

Skillbook

Even Better Presentations

Communication
Skills



Mindtools

Even Better Presentations

Skillbook

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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Essential Elements of Effective Presentations	2
3.	Formulating Your Strategy	3
4.	Developing Your Structure	5
5.	Supporting Your Points	10
6.	Delivery Style	12
7.	Preparing for Questions	15
8.	Key Points	18

1. Introduction

As part of your job, do you need to present data? Or deliver ideas that you're not familiar with? Or explain plans? Or generate enthusiasm for your projects and ideas, and defend them against criticism? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then you'll need to have and use good presentation skills.

In the **Great Presentations Skillbook**, we addressed the four key principles of presentations and offered some fictional scenarios in which to apply them.

This Skillbook will help you to give even better presentations. It will introduce the five crucial "S" elements of presentations and provide interactive exercises where you can apply these skills to your own situation.

In around one hour, we'll:

- Help you to identify the best strategy and structure for your presentation.
- Provide specific techniques for improving your presentation style and delivery.
- Give you a detailed checklist for using visual aids.
- Offer techniques for handling difficult questions.

By the end of this Skillbook, you'll have a much better understanding of how to prepare and deliver presentations more effectively.

2. Essential Elements of Effective Presentations

There are five common elements that are central to great presentations. They are:

1. **Strategy** – understanding your audience and its needs.
2. **Structure** – preparing your content.
3. **Support** – backing up your arguments with the appropriate evidence.
4. **Style** – delivering your material confidently and appropriately.
5. **Supplement** – calming your nerves by being well prepared for key questions and arguments.

If you address each of these elements, you'll be in a good position to deliver a memorable and impactful presentation.

Let's explore each in turn.

3. Formulating Your Strategy

It's tempting to begin your preparation by collecting data or writing notes. But first, you need to clarify what you're trying to do in your presentation, and why. Common purposes of presentations include:

- To motivate.
- To inform.
- To persuade.
- To demonstrate.
- To teach.

For example, if the purpose of your presentation is to **motivate** people to change their behavior, then you will need to use persuasive language and a passionate presentation style. However, if your aim is to **inform** your audience, then you might want to include more facts, figures and general information.

To formulate your presentation strategy, start by thinking about the broad subject that you wish to cover. Then, look at your **general** purpose, and what you want to achieve (to persuade, inform, teach, or motivate).

From there, you can develop a **specific** purpose for your presentation, such as the key message that you want audience members to take away.

Think about these questions before you begin:

1. What do you want your audience to learn?
2. What behaviors or attitudes do you want your audience members to adopt following the presentation?
3. How do you want them to feel afterward?
4. What are the next steps, for you and your audience, once the presentation is finished?

When you think about these questions, also consider your audience members:

- Who are they?
- What do they care about?
- How much do they know about the presentation subject matter already?
- How will they use the information that you present to them?
- How do they want information presented to them?
- Will they like or dislike statistics, pictures, quotes, diagrams, or cartoons?
- What's likely to disengage them?

Keep these questions in mind as you work through the rest of your presentation.



Action:

Imagine that you need to give a presentation to persuade people to adopt a certain course of action. Look at the questions on the previous page, and complete the table below.

Presentation Strategy
What's the subject? (aim to write one sentence)
What do you want to achieve? (for example, to motivate, to persuade, to inform, etc.)
What main points do you want your audience to take away?

4. Developing Your Structure

How you organize your presentation affects how well the audience understands and relates to your message. When your message is well organized, your audience will more likely comprehend and retain it. You'll also be seen as a good communicator, which will add to your credibility.

You can choose from a variety of structures for your presentation. However, a very effective one, particularly when you're trying to persuade people to take action, is known as "the sandwich."

With this technique, start with the advantages or positives of your message. Then address the risks or concerns. Finally, reinforce the benefits, by showing how the risks will be managed or eliminated.

Regardless of your structure, always aim to start your presentation at your audience's point of understanding: you don't want to bore them with information that they already know, or baffle them with too much information or complexity. Try to provide occasional background information and clarification during the presentation.

Action:



Using the example that you identified in the previous exercise, create a sandwich structure for your presentation. Write this down in the table on the following page.

Top Layer:	
What are the advantages or benefits for your audience of adopting your point of view? Aim for three key ones.	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Filling:	
Identify the possible risks, disadvantages or areas of difficulty associated with your proposal or idea. Again, aim for three.	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Bottom Layer:
End with the main points of your argument and the steps to take. Aim for three to five points.
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

With a solid plan in place, and an understanding of what your presentation needs to achieve, you can now prepare the introduction and conclusion.

The Introduction

A great presentation will have both a strong initial hook and a powerful ending.

When you prepare your introduction, your goal is to give audience members a preview of what's to come.

This has three key elements:

- Catching their interest.
- Offering them a reason to listen.
- Giving them a “road map” of the presentation.

Your introduction establishes the mood of the presentation, and will stay with the audience throughout the talk. Think about how you can engage people's emotions.

Ideas for creating a strong first impression include:

- Asking a rhetorical question.
- Making a strong, startling or unexpected statement.
- Using a compelling or famous quote.
- Telling a short, humorous story.
- Using an example or illustration.
- Issuing a challenge or appeal to the audience members.
- Requesting a specific action that needs to be taken.
- Referring to a recent incident.
- Revealing to an audience the benefits of listening to your presentation.
- Appealing to different senses - play music, show a short video, or pass around the room something that people can physically touch.

The Conclusion

It's important to end your presentation on a high note. You can do this with a powerful conclusion that summarizes your ideas, and their advantages, one last time.

It can be useful to start with your conclusion when you plan your presentation. When you start with your final message in mind, it's easier to make sure that everything else flows to the natural conclusion.

Highlight or reiterate your key message at the beginning, middle and end of your talk, perhaps using a simple graphic or image. This will help your audience members to retain the central theme of the presentation.

You can use the same methods that you used to create a strong introduction to come up with an equally strong conclusion. For example, it can be very effective to end your presentation with a quote or a funny story.

When you prepare your introduction and conclusion, you rely on people remembering the first and last thing that you say. When you make your beginning and ending strong and impactful, you also make your overall message more memorable.



Action:

Write an introduction and conclusion to your presentation in the table, below. You can write a full paragraph or use bullet points to outline your message.

Introduction:
Style: (question, quote, story, etc.)
Text:
Conclusion
Style: (question, quote, story, etc.)
Text:

5. Supporting Your Points

There are many ways to support the points that you make in your presentation. You can use statistics, examples or testimonies to back up what you say and add credibility to your arguments.

You'll also have a greater impact on your audience if you can provide new and highly relevant information.

Visual Aids

You can use visual aids (such as images and graphs) to support your message and keep listeners engaged. They also increase the audience's ability to process and retain your message.

It's important to remember, though, that visual aids are there to support or improve your presentation, not to get in the way of it.

They need to be simple, clear and have a consistent style. Visual aids should always act as a complement to the presentation, never as a distraction.

Use the following checklist when you prepare your visual aids:

- Can the audience see them easily?
- Are they simple and easy to understand?
- Are they engaging and varied?
- Do the visual aids add to my presentation? Could I do without them?
- Have I overused flashy effects?
- When should I remove an image, to avoid distracting the audience?
- Can I explain the data behind the image or graphic, if asked?
- Can I minimize the distraction of using handouts (distribution, talking, reading)?
- Have I practiced using the aids, and am I comfortable with them?
- Are the aids likely to appeal to my audience members' learning styles?
- Can everybody in the room (or phoning in) see the visual aids clearly?
- Do I have a contingency plan if the aids fail to perform as expected?



Action:

Take a fresh look at a slide show presentation you've previously made, or that you have access to, and critique it:

- What most needs changing?
- What would you do differently next time and why?

Write your answers in the box, below.

Does the presentation pass the visual aids checklist? What elements would you change?

6. Delivery Style

Preparation alone doesn't guarantee a good presentation. You must also practice and prepare **giving** your presentation. This is where your delivery style becomes important.

A really good presenter makes presenting look effortless. However, don't be fooled by this – hours of hard work and practice have gone into every great presentation.

In fact, effective presenters often put as much effort into practicing the delivery as they do into creating the content.

Preparing Your Notes

Here are some pointers that you can use to prepare your speaking notes:

- Start by writing an outline of your key points, referring back to your chosen strategy.
- Copy key words onto note cards to stimulate your memory if you “dry up” when speaking. But never just read your presentation – this almost always looks and sounds awkward.
- Write down direct quotes, statistics and anything else that requires exact wording, in full.
- Highlight points where you'll introduce a visual aid or other external cue.
- Think about your transitions, making sure that you move smoothly from one point to the next.
- Note places where you intend to pause for thought or effect, or to invite questions from audience members.
- Don't apologize for your presentation, either directly or indirectly through your style of delivery. If you've done your preparation, you deserve to be here. If you haven't, you still need to give the best impression possible.

Practicing Your Presentation

Practice presenting with your notes until you are confident that you can deliver without any major fumbles. If you find that you stumble or get tangled up in certain places, try to rewrite those sections until you can speak smoothly and eloquently. Aim for a situation where you don't have to use notes at all, if you can.

When you practice **what** you need to say, you also need to be mindful of **how** you say and present it. Here is a list of things to keep in mind for your delivery:

- Use eye contact. This increases your trustworthiness and credibility. Look at one audience member at a time as the presentation proceeds, shifting your gaze to different parts of the room in a random pattern.
- Consider your posture and your facial expressions. Make sure that you convey the right attitude.
- If you need to use a podium, try not to stand directly behind it, as you want the audience to see your gestures. Come out and stand next to it now and again.
- Use the physical space available to you and move around, changing your position in the room if you can.
- Be animated and conversational (unless it's a highly formal setting, where a written speech may be more appropriate).
- Use relaxed and fluid physical gestures.
- Vary your tone of voice and inflection to emphasize a point, or to indicate a change in topic.
- Eliminate distracting behaviors, such as jiggling your keys or adjusting your glasses.
- Remove distracting items (such as mugs or wastebaskets) from the audience's view.





Action:

A good way to become comfortable presenting is to slowly build toward talking to a large group. Start small, even just contributing to a meeting. Then, consider giving a lunchtime talk – this could be anything from what you learned on a recent course to what you did on your last vacation.

Then, consider co-hosting a company webinar or joining the team on an exhibition stand. Note down any opportunities to talk in the box below.

Write down three occasions where you could practice speaking to an audience.

1.

2.

3.

7. Preparing for Questions

When it comes to questions, you must be prepared to interact with your audience. You need to be able to answer people's queries, and address their concerns quickly and intelligently.

The best way to do this is to try to predict the issues that are likely to be raised. This will give you time to prepare for them.

When compiling your presentation, think about possible counter-arguments and challenges to your position, and then practice your responses.

A vital part of the communication process is reacting to other people's perspectives. Here are some tips to help you to anticipate your audience's questions:

- Research the information around your presentation thoroughly.
- Ask yourself, "What's the flip side to this statement or argument?"
- Ask colleagues to review your material carefully and give you feedback.
- Practice your responses to each piece of counter-evidence.
- Be ready for a questioner who may have a personal agenda.

Action:



Using your example, identify two or three counter-arguments or comments that you should be prepared for in the spaces provided on the following page. Then address each one with a supporting piece of information.

Argument:
Response:
Argument:
Response:
Argument:
Response:

If an audience member challenges you during your presentation, it can be helpful to keep the following tips in mind:

- Restate the objection or question. This gives you time to think, and also makes sure that everyone else hears what was said.
- State your position directly, clearly and concisely, but make sure that you also acknowledge the other person's position.
- Offer support for your position, and provide evidence of its validity.
- Keep in mind the time you have available, and try to balance the needs of the audience with the demands of specific individuals.
- If you are asked a complicated question, maybe offer to answer it after the presentation, either via a quick meeting or a conference call.
- Handle hostile questioners politely, but also with honesty and directness.
- Keep exchanges objective and factual. Don't take it personally or get involved in a wider issue during the presentation. Although it is good to bring a personal perspective to your presentation, keep your response relevant to the wider audience.

8. Key Points

The ability to plan and deliver an effective presentation is a critical skill in today's workplace. When you can communicate your message, position and views in this way, it helps you to motivate, inform and persuade others.

When preparing your presentation, keep in mind the “5 S” structure:

1. **Strategy:** clarify what you're trying to do, who you are addressing, and what your key takeaways will be. This will help you to prepare your presentation.
2. **Structure:** use “the sandwich” technique to aid audience comprehension. Plan a powerful introduction and conclude on a high note. This will make your message clear.
3. **Support:** use statistics and examples to support your point. Utilize visual aids to illustrate these points. This will increase your audience's ability to process and retain your message.
4. **Style:** after you've prepared, it's time to practice. Consider the most appropriate way to give your presentation. Then, work on your delivery, and, most importantly, practice! This will help to sell your presentation.
5. **Supplement:** be prepared to interact with your audience, particularly when questions are asked. Consider which issues are likely to be raised and prepare your responses in advance. This will stop your presentation from being undermined by criticism.

By keeping these five elements in mind, you'll be able to produce powerful, persuasive presentations that can win over any audience.