

MAKE WINNING PRESENTATIONS

Source: Time Management for Dummies by Jeffrey J. Mayer

Get rid of those butterflies

It's perfectly natural for you to feel butterflies in your stomach when you've got to stand up and speak before a group of people, or when you're participating in a discussion with your colleagues and coworkers while you're sitting in the conference room. Many professional athletes, actors, singers, and musicians feel a sense of terror just before they're about to perform, so why shouldn't you? But after they get started, that feeling of terror subsides. If you didn't feel nervous, tense, or apprehensive, you wouldn't be human.

With a little bit of practice, you can get rid of those butterflies in your stomach and use that nervous energy to improve the quality of your presentation. Here are some tips:

- ✔ While you are waiting for your turn to speak, you should use these few moments to "warm up." Think about your opening statements or remarks, and go over your material or notes one more time.
- ✔ If you will be addressing a group of people and are waiting to be introduced, read the first page or two of your presentation to yourself.
- ✔ Remind yourself to display lots of energy and enthusiasm and to smile. Remember that these people are your friends.
- ✔ Use your breathing to calm yourself down. Controlled breathing is a great way to get yourself to relax. Start by inhaling deeply through your nose and then, with pursed lips, slowly blow the air out of your mouth as if you were trying to blow out a dozen candles on a birthday cake in one breath. As you exhale, you'll feel your *diaphragm* — the muscle that brings air into and pushes air out of your lungs — contract and become tighter. The more nervous you feel, the harder you should blow and the tighter you should squeeze your diaphragm. This technique will help you to dissipate a lot of nervous energy.
- ✔ Leave a nickel or a quarter in one of your pockets; if you're feeling stress or tension, you can squeeze the coin.

Warm up your audience

When you are speaking in front of a group of people, try to loosen up your audience, and yourself, before you begin. This gives them a few moments to get settled, and it gives you a chance to burn up some of your nervous energy.

Open with a bang

Plan the opening of your presentation in the same methodical way that you plan the presentation itself. Say thank you to the person who just gave you such a *wonderful and heart-warming* introduction. And if possible, say something that is funny or humorous. This gives the audience a chance to get settled and relax.

Then think about how you can use your opening line to grab your audience's attention and establish rapport with them.

If you've got some special talents, use them. Can you sing? Dance? Draw? Can you tell stories? Can you tell funny stories? The use of humor can be an important part of making an effective presentation. Funny stories that are based on a personal experience or a real-life example can help you to illustrate a key point and make it easier for your audience to remember those key points.

When you're in front of a group of people, just be yourself. Don't try to be something you're not.

Pay close attention to the length of your opening remarks. If your few moments of small talk are too short, then your audience won't be ready for you; and if it's too long, they'll begin to feel you're wasting their time.

The goal of your speech is to try and make them think. Speak intelligently, persuasively, and logically. Remember, the most moving thing in a speech is always the logic.

Speeches are a tool of leadership. Say *big* things — *great* things — and say them with sincerity.

Talk with your body

No matter how well prepared you are when you give your presentation, it is your nonverbal delivery — your physical presence in front of your audience — that ultimately establishes your credibility.

The first thing you should pay attention to is how you look in front of your audience. Here are some tips:

- ✔ Stand up straight, squeeze your shoulder blades together to open your chest, square your shoulders, and pick up your head.
- ✔ For more balance and stability — and a feeling of power — plant your feet firmly on the floor. To do this, spread your feet about an inch wider than your normal stance, bend your knees slightly, and gently rock forward and backward, for just a moment, so that you can feel your heels, feet, and toes come in contact with the floor. This will keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet.
- ✔ When you move, take long, purposeful strides in the direction you want to go, and then plant your feet on the floor again.

Fifty-five percent of your message is communicated through body language, 38 percent through your vocal cords, and only 7 percent through your words.

You've got two hands — use them

Because more than half of your message is conveyed by your body language, be animated and use your hands and facial expressions to help express yourself. Let your audience use their eyes and their ears to experience what you're saying.

Here are some tips:

- ✔ Keep your hands in view. Don't put them in your pockets or behind your back.
- ✔ Let your gestures flow naturally. Speak with your hands and your arms. Practice being more animated with your gestures in front of a mirror so that you can see how other people see you.
- ✔ When you're making points, spread your hand out and count on your fingers so that your audience will know that you're counting for them.
- ✔ To keep from making jingling sounds when you're walking around, remove keys, change, and any other objects from your pockets.

Keep smiling. The warmth of your smile will help to win your audience over.

Keep your body moving

To keep your audience's attention, don't stand in one place or stay behind the lectern or podium for too long. Keep moving. Let your movement coincide with your words. When you become excited and begin to speak more rapidly, move quickly and it'll stir up the audience. When you calm down and begin to speak at a slower rate of speed, lower the tone of your voice and slow down your body movements. It'll keep your audience sitting on the edges of their seats.

- ✔ When you're giving a list of items, say the item, take one step, and stop, and then say the next item and repeat this movement as you're stating your list.
- ✔ When you're making specific points, turn and face a different part of the room — left and right, front and back.
- ✔ When you want to speak intimately, move forward and lower your voice.
- ✔ When you want to speak with more authority, take a step backward and speak more loudly.
- ✔ Talk to all the people in your audience: the people in the front of the room, the people in the back of the room, the people in the middle, and the people who are sitting on the far left and far right.
- ✔ When someone asks a question, walk toward that person.

When answering a question, listen to the question and then repeat it to the audience before you begin to answer it.

Look at your audience

When you're talking to someone, look at him or her. Eye contact is a very important part of defining, developing, and establishing relationships between people. And by looking into another person's eyes, you can often determine how well the two of you are connecting.

When you're speaking in front of a group of people, you want to establish a relationship with each person in the audience. You want them to feel connected to you, befriended by you, and you want them to give you some of their energy, which in turn gives you more confidence.

Try to win everyone over. Let them feel the warmth of your presence and the warmth of your smile.

- ✔ When you're standing in front of a small group of people, scan the room and try to make eye contact with as many individuals as you can, especially those who aren't smiling and nodding their heads in agreement. Select a row and then scan from left to right (not front to back), and when you've looked at everyone in that row, scan the row behind it, from right to left, until you've worked your way through the entire audience. Then you should look at the people sitting in the front of the room and start over. Make all members of your audience feel that you're speaking directly to them.
- ✔ If you're speaking to a large audience, it may not be possible for you to look at each person, so you should make and hold eye contact with various sections of the room following the same pattern of movement. Start at the front of the audience and look from left to right, and then look at the next section of people from right to left, until you've worked your way through the entire audience, and then start over again.
- ✔ For a little variety, you can play some games with yourself as you're making eye contact with your audience. For example, you can look for everyone with big hair, everyone with short hair, or everyone with no hair. Then look for everyone wearing green, or red, or black, and then look at each person who is sitting in the middle of each section. (And if you see people with yellow hair, green hair, orange hair, or purple hair, don't stare at them because you may forget where you are in your presentation.)
- ✔ If you're losing some members of your audience — they're dozing off, appear to be daydreaming, or are talking with their neighbors — you've got to work at bringing them back. Walk towards them, give them more eye contact, and pay more attention to them.

To bring attention to your eyes, use a very light powder around them. To bring attention to your mouth, use Vaseline or a light lip gloss.



Now where was I?

Most people find that it can be quite a challenge to hold their speaker's notes, look at the audience, and keep their place all at the same time. So here are a few thoughts:

- ✔ When you create your outline, only include the key words or phrases. Don't write out your sentences.
- ✔ Make your speaker's notes easy to read. Print them on a sheet of paper or on index cards, using a very large, easy-to-read font, such as Times Roman, 18 point. (You can use presentation software to create your

speaker's notes. I discuss presentation software in the section "Use Pictures, Graphics, and Charts to Enhance Your Presentation." For myself, I just create my speaker's notes in WordPerfect.)

- ✔ Hold your notes with your left hand and, as you speak, slide your thumb downward so that it's always on the next line of your presentation. When you take your eyes away from your notes to look at your audience, just look for your thumb and you'll know exactly where you are in your presentation.



When you're looking into a person's eyes, don't try to look at both eyes at the same time. This causes you to shift your focus from one eye to the other, and the other person can see your eyes darting back and forth. Instead, you should focus on only one of the person's eyes at a time. This will keep your eyes in a fixed position.

Make your voice sound interesting

Most people make decisions based not on what a person says, but on how that person says it. And when you're speaking in front of a group of people, if your delivery is exciting, the presentation becomes exciting and your audience continues to listen. So when you can make the sound of your voice more interesting — by varying the volume, pitch, modulation, and intonation — it's much easier to keep your audience's attention. The next few sections offer some tips on using your voice effectively.

Pay attention to the speed at which you talk

Don't talk too slowly or you'll bore your audience to death; but don't speak too quickly either, or they may not catch everything you're saying. Just try to speak at the same rate of speed that you use when you're talking to a friend on the phone, about 150 to 200 words per minute.

For added emphasis, add silence

When you're giving a presentation, it's very easy to overwhelm your audience with information. You're giving them so many different things to think about that it's almost impossible for them to process it all. One of the ways you can help your audience grasp all the things you're saying is to use silence as a presentation technique.

- ✔ When you want to emphasize a specific point, pause for one beat before and after the word you want to make stand out. (A beat would be about a second in length, like your heartbeat when you're lying down and resting, not your heartbeat while you're standing in front of your audience.)
- ✔ When you want to emphasize the transition from one thought to another, pause for about two beats.

✔ To give your audience a few moments to reflect on the unusual, complex, important, provocative, or evocative statement you just made, pause for about four beats.

✔ When you want to emphasize something dramatically, make your statement and then stop talking. After a few moments the tension will start to build, and when it finally reaches a breaking point, you should commence speaking again.

And to keep your presentation from appearing canned — because you've given it so many times — you should occasionally pause, look toward the ceiling, and rub your chin with your hand, as if you're trying to remember something or you're trying to find just the right word, for three or four beats. This is particularly effective when someone's asking a question that you've answered a thousand times before.

Change your pace frequently

Vary your pace to fit the content or mood of what you're saying. When you're talking about something that's exciting, sound excited and speak a little more quickly. And when you're talking about something that's serious, sound serious and slow things down.

Raise and lower your voice

To keep your audience interested in what you're saying, you should change the volume at which you're speaking. When you get excited, it's okay to speak loudly and more quickly; and when you want to make a very important point, speak softly, or even whisper, and everyone will lean forward as they strain to hear what it is you're saying. When you whisper, everyone listens!

Pronounce all your words clearly and distinctly

Try to pronounce your words — beginning, middle, and end — cleanly and clearly, and keep enough air in your lungs so that you'll be able to end your sentences with power as you put em-PHA-sis on the last syl-LAB-le of the last word. Always try to speak with power and conviction.



Always take a deep breath before you begin to speak. When a person begins speaking in front of a group of people, he or she often gets a rush of adrenaline and then starts talking faster and faster and faster. And like a hundred-car freight train, once you start talking too quickly, it's very difficult to slow yourself down. So always take a breath before you begin a new sentence and a deep breath before you begin a new paragraph. This technique will give you an extra moment to collect your thoughts, in addition to keeping you from talking too quickly. And remember: When your lungs are full of air, your voice sounds deeper and has more power.

Add depth and power to your voice

Here are a few easy and simple exercises that will help you add depth and power to your voice:

- ✔ **Humming down.** To lower the normal pitch of your voice, hum down the scale to the lowest note you can reach and hold it for as long as you can. Do this three or four times a day as you're getting dressed in the morning. Within just a few weeks, you'll find that you're speaking with a deeper voice.
- ✔ **Make your voice more interesting.** To make your voice sound more interesting, practice counting aloud. Start by counting from 1 to 10 and do this over and over again (and then from 1 to 20, and from 1 to 30). As you say the numbers, begin to make each one sound different from the previous number. Say some louder, others softer, some with a higher voice, and others with a lower voice. Try to make each one sound interesting. Do this for a few weeks, and you'll be able to keep your audience members sitting on the edges of their seats while you're reading the telephone directory.
- ✔ **Increase your lung capacity.** When your lungs are empty, they hold about two pints of air; when they're fully inflated, they hold about ten pints — a one-gallon differential — and when you're just sitting around watching television, your lungs contain about five pints of air. The greater the amount of air you have in your lungs, the richer the tone of your voice, the deeper the pitch of your voice, and the more powerful the volume.

Enthusiasm creates energy

Like laughter, enthusiasm is contagious. So let your enthusiasm about your job, career, product, service, or business show in your voice, your gestures, and in your energy level when you're standing in front of an audience. When

it's apparent that you enjoy and are excited about the subject of your presentation, you'll keep your audience interested in the things you're saying.