

# Presentation Matters!

Even if you have a great idea, if you can't communicate it to your audience, it will go nowhere. When it comes to presenting, your **voice**, **body language** and **content** are all equally important in engaging your audience and getting your point across. Not your PowerPoint.

Based on studies by psychologist [Albert Mehrabian on the importance of non-verbal and verbal communications](#), findings showed that audiences placed it in this order: 7% Content; 38% Voice; 55% Body language. This is widely known as the 7:38:55 percent rule.

This not to say that content does not matter, but when it comes to presenting it highlights that the other points should be taken into consideration.

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## How can you prepare your **voice**?

Your voice is a very flexible and powerful tool. You can use it in many different ways by varying the volume, pace and pitch. How you express your message can literally be the difference between someone listening to what you have to say or switching off, so it is worth spending some time preparing.

### 1. Warm up your voice before the presentation

Many of us have habits that can block our communication when it comes to public speaking, including hesitation, mumbling, holding our breath, cutting sentences short and flattening our vocal tone. To avoid this, there are several voice exercises you can try out (see our guides on the Presentation Matters page).

### 2. Project your voice to the back of the room and take your time speaking

When delivering the presentation make sure you look up and speak clearly to the back of the room. That will ensure you articulate your words and avoid mumbling.

Make sure that the speed of your delivery is easy to follow. To add life to your presentation, try changing the pace of your delivery. A slightly faster section might convey enthusiasm. A slightly slower one might add emphasis or caution.

### 3. Keep a glass of water to hand

Even the best public speaker can get a dry throat, so keep a glass of water handy. Don't worry if you feel like you need a few seconds to pause and have a drink, it might feel like a long time to you, but it really is not long at all!

## What do we mean by **body language**?

We're talking about your posture, facial expressions and gestures. These are all attributes that contribute to storytelling and engaging an audience. Imagine a great speaker like Martin Luther King, presenting his 'I have a dream' speech from the corner of a room without any movement or eye contact. We just wouldn't know about his dream.

### 1. Walk onto the stage with purpose

Your presentation begins as soon as people can see you, so walk onto the stage with meaning and in the same way you plan to give your presentation. Hopefully this will give you a boost as well.

## 2. Don't be static and move around

Moving around will add energy and variety to your presentation. It will also make you look more confident – because people who are nervous are generally frozen in one spot.

## 3. Imagine you are having a conversation with the audience

People use their arms and hands in every day conversation to add emphasis or to help describe events. Imagine you are having a conversation with a friend, you would not stand with your hands firmly at your sides.

## Content counts!

Humans respond to storytelling, this is historical and how we relay information to each other. We do not list out facts and bullet points. When it comes to structuring your presentation it is important to spend time thinking about the message you want your audience to take away with them and the best way to get that across to that specific audience.

### 1. Know your audience and what you want them to take away

What works for one audience, may not work for another, e.g. academics and policymakers will want to hear about very different information and in very different ways.

However interesting your presentation is, the reality is, the audience will not remember that much of it. Before structuring your presentation, write clearly what your objective is for the presentation in one sentence, and keep referring to that when you are working on it – i.e. Policymakers will understand the importance of XYZ. This will ensure that you keep your audience and message at the forefront of your mind.

### 2. Spend time thinking about the structure and narrative

Grabbing your audience's attention straight away is key (we have included a resource with a suggestion on how you can structure your opening). However, what is also important is the narrative that will carry your audience through the presentation. Obviously you can make a number of different points, but what's the thread? What's the story? Again, it will be helpful to refer to your objective, in deciding what to include and what not to include.

### 3. Avoid death by PowerPoint

People remember images and stories, not lists. This is true in all settings. People will not remember the list of bullet points you shared, but are more likely to remember the image or interesting quote that highlighted the point you want to make.

When it comes to developing your presentation, avoid listing out the points you want to make on the slides, and think about images, videos and other content that will help your story stay in the audience's mind.

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Finally, preparation and rehearsal is key! This goes for all areas - voice, body language and content. It will also help you address any nerves you might have. There are very few of us who can just 'wing it', so practicing and practicing again is pivotal to the success of your presentation.