Presentation Skills for Corporate Culture

What should I ask about when preparing for the presentation context?
When you’re asked to give a presentation, gather as much information as possible about the context.

- Audience size
- Room layout
- Length of presentation and time of day
- Available technology

What should I know about my audience?
Before you begin creating the content of your presentation, consider who’ll be in your audience. For U.S. business audiences, the following factors may help you better know your audience.

- **Demographics**: What are the audience members’ ages, genders, ethnicities, education levels, cultural backgrounds, income levels? Also consider audience members’ position within the company and relationships to others in the room.
- **Corporate culture**: Corporate values, corporate hierarchy (or lack thereof), and expectations for presentations at this company.
- **Audience attitude**: What do the audience members know about the topic of your presentation? What’s their opinion of it? What’s their opinion of you?

How should I structure my presentation?
The following structure will serve most presentations well.

1. Audience connection
2. Agenda
3. Background (if necessary)
4. 3 key points
5. Wrap-up/Call to action
6. Q&A

What are the most important elements of my delivery?
McKay and Rosa (2000) found that up to 90% of the information in a presentation is conveyed through nonverbal communication. Mehrabian’s (1971) study found that 55% of an audience’s information in a presentation came from facial expression, 38% came from tone, and 7% came from verbal delivery. Some of the most important components include:

- Eye contact
- Confident vocal quality
- Pace of 125-150 words per minute
- Conversational delivery style
- Confident posture
- Purposeful movements and gestures
- Relaxed arms
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What tools can I use in preparing my presentation?
In thinking about your presentation, you can consider a number of tools, each with a very different purpose.

- **Notes**: These are “cheat sheets” for the speaker with highlights, an outline, and key facts and figures. Put them in large font in bullet-point format for easy skimming.
- **Handouts**: You’ll provide these to the audience at the end of your presentation so that they have the information they need to put your ideas to work back at their desks. Occasionally, very complex or text-heavy information can also be provided as a handout.
- **PowerPoint**: Your slides complement your verbal presentation without duplicating it. They provide visual interest and, often, a different way of representing the information you’re talking about (such as in charts, tables, or other images).

What factors should I consider in my visuals?
Remember that your visual aids should be visual aids only—not the text of your presentation. The visuals (slides, a poster, props, etc.) should complement the verbal content, not distract the audience.

- Whenever possible, substitute images for text
- Label charts, tables, and figures for easy interpretation
- Choose strong color contrast: dark text on light background, or light text on dark background
- Choose sans serif fonts in at least 18 point
- Follow the 4 x 6 guideline: a maximum of 4 bullets and 6 words per bullet on each slide
- Keep text near the top of your slide
- For very detailed information, consider using animation to draw attention or use handouts
- Consider using animation to control the visibility of information on your slides
- Maintain consistency for any animations or transitions

Where can I learn more about delivering presentations for corporate culture?
Tisdale’s book provides a thorough guide to business presentations. The Bailey and Schultz books each contain one or more chapters devoted to presentations.


References