

Delivery Skills

There is no question about the importance of content. A presentation without good content will always fall flat. However there are many skills that must be applied to bring good content to life.

Even with solid research, subject expertise, good planning and excellent facilities, some presentations fail. If a presenter does not have a confident, enthusiastic delivery style, the audience quickly loses interest and becomes bored.

Research has shown that an audience's opinion of a presentation is based 7% from the presentation content, 38% from voice and 55% from facial expressions and gestures.

Presenters need to use their own personality while focusing on their delivery skills to project the professional and confident style needed to create a successful presentation.

Utilizing an interactive and lively presentation style uses nervous energy in a positive way instead of as an inhibitor.

Delivery skills are comprised of effective eye contact, volume, pacing, tone, body language, word choice, and appearance.

It's important to be aware of not only what you are saying, but also how you are saying it.

Eye Contact

In our culture, we expect good, direct eye contact. In many presentations, speakers look at the walls, floor, their notes, anywhere but at the audience members! We need to look at individuals. Eye contact opens the channel of communication between people.

DO:

- 👍 **Maintain direct eye contact.** Pick out individual people in the audience and maintain direct eye contact for a complete thought, approximately 5 seconds. Then, pick out someone else and say the next thought or sentence to them.
- 👍 **Focus on one person.** Not long enough to make that individual feel uncomfortable, but long enough to pull him or her into your presentation. Then move to another person. This limits the visual stimulus going to your brain from outside sources such as lighting, colors, etc., allowing you to think more clearly.

DON'T:

- 🚫 **Let your eyes dart around the room.** This habit is problematic. You become over stimulated by the overabundance of images. You then become nervous which makes it hard to think. Additionally, when you scan, no one feels seen or drawn into the presentation.
- 🚫 **Speak unless you're eye to eye.** While speaking, avoid looking at the floor, back wall, ceiling, or visual aid equipment.
- 🚫 **Just look at your audience – see them.** *Most speakers look; few speakers see.* Looking at individuals helps relax you by connecting you with an audience member and creating the feeling of being in a one on one dialogue or discussion.
- 🚫 **Try to look at every face in a large audience.** If the group is too large, make eye contact with individuals in different parts of the room. As the distance increases, a larger number of people feel your eye contact.

Voice

The sound of your voice can be a major detractor from the content of your presentation, or it can be one of your most effective tools. The pitch, tone and volume of your voice is crucial for effective delivery.

DO:

- 👍 **Relax your vocal cords.** Uneasiness increases muscle tension which attacks your larynx, and changes the natural sound of your voice. Your audience reads this as a negative; therefore, it detracts from your message. To bring back the natural animation, you must relax and release tension. Upper and lower body movements as well as deep breathing are critical ways to accomplish this.
- 👍 **Vary your pace.** The use of variety within your normal tempo range is a positive way to maintain audience interest. Deliver key words and concepts slowly. Less important material can be covered more quickly.
- 👍 **Examine the pitch of your voice.** Speaking at a natural pitch is helpful to inflection. Be loud enough to be heard well without shouting. Use a range from “enthusiastic” to more conversational tones.
- 👍 **Use inflection for emphasis.** Inflection, the rise and fall of pitch, is important in conveying the relative importance of words within a statement. Use an upward inflection to emphasize key words. Contrast is attention getting.
- 👍 **Use pauses effectively.** Pausing during a presentation can be an effective device to allow your important points to stick in. don't be afraid to allow periods of silence. The audience needs time to digest what you're saying, it's the first time they're hearing this information. Pausing also allows you to breathe, which ensures that your voice stays strong.
- 👍 **Articulate your words clearly.** Each word should be crisp and clear. Clear diction is especially important when speaking with people who might have hearing difficulties, or those who are unfamiliar with the language you will be speaking.

Voice (Continued)

DON'T:

- ☛ **Speak too fast.** When you are nervous, trying to show enthusiasm, or see your time is running out, you may begin to race through material. You know you are talking too fast when you trip over words. The audience may draw the conclusion that you don't know your material or that you're bored with your subject matter.
- ☛ **Speak too slowly.** Long pauses and hesitations negatively broadcast to the audience that you're not prepared, you are avoiding a direct answer, or this isn't your field.
- ☛ **Sound monotone.** Delivery without a variation in speed, pitch and volume creates the dreaded monotone, whose hypnotic effect will put your audience to sleep. Being monotone is one of the easiest ways to lose your audience.
- ☛ **Speak lower than your natural pitch.** In business, sometimes a loud speaking voice is perceived as authoritative.
- ☛ **Speak too softly.** When speaking softly you run the risk of not being heard. The audience will think you are unsure of yourself or you're boring. People will not strain to listen to you. Not only should the audience be able to hear, but you want to make it easy for them to keep listening.

The way you say it can alter what the listener thinks you said.

Body Language

When you prepare for a presentation, you organize your thoughts and prepare your words. When the moment arrives to present, your adrenaline starts pumping and produces extra energy. How can you make this energy enhance your presentation rather than aggravate your nervousness?

Mastering key techniques allows you to channel your nervous energy in a way that brings life to your presentation. Using your body language properly will help your presentation become interesting and engaging.

DO:

- 👉 **Balance your stance.** Keep your weight balanced equally over both feet. Your feet should be approximately shoulder's width apart. Keep your posture erect, but relaxed. You should appear confident, but not arrogant.
- 👉 **Move with a purpose.** Standing in several spots around the room has benefits. Just be sure to move in silence and in-between statements, then stop your feet and resume your balanced stance before speaking again.
- 👉 **Keep your feet pointed toward the audience.** Stand facing the audience. If you need to see the visual behind you, twist at your waist and keep your feet facing the front. Above all, don't speak unless you have eye contact with the audience.
- 👉 **Keep arm gestures above waist.** Arm gestures should be above the waist and away from your body. It may feel awkward at first, however the gestures need to be seen by the entire audience and create a lasting visual impression.
- 👉 **Use meaningful gestures.** Gestures add visual emphasis to your words and help your listeners remember the content. When used in conjunction with inflection, your key points become memorable to your audience. For example, use gestures to illustrate or highlight:

Compare/Contrast	Audience/Self
Increase/Decrease	Bring together/Push apart
Negative/Positive Impact	Build up/Tear down
Match/Opposites	
- 👉 **Return hands to sides between gestures.** This neutral arm position does not distract an audience's attention and results in the gestures you use being remembered.

Body Language (Continued)

DON'T:

- ✱ **Shift or pace.** Avoid shifting your weight from one hip to the other and back again, as well as pacing back and forth. The audience will be distracted by the pattern and focus more on this than on listening.
- ✱ **Lean on equipment.** Tables, lecterns, and equipment are not meant to serve as a crutch for you. Leaning may come across as too casual and unprofessional.
- ✱ **Stand behind the lectern.** This creates a barrier between you and the audience. Instead, move to the side or in front of the lectern to get closer to the audience. Lecterns also inhibit gestures and often lead speakers to read from their notes.
- ✱ **Use repetitive gestures.** By using gestures constantly, your meaningful gestures get lost.
- ✱ **Use confidence-robbing gestures.** The following gestures broadcast to the audience that you are nervous or uncomfortable and detract from your message:

- Hands on hips
- Crossed arms
- Clenching or fiddling with objects (i.e. glasses, markers, notes, pointers, transparencies)
- Pointing with pen
- Hands in pockets
- Hands clasped in front or handcuffed behind back
- Fiddling with hair, tie, jewelry
- Wringing your hands

Word Choice

Word choice itself can portray confidence and openness, as well as uncertainty or intolerance. When preparing your presentation, keep the following points in mind:

DO:

- 👍 **Communicate on a personal level.** Use words that you know your audience understands.
- 👍 **Slow down when using technical words.** Be sure to clearly pronounce words that are difficult or technical. State the meaning of acronyms the first time they are used in the presentation.
- 👍 **Choose confident words and phrases.** Use phrases such as the following:

I'll find out and get back to you
We can solve that
Here's what I can do
We want to work with you

I can explain that
Let me see what I can do
I will be glad to help you
We are here to support your needs

DON'T:

- 🚫 **Use non-words.** Avoid the use of repetitive words or phrases such as “ok”, “now”, “like”, and “you know”. Try to break bad habits such as unconscious long pauses between sentences and using “um” and “uh” while pausing.
- 🚫 **Choose inflammatory or skeptical phrases.** Do not use phrases such as:

You'll have to
You must
It's against our policy
You don't understand
You should

I'll try
Hopefully
Would you mind
If I get a chance
We never