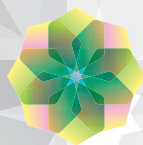


# Guide to public speaking



**TECHNOPORT**  
TALKS

# The YES and NO list for preparing a presentation

Build up your self-confidence by using simple techniques for talking to many people. If you avoid the classic pitfalls, you can hold your audience in the palm of your hand – and many hands will be raised when you ask for questions.

## YES! Know your audience

The fact that you are giving a presentation on your subject in the first place probably means that it is interesting enough to capture the attention of a large audience. But don't take it for granted that everyone has the same approach to the subject as you have. You need to use a hook that catches your audience's attention; architecture students need a different bait from business leaders. One audience may vary from the next, and it may be wise to deal with this at the start; show that you know who you are talking to and explain how you plan to approach the subject you will discuss.

## YES! Speak naturally

If you recite your presentation by rote, you may lose your audience at an early stage. Don't think that you can hide behind PowerPoint animations – they cannot deliver the lecture for you. A speech focused on facts that are read aloud word for word will be about as exciting as a shopping list. Introduce some surprising elements, and feel free to provide comments and examples along the way to make your presentation more interesting. But don't wander away from the point: your main message must be in focus all the time.

## YES! Be a storyteller

It is easy to think that a fascinating subject will automatically spark the curiosity and involvement of the audience. But that isn't the case. You need to make sure that every individual in the audience is with you all the way by captivating them with an exciting story. Think about what aroused your interest in this specific subject, and what keeps it alive for you. Let your own enthusiasm be a vital force that makes you a good storyteller.

## YES! Welcome questions

Take advantage of all the thinking you have generated during your presentation, and use the question session to stimulate discussion. This may be the most interesting part, which does not mean that your presentation was poor – quite the opposite. Answering questions is an art in itself. But instead of dreading the questions, you should practise so that you master this art. Remember that you do not need to have an answer for everything, and that you can skip uninteresting questions to allow more time for the really interesting ones. If you thought it was difficult to manage without a prepared script during your presentation, the question session can give you an opportunity to speak more naturally and get more people involved.

## YES! Respect your audience

If you consider yourself the world's foremost expert in your field, you might be on the wrong track from the start. It is better to assume that the real expert is sitting in the front row. This does not mean that you should be self-effacing in your presentation, but it may pay to have a humble attitude to your audience. They are probably alert and intelligent, and perhaps they have paid money to listen to you. You owe it to them to take your task seriously. Presenting yourself as less intelligent than you are is just as much to your disadvantage as drowning your audience in technical details. Instead, balance your presentation to suit an intelligent listener who is not an expert in your area.

## **NO!** Don't lean on technology

You don't need to use every technique imaginable just because it's there. A slick animated PowerPoint presentation with all kinds of effects may be fun to watch, but your audience may miss the message that you actually wanted to convey. Use images only when it is absolutely necessary, and keep them as simple as possible. Too many pictures, graphs or forms will be more distracting than informative. You – not the PowerPoint – are delivering the presentation. Too much text in the slide takes the focus away from you, and unnecessary information is distracting. Try to find visuals that your audience can recognize, and that illustrate your point without needing detailed explanation.

## **NO!** Don't sell yourself

Giving a presentation is not the same as standing at an exhibition stand. If your focus is on selling yourself and your product, your audience will soon get bored. Focus on the content and presentation, and let your work sell itself. A nuanced perspective on your subject may be an advantage. You can present both benefits and drawbacks before you explain why your version is best. This implies a healthy respect for your audience; they can recognize hidden agendas. Give the content priority over the commercial interests.

## **NO!** Don't be a stand-up comedian

Humour is important, but it is tiring when overused. You need to find a balance between seriousness and humour. In a good presentation, both are intertwined without allowing one to dominate the other. It is disarming and fun to be served some witty comments along the way, but not to be bombarded with jokes that spoil the main message. Try to find a rhythm in which humour alternates with a matter-of-fact approach, and avoid agitated movements around the podium. A focused presentation that keeps to the point will have a more magnetic effect on the audience than restless wandering and large theatrical gestures.

## **NO!** Don't practise in front of the mirror

Too much preparation can spoil a good presentation and be counterproductive. Professional speakers become boring if they are too professional. Practising every aspect down to the smallest detail with strong points, dramatic pauses, facial expressions and movements can make the audience feel that they are watching an actor and not an expert. A more informal attitude will not only make the audience feel more comfortable – it will also make it easier for you to stand at the podium. Leave acting to those who know how to do it, and rather be an honest and dedicated communicator of your work.

## **NO!** Don't be pompous

Taking yourself too seriously is just as boring during your presentation as it is in the bar later in the evening. It is more interesting to offer a human approach to the subject than to bask in the glow of your audience's attention. Mistakes can be just as illuminating as successes, and the audience may be more intrigued than if you present a long series of flawless results. You have already proved something by holding your presentation. You do not need to be impressed with yourself as well.

*Nora Evensen*