

# Ten Top Tips For a Well-Received Presentation Or Briefing

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The first step in the development of a speaker (once they get over the basic hurdle of having enough courage to turn up and have a go) is to learn sound principles for designing and delivering a basic presentation. The following ten tips are based on our combined experience of presenting to all kinds of audiences ourselves, and training hundreds of others to do the same. Think about these ten areas before your next presentation and we are sure you will notice the difference. (We're willing to bet that even highly experienced speakers will find some useful reminders, too).

## 1. Think about a few (*maximum: 3*) key messages

This is where many people who are experts on their subject go wrong – they try and make their talk comprehensive, rather than providing an informative and memorable overview. Leave nuances, exceptions and other sophisticated detail to be covered in handouts, reference materials or in a subsequent one-on-one meeting. Most listeners will not be able to absorb more than a few key ideas. Take a moment to think about what are the *one-to-three* messages that you want the audience to take home. Is there a new development? Are you making a major new offer with a particular advantage to the listener? Is there a crucial process that a team should give priority over and above their other responsibilities? Focus your talk around those key messages.

## 2. Start with planning your call to action

What do you want your audience to *do* as a result of listening to you? What is in it for them to do it? Why is it important to them? What are the consequences if they do, and what if they don't? Start with your goal, and make sure that all the elements of your presentation (your examples, key data, stories etc) are designed to lead in that direction.

And don't miss this trick: if you want the audience to do something, *make it easy* for them (e.g. if you're selling product, have a way of accepting orders and payment on the spot; if you want meetings, have your diary handy; if you want survey responses, give the audience forms and stamped addressed envelopes).

### 3. Think about the context and the format

Is this a large ballroom-style talk or small session in a breakout room? How interactive can you or do you want to be? How much detail do you need to cover?

Don't be constrained into a 'front-to-back' lecture. There may be a much more interactive, engaging and easy-to-deliver format that will work in the context of your talk – think about a "pub quiz", a format taken from a TV game show, or an extended case study or story.

### 4. Technology: help or hindrance?

*At all costs* avoid "Death-by-PowerPoint" (i.e. screen after screen of bullet-pointed lists in tiny fonts, especially with words flying in from the top left etc). When you have checked out the venue and chosen your format, you can think about what will vividly illustrate your talk or help the audience. Pictures are better than words. Some venues have electronic "voting" buttons, you can re-create the "Headlines round" from *Have I Got News For You* (PowerPoint is fine for this), or even have a music round (tricky, but possible!).

Another very effective method is to talk *without notes or visual aids at all* – it works best if you organise your talk around memorable anecdotes, and will make you seem both knowledgeable and approachable – not a bad combination.

### 5. Don't read your talk word for word (unless it's a formal speech)

Written language and spoken language are very different. It's an art to write natural sounding speech, and even novelists and comedians take years to master it. For business presentations, it's much better to organise around brief notes only, and use them merely as prompts – the effect will be much more natural.

### 6. Get some basic voice (and microphone) training if you need it

Good vocal training can quickly and easily make your voice more audible and powerful. Even without training, listen to yourself carefully as you rehearse. Think about your pitch, pace, pause, the note of your voice, the tone and 'colour' as you speak. Practice out loud, even if alone. **DO NOT** rehearse your talk by reading it to yourself 'inside your head'.

A tie microphone is easy to use – you just ignore it – but if you will be using a hand-held mic there is a knack to how you hold it. If you get this wrong the volume of your voice will fluctuate wildly – not very professional. Get someone who knows what they are doing to show you, and get some practice.

## 7. Posture: Stand, or sit, tall

Standing up straight allows you to breathe deeply and builds confidence. It lets you use your voice with more power, and standing with your legs hip-width apart gives you stability and stops you wobbling around. If you are a shuffler, you may feel more comfortable, and come across better, if you sit, perhaps on the edge of a (stable!) desk. If you do sit, don't 'crumple'. Don't stand behind a podium unless it's a very formal occasion.

## 8. Never never apologise

Never? Not quite. Never apologise that people will have to "put up" with you, or that you are standing in for someone. Mostly, never apologise for your subject, saying that it is dull or that you will "grind through" some detailed points. If the content is dry, recognise that as a speaker it's your JOB to make it interesting.

## 9. If you are short on time – rehearse a strong opening and a strong ending

If you don't get as much rehearsal as you want (and who does?) – focus on the first and last minute of your talk. Your opening should be positive, energetic and attention grabbing. Make it clear why the subject matter is important to the audience (for example to avoid a costly problem). Don't try to be "funny" if you are not really comedic, but do be light-hearted in a natural, easy way. Similarly, make your last minute clear, concise and a rallying point for your key messages.

## 10. Keep your energy up – it's showtime!

Self explanatory really: with a good energy level you will perform better and enjoy the experience. And if you enjoy yourself, your audience will enjoy themselves and get more out of the event.

As a result, they will be more likely to approach you for your advice.

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## If you would like to find out more

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Alternatively, you can visit us at [www.bassclusker.com](http://www.bassclusker.com).