Presentation Skills for Corporate Culture

What should I know about my audience before I present?

- Demographic information. Knowing who’s in your audience will guide some of the choices you make about content, pace, background information, and even the examples you use to illustrate your points.
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Ethnicity
  - Education
  - Income level
  - Position within company
  - Relationship with other audience members
- Corporate expectations. These include corporate values (employee-driven, customer-driven, bottom-line-driven, etc.), corporate hierarchy (top-down, bottom-up, etc.), and expectations for presentations.
- Your audience’s level of knowledge about your topic and their attitude toward it and toward you.
- The details of your presentation. How many people will attend? How long should your presentation be? What time of day will you present? How is the room configured? What technology will be available?

How should I organize my presentation content?

1. Audience connection: Get the audience engaged with a surprising fact, interesting twist, or audience participation. You can omit this opening and begin with a direct statement of your presentation’s goals if you already have strong credibility with the audience or if you think that your audience will be receptive to your ideas.
2. Agenda: Tell the audience what you’re going to tell them, in 2-3 points, maximum.
3. Background: Cover any necessary jargon or history before you start.
4. Key points: Deliver your 2-3 main points.
5. Call to action: Share with the audience what you want them to do, think, or know.
6. Q&A: Boldly invite questions from the audience.

What are the most important elements of a successful delivery?

- Eye contact. The audience will be looking at your eyes 63% of the time.
  - U.S. business audiences expect sustained eye contact.
  - Limit looking at your slides or notes. Try printing your notes in 14-point font or larger so they’re easy to glance at. Use outline form, not complete sentences, or you’ll be tempted to read.
  - Scan the audience using an X or Z pattern.
- Vocal quality. The way you say your content may tell your audience more than the content itself.
  - Project confidently, but don’t shout.
  - Aim for a pace of 125-150 words per minute.
  - Use a conversational delivery style to avoid sounding stilted or memorized.
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- Minimize verbal clutter (uh, um, like, you know, etc.).
- Pronounce words correctly.
- Inflect sentences to match their meaning. Use up-inflection for questions but not for statements, for example.

- Gestures and movement.
  - Stand confidently. Hold your head up and shoulders squared back.
  - Relax your arms, but don’t put your hands in your pockets.
  - Use gestures purposefully in a way that feels natural. Consider planning some gestures for key moments.
  - Don’t hide behind barriers like a podium.
  - If it feels natural to walk while speaking, try the presentation two-step.

How can I create successful visuals for my presentation?

- Text. Wherever possible, avoid using text at all. On slides, images speak louder than words. If you must use text, try to follow the guidelines below.
  - Use a sans serif font in a large font size (at least 18 point).
  - Obey the 4x6 rule for bullets (strive for 4 bullets max, 6 words/bullet). If you can’t cut down the text any further, consider breaking it up into two slides.
  - Maintain strong color contrast (light on dark or dark on light, no red/green).
  - Position the most important text near the top of the slide. Audiences perceive information at the top of the slide as most important.
  - If you need to show your audience lots of text (as in a complex table, graph, or organizational chart), consider using a handout instead.
  - Above all, remember that your slides are not your notes.

- Images. Use images whenever you can, as long as they enhance your spoken content (and don’t distract from it).
  - Obey color contrast rules for images that will share space with text.
  - Consider using color for impact vs. black-and-white.
  - Avoid tables unless they’re simple and intuitive to a naïve audience. Try using a chart instead, but label your data points rather than relying on a legend.

- Animation. Use it sparingly and always with a purpose in mind.
  - You can use animation to make text appear on your slides when you must break the 4x6 rule. You can also dim text once it appears to make “visual room” for more additions.
  - You can use animation to direct your audience’s attention and keep them from reading ahead.
  - You can use animation to call attention to particular parts of your slide (like an image, a chart, etc.).
  - If you must use transitions, use them uniformly. Avoid sound.

Recommended Reading