraction of a second but you must take the whole room in to your glance even when there is a large audience.

It is quite acceptable to do this more than once in order to engage everyone's attention before you begin speaking. The single biggest factor that prevents proper eye contact is presentation nerves. If you are nervous then there is a natural temptation to avoid eye contact. If you have prepared properly and are presenting confidently then your eye contact will be natural and will serve its purpose of engaging with everyone in the room.

As well as engagement, one of the key functions of eye contact is that it enables you to read the audience. You should be looking for signs that people are staying with you and that you have not left a significant number of people behind.

People will usually nod their heads and make eye contact when they are with you. It is when they close their eyes or stare at the floor or out of the window that you can assume that you are losing their interest. The early signs of this happening should encourage you to pause and reengage with the audience either by summarizing what you've already said and using a transition into the next part of the presentation or by clarifying something that is causing confusion.

Whatever you do, do not overreact to any one individual. Some people may genuinely have no interest in the item you're presenting and may be there because they have been told to or for some other purpose.

All these features of your delivery style will be affected by the size of your audience. You will generally need to be more extroverted the larger your audience and it will require more energy and concentration to scan a large audience to make sure that everyone is following your message.

You also need to take into account the likely effect on the audience of what you are presenting. If the implications of your message are going to cause problems for some people in the audience—for example, redundancy or restructuring—then an overly upbeat delivery style will come across as insensitive and antagonistic, alienating those in your audience that are affected.

## KEY POINTS

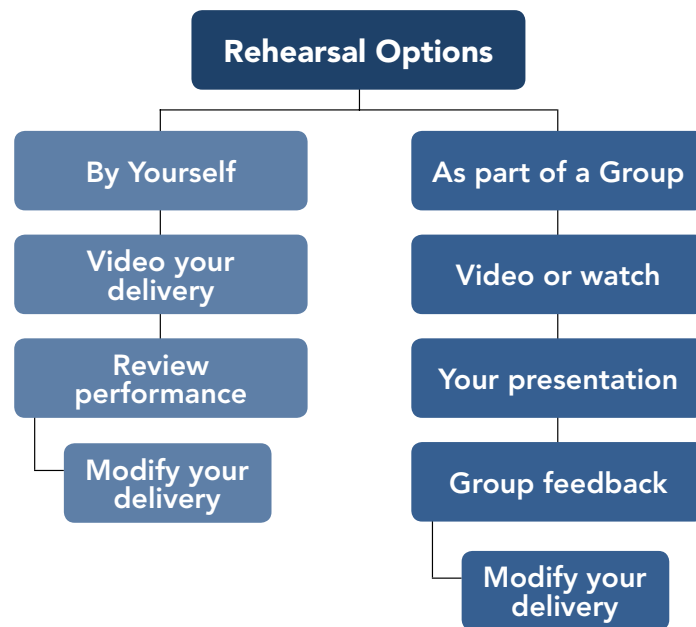
- ✓ A persuasive delivery style involves mastery of voice, body language, and eye contact.
  - ✓ You should make a conscious effort to eradicate any verbal mannerisms you may have. These include: droning, aural punctuation, hesitation, or verification.
  - ✓ Try to avoid becoming rooted to the spot. It is generally easier to keep people's attention if you move around a little.
  - ✓ Respect the audience's personal space and only move into it briefly if you need to make an important point.
  - ✓ Remember to make plenty of eye contact. This enables you to check that people are following you and to modify your delivery if they are not.
  - ✓ Make sure that your overall tone is appropriate for the message.
- 

## Rehearsing

The only way to develop your delivery skills is through continual practice, criticism, and revision. That criticism can be self-criticism and in the early stages this is undoubtedly the easiest way. Another relatively painless way is to come to an arrangement with one of your colleagues that you will critique each other's presentations. These critiques should concentrate on those areas that were good as well as those that were weak.

The idea of practicing in front of an audience fills most people with dread. This is made worse when the audience consists of people we work with because no one enjoys all of their shortcomings being discussed by their co-workers.

Remember that any presenter who appears knowledgeable, confident, and enthusiastic about their subject will be forgiven even if their delivery style is not perfect.



When trying to improve your delivery do not try to choreograph every single part of it. The more you consciously think about your body language, eye contact, tone of voice, and avoidance of filler phrases the less natural your delivery will appear. The most important thing is simply to eradicate your worst mannerisms and then concentrate on knowing the topic of your presentation sufficiently well so that you can present it with confidence.

This means that you have two options if you want to improve your delivery style. The first of these, and the most straightforward, involves simply videoing yourself with no audience whilst presenting directly to the camera and reviewing your performance with the intention of eradicating your most annoying mannerisms. Most people will see radical improvements after just a few sessions. You don't need an expensive video camera to do this. Even the cheapest cell phones have a video camera built in and you can simply Velcro one to a wall and use it to record yourself.

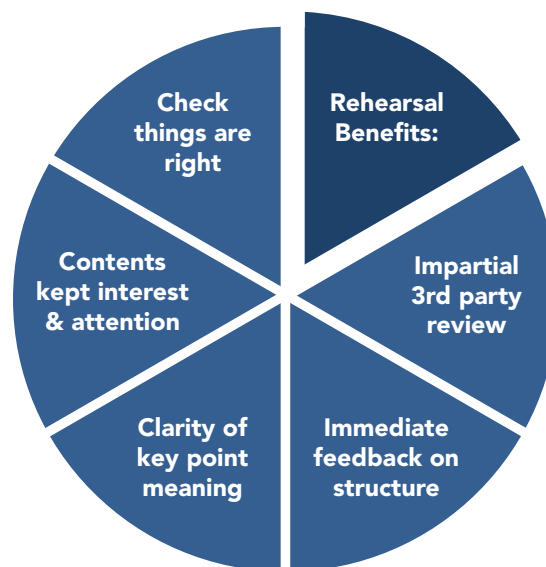
The second option is to join with a group of like-minded people who want to improve their public speaking skills. This can take you much further because not only will you actually be performing in front of an audience, but also there will usually be experienced help available.

Even if you do not feel as though you want to invest the time and effort in joining a group of people you should at least use the first option. The fact is that most people who have not taken steps to eradicate annoying mannerisms will usually exhibit one or two things that detract from the message they are trying to get across.



Most people who have never seen themselves deliver a presentation realize after a few minutes in front of an audience that they are using some verbal mannerism that the audience finds irritating and they try to stop doing it in real time. They usually end up simply swapping one mannerism for another, or they become so preoccupied with avoiding that particular behavior that they lose their concentration, their delivery suffers, and the message is lost.

There are several benefits you can attain by rehearsing a presentation at least once before doing it in front of an audience. Practice will help you with your transitions from one point to the next—it is sometimes only through going through the presentation aloud that you realize that your transitions are not as clear as they could be. Practice helps you to test your explanations of difficult concepts so that by the time you give the presentation all of the words are there when you need them.



Remember, even if you are only giving a presentation once, by rehearsing it before the event you give yourself time to develop your overall presentation skills, not just the content. Once you are comfortable with your content and the material behind it, you can practice your delivery by recording it on a cheap video camera or your cell phone.

Set the camera up in such a way that you can film your full body and work through the first point in your presentation. View this critically and eliminate any annoying habits you may have—for example, the use of stock phrases or non-words, or inappropriate body movement.

If you work through the whole presentation this way not only will you become familiar with how it comes across to the audience, you can also eradicate any distracting habits you have seen on the video one by one. In this way, not only do you practice the presentation in question, you also improve your general presentation skills.

It is important to perform at least one full rehearsal of your presentation, using the cue cards that you have prepared. This will highlight any areas of weakness, any items that strike you as being out of sequence, and any cue cards that fail to trigger the spontaneous flow that you had planned. If you make any major changes to the presentation following this rehearsal then you should perform another rehearsal—at least to cover the areas that have been changed.

One reason for practicing your presentation out loud and in front of the camera if possible is that it will give you a clear indication as to whether or not your planned timing is realistic. Generally speaking, once you begin a live presentation you're likely to take longer than you did in rehearsal. This is because you will react to any indication that the audience is not following you with a more detailed explanation or a different form of words.

In addition, it may become clear that whenever you put a slide up the audience requires a certain amount of time—usually somewhere between 10 and 30 seconds—to become orientated as to what the slide is trying to say. You will often discover that when you change slides it feels unnatural to begin speaking straightaway and that you really need to give the audience this time to orientate themselves before you begin either describing the contents of the slide or saying what conclusions can be drawn from it.

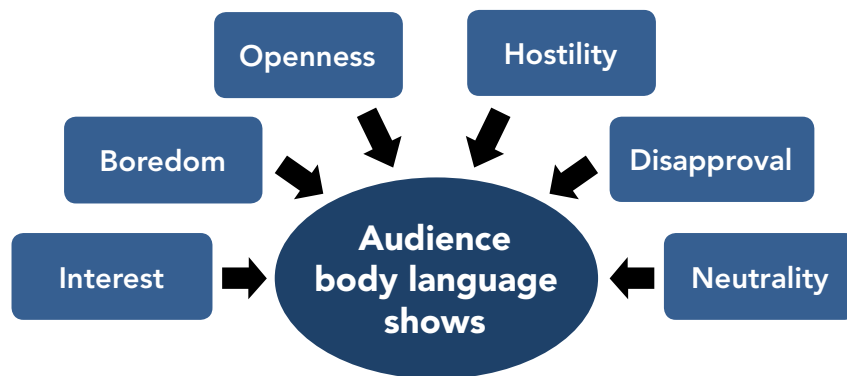
### KEY POINTS

- ✓ The only way to develop your delivery skills is through continual practice, criticism, and revision. Remember, audiences like knowledgeable, confident, and enthusiastic presenters.
  - ✓ Use the video camera on your cell phone to record your rehearsals. This will help you overcome any annoying mannerisms you may have.
  - ✓ Rehearsals also allow you to see if your points are clear when spoken aloud, to perfect your transitions, and to check your timings.
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## Reading Your Audience

Just as the audience read your own body language you too can read theirs. This continual assessment of their level of attention helps you to understand how engaged they are with the topic and your style of delivery. Is their reaction one of openness, or are they responding negatively to what you are saying? Does the level of eye contact throughout the audience show interest or apathy towards the topic?

When you are making a presentation the best way of staying in control and keeping your audience with you is to keep them interested in what you are saying.



Another complication is that audiences are made up of individuals, who will not necessarily share the same interests, attention span, or boredom threshold. People vary in the way they express these feelings and you should be able to read signs of this from the body language your audience display.

Members of an audience don't usually think of themselves as being observed, and consequently their body language is relatively easy to read. There are a variety of body language signals that you might observe among members of an audience, such as:

- Disapproval
- Hostility
- Openness
- Lack of interest
- Neutrality
- Boredom

Members of an audience can show signs of disapproval or hostility in a number of ways. You may observe people pointedly discussing things with a neighbor, looking at the ceiling or out of a window, or frowning whilst looking at you.

A negative posture—perhaps with an impassive or slightly hostile expression, or with arms folded as if to form a barrier and legs crossed with the person leaning back—suggests resistance to the presenter. However, you should be careful to avoid making judgments based on observing one piece of body language in isolation. For example, crossed legs or crossed arms on their own should not be automatically read as signaling a negative reaction.

A neutral and open attitude is often accompanied by a neutral or slightly friendly facial expression and an upright or slightly forward-leaning seating position. As these people have not yet decided whether or not they agree with your main message you may observe a mixture of gentle nods and shakes of their head as you make your key points. Neutrals should be viewed as a positive resource—it is after all the job of your presentation to win them over.

Someone interested in what you are saying may be smiling and nodding in agreement or frowning in thought, possibly leaning forward attentively. Hands clasped together may also indicate that a person is carefully considering what you are saying.

If boredom is affecting any members of your audience this may manifest itself in reversion to common habits—such as fidgeting with personal belongings like glasses, watches, pens, or earrings. Whilst looking at a watch or clicking a pen may demonstrate boredom don't confuse these signs with such things as the chewing of the end of a pen, which may indicate thoughtfulness.

Members of the audience who become bored may also whisper among themselves, rustle papers, scribble aimlessly on notepads, leaning back with their hands behind their heads, and even make audible sighs.

Recognizing both positive and negative signals from your audience should not change your planned presentation fundamentally. Your message and the material with which you are communicating it should have been carefully prepared and radical changes will almost certainly not be practical.

The real point of reading signals from your audience is that it can help you to judge who you have on-side, who is opposing your point of view, and who has yet to decide. This should help you to focus your message where it can have maximum impact, using your transitions to talk round those that can be swayed, whilst keeping your supporters with you and trying not to alienate the opposition.

### KEY POINTS

- ✓ Reading the audience's body language can help you to modify the pace of your delivery to keep as many people on board as possible.
- ✓ It can also help you to gauge who is in agreement with you, who is opposing your point of view, and who has yet to decide.

## Retaining Control

Assuming that you have confidence in the material that you are presenting and have practiced it sufficiently then nervousness should not be too much of a problem.



One of the best ways to ensure you remain in control is to do everything you can to either preempt or prepare for questions that undermine your position or message, or that you simply cannot answer. An unexpected question has been known stop a previously

convincing speaker dead in their tracks. You can never be 100 percent certain this won't happen, but through careful planning and rehearsing you can attempt to minimize the possibility.

If an unexpected disruption occurs you have three options open to you:

- Simply reiterate your position as firmly and confidently as possible
- Acknowledge the question. saying that there is insufficient time to answer it properly now, but that you will do so in the question and answer session
- Respond directly to the challenge with some sort of counter-argument

The first option carries the risk of making you appear arrogant and is best avoided even if you think that the person asking the question has very little support among the audience.

The second option is usually the best one. Make sure that you take the time to note down the question, who asked it (name, title, division, or organization), and at which part of your presentation it occurred. If the question cannot be answered during the Q&A session you may want to give the person an indication of when you will get back with your response.

Responding directly to the challenge with a counter-argument can be a very dangerous tactic because you will not have prepared a response and you could easily end up in a lengthy standup squabble.

You should also avoid the temptation to let a colleague answer a question because this would be one of the easiest ways for you to lose your credibility and control. You also have no idea what that person may say in their answer and therefore have no way to judge its impact on your key message statement. So unless you are 100 percent confident that their answer will support your aim then noting the question and agreeing to answer it later is the best option.

The key things to remember when dealing with a disruption are that you must be polite but firm, and you must never lose your temper—if you enter into a shouting match with a heckler then they win and you lose.

It is vital you don't let disruptive members of the audience derail your presentation—your time is limited so don't get involved in protracted discussions. Try to approach the point

of contention from any common ground that you share. If this fails to work then politely request that the point is discussed later at the pre-planned question and answer session.

If someone criticizes something that you have said, avoid getting into an argument with them. If your point was based on fact then make this clear and present the evidence. However, if it was based on your personal opinion, then don't attempt to pass this off as factual. Always remember that what is underlying the point of contention may be a genuine concern and you should be seen to at least acknowledge this. If you try to brush it aside it might be taken up by other members of the audience and could become a much bigger issue than if you had simply recognized it in the first place.

Attention seekers may make silly or sarcastic comments simply to get themselves noticed. Others may respond unwittingly to a rhetorical question that you have posed simply because they weren't paying full attention!

Try to analyze these sorts of events as they occur and respond, perhaps with humor, acknowledgement, or support but don't try to put people down— this nearly always reflects badly on the presenter.

### KEY POINTS

- ✓ You need to have a strategy for dealing with unexpected questions.
  - ✓ The safest approach is to acknowledge the question saying that there is insufficient time to answer it properly and to promise to deal with it during the Q&A session or after the presentation.
  - ✓ Never allow yourself to be drawn into an argument, but don't appear arrogant or unconcerned about issues that other people feel strongly enough about to bring up.
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## Question & Answer Session

The final part of most presentations is the 'Question & Answer' session (Q&A)—a planned session allocated to questions from the audience. The Q&A normally follows the conclusion, where you assert yourself as the center of attention, delivering with confidence, enthusiasm, and authority.

Ideally the conclusion should represent about 10 percent of the overall presentation. Your last visual aid should summarize the main message of the presentation and be left up as you answer questions. You can emphasize this transition by moving towards the audience, raising or lowering your voice, or perhaps pausing for a few seconds to look at your notes. This will increase the audience's capacity to retain the key message.

The impression you make at this point with the audience will be the lasting one and your last words the most remembered. So always plan a strong finish and make sure it is short and to the point.

**Options you  
can use to  
conclude a  
presentation:**

- Call to action
- Personal experience
- Quotation
- Humor
- Statistical evidence

Your conclusion should clearly indicate the end of your presentation, allowing the audience time to frame any relevant questions.

If the ending just appears out of the blue you are likely to be met with stony silence. Whilst you may initially welcome the lack of questions it can often leave the lasting impression that no one was really interested in the content or thought it was important.

A few good questions at the end of the presentation can sometimes make up for any oversights you have made when developing the content. Even though you can try to cover the points that you feel people will be interested in you can not always do this in a way that really resonates with them.



Sometimes people will get more from the answers to some questions at the end than they will have got from your presentation as a whole simply because the questions were phrased in a way that made sense to them from their perspective.

Plan for the transition to the Q&A session in the same way you have planned the rest of your presentation. When you have your final content, read through it carefully and note any questions that it is likely to raise, and prepare answers to these in advance. Focus on any areas in which your message is short of facts or vulnerable to being challenged. This will help you to anticipate most questions that are likely to arise, as well as prepare more lengthy answers in advance for questions you are sure will be raised.

Make sure your answers to any queries are helpful and informative, thus helping you to retain control. Some common ways to manage this transition and get questions flowing are:

- Have noted on a flip chart questions as they arose during the presentation and answer them in turn. (Eliminate any early questions that the latter part of your presentation answered.)
- If you have a chairperson agree with them beforehand that they will intervene and ask some initial questions in an attempt to involve your audience.
- Have someone in the audience primed to ask a simple question.
- Ask the audience if there is anyone who can relate to or has practical experience of an item discussed in the presentation and if their experience was the same or similar.

Remember, even people who do have questions may not want to be the first to speak up. In some instances it is equally likely that you are just facing an unresponsive group. This may be due to the character types within it or the intra-group politics.

When answering questions speak clearly and confidently, otherwise you will appear unsure of what you are saying. Do not let nerves draw you into responding hastily, always think about your answer before you speak, and if necessary refer back to your notes in order to answer a question.

If the question requires clarification then ask the questioner to do this, rather than risk answering a question that wasn't asked. When answering, address the entire audience and not just the questioner, and avoid getting into a protracted debate on any point that

is raised—you may offer to see a questioner after the presentation to continue a point that is of specific personal interest to them.

You may face questions that are unanswerable. These may be posed by people who are hostile to your message or by those just wishing to make a point. If you feel unable to answer a question you may find it useful to have a standard reply ready in order to reduce its impact on your presentation. Here are some useful examples:

*'I need to check with my colleagues before I can answer your questions so please see me after the session. I will take your details and get back to you.'*

*'Let me think about that for a minute. Can we come back to it later? Next question please.'*

*'I don't think that the information necessarily supports either view definitively. However my personal opinion is that . . .'*

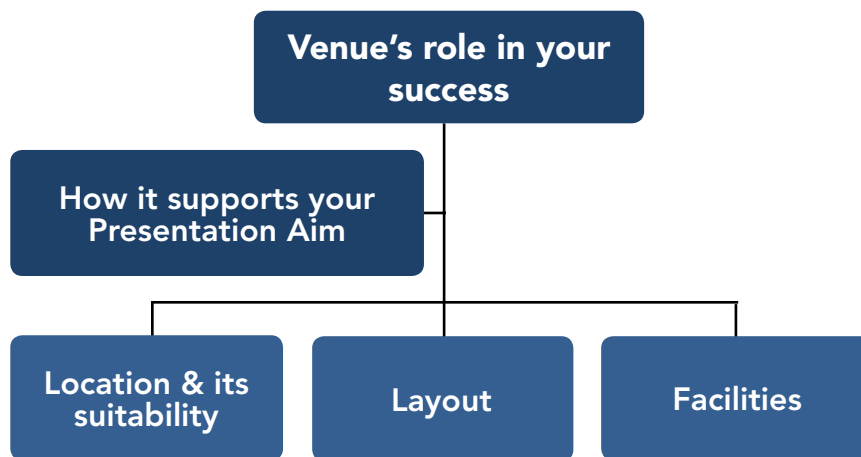
When you have reached the limits of your time you need to draw the Q&A session to an end. It is extremely important to thank everyone for their questions and for giving up their time to listen to you. If several people still have questions at this point you can give them your email address and ask them to send their question to you so you can reply to it.

## KEY POINTS

- ✓ A lack of questions after a presentation can make it look as though no one was really interested in the message.
- ✓ You should plan for the Q&A session rather than leaving it to chance.
- ✓ Don't forget that many people who would like to ask a question may not be prepared to speak out first.
- ✓ Ask a colleague to ask a pre-prepared question to get things started or agree with the chairperson to ask some initial questions.
- ✓ Always repeat the question to check that you have understood it and to give yourself time to think about your reply.
- ✓ Have some standard replies ready to deflect questions that you don't want to answer.
- ✓ Remember, a good question and answer session can leave a lasting impression that the presentation was important and relevant.

## Importance of the Venue

The location of the venue, how appropriate it is to your audience and message, its layout, and the facilities of the room are all elements that play a role in the successful delivery of your presentation.



If you are presenting in a familiar setting (for example, within your own organization) the room and its layout will be familiar. However, you may be presenting at a location that you have never seen before—the boardroom of a host organization, a hotel suite, or an exhibition, for instance. Where this is the case it is important to plan your arrival at the venue well ahead of time.

Whether the presentation venue is known to you or not, there are key questions you need to ask the person organizing the event to ensure that you are properly prepared for the task and understand how to maximize the influence of the venue. It is always advisable to visit the venue's website prior to your call as this may prompt more detailed questions, such as:

- How easy is the venue to get to by car, rail, or air?
- Does the image of the venue match / suit your audience?
- With regard to the room:
  - What is its capacity?
  - What floor plan options are available?

- What presentation facilities are available? Where are electric sockets? Will you need extensions for your electric cables/wires?
- Do you have control over the lighting and heating of the room?
- What types of events are going on in adjacent rooms at that time?

### Location and its suitability

The venue will set the mood for your presentation. An informal gathering in a small cheerful office will create a very different mood to a large conference room in a hotel. There are logistics involved when traveling to a remote location that you need to think carefully about and plan for—for example, organizing any travel tickets, pre-event accommodation, any specialist equipment, support materials, appropriate clothes, etc.



When presenting at an external location you should try to pre-arrange access to the room in which you will be presenting. Even if it is being used immediately before your slot you could try and gain access to this event, as it is important to familiarize yourself with the surroundings.

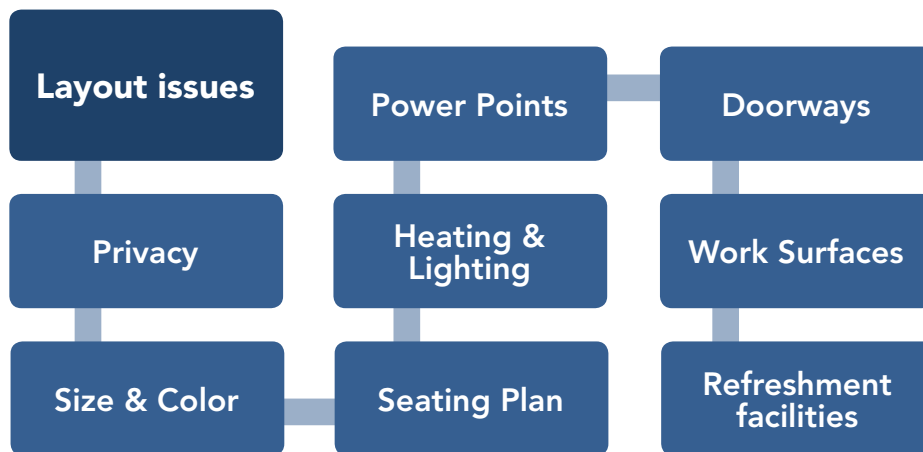
If you are unable to get there early, then you should contact the venue in advance and request a copy of the floor plan, and ask if any specific seating plan has been requested for that day. If it is your own event you can ask what seating arrangement options they offer and select the one most suited to your presentation aim and the size of your audience.

It is often wise to ask what events are going on in the adjacent rooms so that you know the atmosphere will be appropriate to your needs. You don't want to find your room is next to a party when you are giving a business presentation! Always build in some contingency as a safety factor to allow for any unforeseen travel, accommodation, or venue problems.

**Layout**

The importance of the room's layout cannot be underestimated. Layout is composed of a variety of aspects—size, coloring, lighting, position of power points, doorways, work surfaces, and any refreshment facilities. As the presenter your main concern is how these things impact your ability to perform.

This is easiest to control when you are giving a standalone presentation, but there are things you can do in other situations. It is a good idea to arrive early to familiarize yourself with the set up and decide how best to work within the constraints you have. As the presenter you are by default in control of the room so make sure you remove any distractions—for example, by closing open doors or windows that might otherwise divert people's attention.



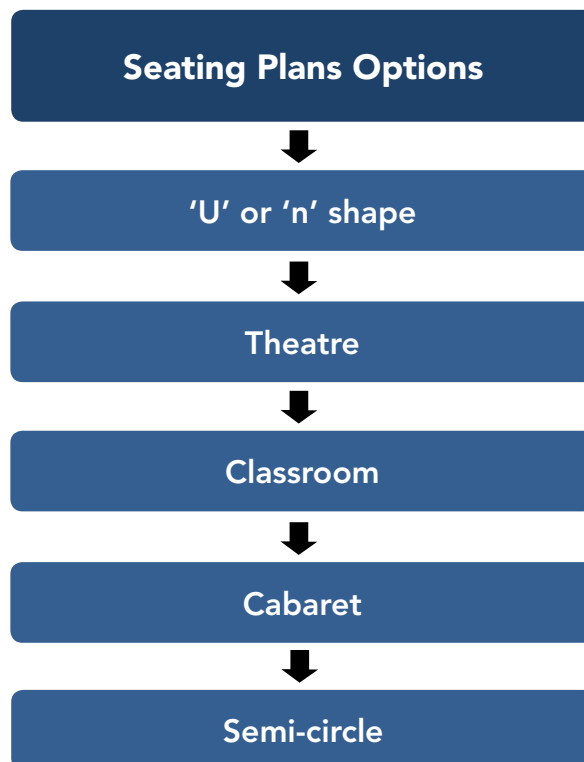
You should pay particular attention to the position where you will present from and the location of any support equipment. By standing in this position you can check the line of sight to your audience.

*Are there any barriers that might prevent your audience seeing you clearly, such as columns or projection equipment? If so, can you alter the position of these obstacles or the seating arrangement?*

If possible practice your delivery style from the podium or stage to familiarize yourself with the surroundings and see how well your voice carries. You can ask a colleague or one of the venue staff to make sure those at the back can hear you clearly. If they can't, practice adjusting your delivery until you can be heard. Remember that your voice will carry less well when the room is full.

The degree to which you can control the room will vary depending on your level of involvement with the organization of the event, when you are speaking, and whether it is a standalone presentation. If you are first to speak after a break or lunch you will be able to ensure the lights and heating are suitable. Even if you follow another speaker don't be afraid to ask for adjustments to be made.

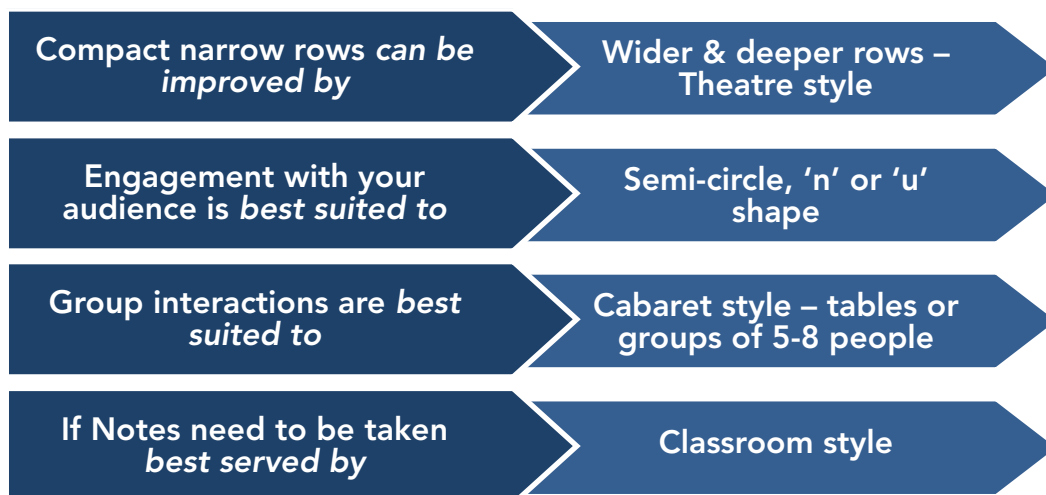
Make sure you have control of the room and remove anything that detracts significantly from your presentation—for example, is it too bright for people to see your slides? Is the room too stuffy? Does the seating arrangement make it difficult for you to make eye contact? Use the time in your 'pre-introduction' to settle the audience and get the room as you want it; your audience will appreciate your consideration and be more attentive.



When considering seating it is important to make sure the audience can be both relaxed and attentive; you don't want them so comfortable they fall asleep. There are a wide variety of seating options: some of the most common are show in the diagram above. For large venues this will largely be fixed, but for smaller venues you will have more discretion.

You need to select the one that give you the best eye contact with your audience and suits the purpose and nature of your presentation. For example, wider and deeper rows in theatre style can offer you better eye contact with your audience. In addition you need to assess how clearly your visual aids can be seen by those at the back of the room or on the periphery.

If you need good acoustics and the ability to engage with your audience then a semi-circle or 'u' shape is the most effective format. It does require more space so be conscious of this when deciding on your room size.



Similarly, if your presentation involves a lot of note taking, or includes workgroup-based interaction, you may want to include tables in the seating plan—but make sure you have easy eye contact. Research has shown that groups of five to eight is the best size to ensure everyone can be included and create the necessary energy within the group.

To avoid everyone sitting at the very back of the room as they enter you can remove the last row of seats so they have to sit closer to the presenter. These surplus seats can then be stacked at the back for latecomers to use and place behind the last row. If you are responsible for setting up the room make sure you consider the following:

- Make sure that you can control the ambient light level to suit your visual aids. You may want to check if there are any curtains or blinds in case you need them.
- Locate and understand the controls for the heating and air conditioning settings to avoid the room becoming stuffy or cold.
- Locate power points and ensure that you have any extension leads and adaptors that you need.
- Ask a colleague to stand at the back to assist you with a sound check and check your visual aids are readable at the back.
- It is important to keep doorways clear at all times and shut to avoid distractions.
- Place refreshments at the rear of the venue to avoid possible distractions.
- If you have handouts decide where you will leave them and whether you are giving them out at the start or end of your presentation. (Organizers will inform you prior to the event of their own procedures in this area.)
- Ensure that the lighting of the stage area is suited to your presentation.

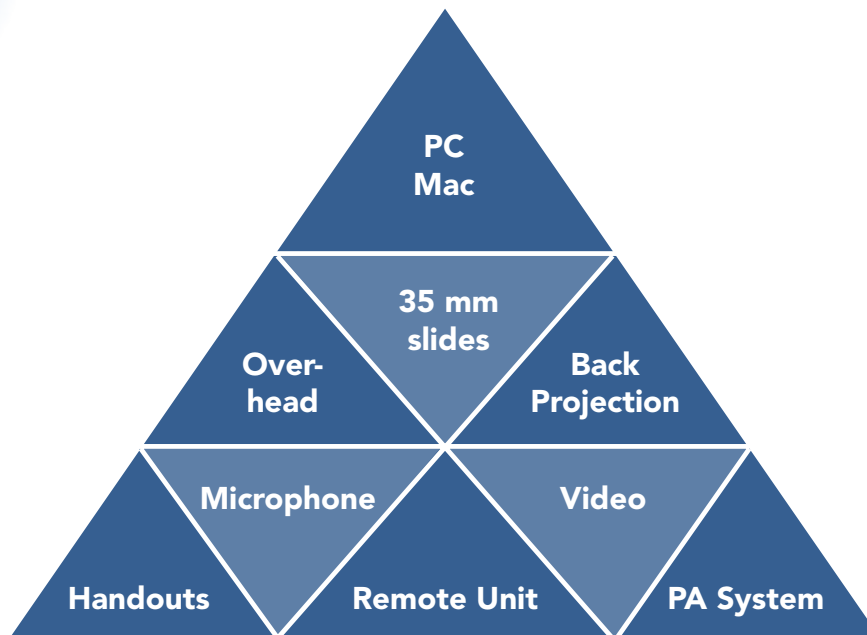
Depending on the size and level of formality of your presentation it may be a good idea to welcome members of your audience as they arrive. If you are present but wait impassively, or are preoccupied, as the audience filters in it can create a cold and standoffish atmosphere that can be difficult to overcome—regardless of how good your presentation is.

### **Facilities**

With any presentation you give make sure that you have checked out what equipment is available for you to use. If you are using a PC or Mac make sure you have a back-up alternative to use in case the technology stops working. This is part of the reason why you need to know all the options a venue has and why you need to make sure that you order for the room all you could need.

Asking whether or not you need an extension lead to use your equipment may seem trivial but isn't if the podium is nowhere near a socket! Make sure to ask the venue if you are allowed to use your own equipment or whether it needs to be certified by the venue.





When you arrive at the venue make sure that any equipment you requested is present and working properly, and that you understand how it operates if it is not something you are already familiar with.

Typical equipment checks:

- A single unfamiliar function or strangely placed button has the potential to stop you when you are in full flow.
- When using a slide show check all slides are present, the right way up, and in the correct sequence.
- Check that you have a spare bulb for the overhead projector and that you know how to replace it on this equipment.
- Put an overhead on the projector to check it is in focus and that the whole of the image can be seen on the screen. Familiarize yourself with adjusting the settings.
- When using a PA system perform a sound check, look to see if your clothing interferes with the microphone, and listen for acoustic feedback. To rectify the latter you may need to adjust the volume and/or the position of the microphone in relation to the PA speakers.

- Record the technical support extension number so that any equipment failure can be remedied as soon as possible.

Place any pointers, pens, remote control units, and other handheld devices where they are easily accessible. Having water or another drink handy is important, so that you can avoid drying-up or having an irritating cough for the remainder of your presentation.

Finally, always ensure you at least have a print-off of your slides so that if all technology fails you have something to aid you as you present. As a last resort you can get the venue to copy this print-off so that your audience can see your visual aids.

### KEY POINTS

- ✓ Make sure that you have access to the room before your presentation so that you can check it meets your requirements and that any technology you need works as it should.
  - ✓ Take control of the venue as early as possible, remove any distractions, and encourage people to occupy seats starting at the front of the room rather than the back.
  - ✓ Always have a back-up plan in case the technology fails and you can't use your visual aids or your time slot is shortened.
-

## Summary

There are three presentation styles that you can use: memorizing the content, reading from a full script, or using free, conversational speech aided by cue cards. Memorizing a full presentation is usually impractical unless it is something that you will deliver regularly, but it can be worth memorizing the introduction as this can give you the opportunity to settle your nerves and get into the flow of speaking to the audience.

Using natural conversational language assisted by pre-prepared cues is almost always the best approach because it encourages the audience to view you as someone who owns this information and is knowledgeable about it.

The effectiveness of your delivery when presenting from cue cards is directly related to the amount of time you devote to preparing and rehearsing. Many people need to make a conscious effort to eradicate verbal mannerisms like aural punctuation, hesitation, or verification. These are not usually apparent in conversation but become obvious when presenting to an audience. Using the video camera on your cell phone to record your rehearsals will help you overcome any annoying mannerisms that you have. Rehearsals also allow you to see if your points are clear when spoken aloud, to perfect your transitions, and to check your timings.

The only way to develop your presentation skills is through continual practice, criticism, and revision. Remember, audiences like knowledgeable, confident, and enthusiastic presenters.

Reading the audience's body language can help you to modify the pace of your delivery to keep as many people on board as possible. It can also help you to gauge who is in agreement with you, who is opposing your point of view, and who has yet to decide.

You need to have a strategy for dealing with unexpected questions. The safest approach is to acknowledge the question saying that there is insufficient time to answer it properly and to promise to deal with it in the Q&A session or after the presentation. Never allow yourself to be drawn into an argument, but don't appear arrogant or unconcerned about issues that other people feel strongly enough about to bring up.

A lack of questions after a presentation can make it look as though no one was really interested in the message, so you should plan for the Q&A session rather than leaving it to

chance. Don't forget that many people who would like to ask a question may not be prepared to speak out first. You can avoid this by getting a colleague to ask a pre-prepared question to get things started.

When you are asked a question, always repeat it to the audience so that everyone has heard it. This gives you the opportunity to check that you have understood it and also gives you time to think about your reply.

It is a good idea to have some standard replies ready to deflect questions that you don't want to answer. This can prevent you from becoming flustered or getting into an argument that you are not prepared for. Remember, a good question and answer session can leave a lasting impression that the presentation was important and relevant, so it is worth putting in the effort to make it successful.

Make sure that you have access to the venue before your presentation so that you can check it meets your requirements and that any technology you need works as it should. Remove any distractions and encourage people to occupy seats starting at the front of the room rather than the back. Always have a back-up plan in case the technology fails and you can't use your visual aids, or if your time slot is shortened.

## Other Free Resources

The Free Management eBooks website offers you over 100 free resources for your own professional development. Our eBooks, Checklists, and Templates are designed to help you with the management issues you face every day. They can be downloaded in PDF, Kindle, ePub, or Doc formats for use on your iPhone, iPad, laptop or desktop.

**eBooks**—Our free management eBooks cover everything from accounting principles to business strategy. Each one has been written to provide you with the practical skills you need to succeed as a management professional.

**Templates**—Most of the day-to-day management tasks you need to do have already been done by others many times in the past. Our management templates will save you from wasting your valuable time re-inventing the wheel.

**Checklists**—When you are working under pressure or doing a task for the first time, it is easy to overlook something or forget to ask a key question. These management checklists will help you to break down complex management tasks into small controllable steps.

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