

Lecture 8 - Presentation skills

Good quality presentations are very important.

You have to know how to keep your audience engaged, how to deliver your content in an appropriate manner and how to ensure that the audience understands your message.

1. **Know your topic:** What is your presentation about? Maybe your lecturer wants you to present your university group project. Maybe your manager wants you to make a presentation on behalf of the team to show the importance of a project and to request further funding for the team. Whatever it is, make sure you know very clearly what the topic of the presentation is and what the purpose is. According to the purpose, you can tailor your presentation to match the requirements.
2. **Research about your audience:** Who will be attending your presentation? Are they technical or non-technical? Are you delivering a presentation to school students, to your work colleagues, to your manager, to your lecturer, to senior company executives, to elderly people from your community? Who is this presentation for? According to the audience, you have to adapt your content. If the audience is non-technical, you obviously have to make the information easy to understand for them. If the audience is heavily technical and you don't use any technical terms, it will probably make them think that you don't know the technical aspect behind the project, and that is why you're not mentioning it, so not using technical terms in this situation would actually be very bad. It is very important to have this information very clear BEFORE you start preparing your presentation. The most challenging part is when the audience varies, so you can have beginners, skilled and very skilled professionals listening to a presentation. In this case, you have to make your presentation so that you cover some basic topics (so that even the beginners understand what your presentation is about), as well as more in-depth and technical terms (so that the skilled and very skilled professionals don't get bored and lose interest in your presentation).
3. **Make engaging slides:** Make sure you don't have much writing on the slides. Try to have photos, diagrams, tables, statistics or other visual ways of delivering the content, instead of having writing on the slides.
4. **Consistency:** keep your slides consistent. Write the titles in the same way, with the same writing size and in the same place on every slide, where possible. Write your name on the footer of the slide, so that if your presentation gets sent around to others, they know who the author is. If it is a team presentation, write the team name in the footer, not just yours.
5. **Timeframe:** Make sure the presentation is not too long, and always keep time for a questions & answers session at the end of the presentation. In this way, the audience will be very engaged - since they are asking the questions, they are obviously interested to hear the answers, so they will listen to you.
6. **Bonus tip!** What can you do if you have 20 minutes for questions time, and nobody is asking questions? Rather than having uncomfortable silence and having to wrap up the presentation early, you can prepare a "back-up plan" for the questions time. Have some content you can present, or some questions that you will address at the end of your presentation, if nobody is asking any questions.
7. **Body language** - make sure you have open body language and that you use your hands to explain different things, but not too much, to become tiring. Don't walk around the room at a fast pace, it

will distract the audience and get them dizzy, instead of focusing on your content. Avoid displaying nervous habits, such as clicking a pen, biting your lips, running your hands through your hair, playing with a piece of paper or your phone, etc. You will come across as nervous and it will show a lack of confidence in your presentation skills.

8. **Professional attire** - make sure you are dressed professionally. If the presentation is not very formal, you can wear a smart casual attire (suit shoes, suit pants, belt in the same colour as the shoes, and a shirt without a tie), but make sure your clothes are clean, ironed, and the colours are appropriate (not brightly coloured shirts, etc)
9. **Intonation, pronunciation, sound:** Adapt your voice, make sure everyone can hear you, even people at the back of the room (if it is a big room), test the microphone beforehand if possible (if you are using a microphone). Make sure you are not too loud either, as it can be unpleasant for some people. If you are making a remote presentation (via Zoom, MS Teams, Skype or other applications), ask people if they can hear you and make sure they can see your screen before you start presenting. Use appropriate intonation, and make sure you highlight certain words using your voice. Pronounce all the words correctly - consider the fact that the majority of your audience might not have English as their first language. Don't speak too fast. Don't use slangs.
10. **Inappropriate jokes:** don't make any jokes that might come across as inappropriate or offensive in any way. There are various other topics that can be unpleasant for the audience. Avoid anything that might come across as sexist, racist, or that targets a particular audience or person. It might be funny for some and they might even laugh, but it might upset others - and that is not what you want people to remember from your presentation.
11. **Rehearse before the presentation:** rehearse the presentation very many times. Most people are very stressed before a presentation. Practice in front of a mirror, you will be much more confident and this will show in your presentation. If you come across as confident, this will make you more engaging for the audience.
12. **Practice:** you can't be perfect from the first attempt. The more you practice, the easier it will become. Deliver presentations every time when you have the chance. The more presentations you deliver the more experience you will gain and the easier it will become.