

This guide looks at some of the skills involved in delivering a successful presentation. In order to deliver a good presentation you need to develop (a) effective communication or public-speaking skills and (b) an ability to create striking visual aids on software like Microsoft PowerPoint or Prezi. In this guide, we will consider effective verbal communication skills or public speaking.

Why are presentation skills so important?

Presentations have become a popular method of assessment at university and so it is important to consider how you might improve your presentation skills. Presentations are often used in job interviews as part of the selection process. Therefore it is important to make the most of the opportunities provided by assessed presentations to practise and develop these skills.

Public speaking: key features

Plenty of people find speaking in front of others difficult. Don't worry: this is entirely natural and it shouldn't prevent you from delivering a presentation successfully. An effective public speaker is all of the following:

1. Confident
2. Clear
3. Convincing

Confident

Most people are quite naturally nervous before giving a presentation, particularly if it is assessed or forms part of a job interview process. Try not to be overwhelmed by any anxiety you are feeling. If you are well-prepared and have practised it a few times, you should be able to approach the presentation with confidence. Also, a few nerves before performing your presentation is a good thing because it gives you a bit of energy and keeps you on your toes. The trick is to at least *appear* confident, even if you are very nervous. This isn't easy but will come with experience.

Clear

Speaking clearly forms an important part of successful public speaking. Clarity is achieved through the pace of your delivery, the volume of your voice, and the effectiveness

of the words you use. When you are feeling nervous, it is easy to speak too quickly. If you feel yourself racing through your presentation, take a breath, and consciously slow down. Also consider how loud your voice is and whether you need to speak up or talk at a more conversational volume. This will depend on the venue: in large a lecture theatre, for example, you may need to project your voice further. You might be lucky and find a microphone in the venue. Remember to check if it is on before speaking! Clarity is also achieved by using sentences with a simple structure and everyday vocabulary and expressions. You might need to use technical or subject-specific language at times, but think about whether your audience will fully understand it or whether you might need to explain one or two things.

Convincing

The final feature of successful public speaking is the ability to convince your audience. Whether you are presenting the findings of a research project as part of an assessment on your course or delivering a presentation on a given topic as part of a job interview process, you need to convince your audience that you are an expert in what you are talking about. This feature of successful public speaking is very closely linked to the other two: to be convincing, you need appear confident, and you will only fully convince your audience if you can get across your argument clearly. In order to be convincing you need to prepare your presentation properly. Research the topic thoroughly and think carefully about your argument. Aim to be professional in the way you deliver your presentation.

Summary

1. **Prepare**
Research the topic thoroughly and have a clear idea of your argument.
2. **Practice**
Rehearse your presentation so that you have a clear understanding of its structure and content.
3. **Observe**
Learn from examples of public speaking, which may be found on the news or on the internet.