Delivering your presentation

# Introduction

You’ve done all the hard work in planning your presentation and designing your slides, now it’s time to deliver it.

Presenting in front of an audience can be intimidating, but it doesn’t need to be.

This resource will **explore what makes a good presenter**. It will help you to **identify what your own barriers** to confident presenting are and **give you some tips** on how you can overcome them to enable you to deliver presentations that will make your audience sit up and take notice.

# Critiquing delivery

The first step to delivering an effective presentation is to be able to recognize what one looks like. Here is our feedback on four presentations. What feedback do you think is the most important and what would you recommend each speaker do to improve?

## Presentation 1: Women in STEM

* Simone has clearly practised and knows her presentation very well.
* The slides are really clear with lots of white space making sure the audience aren’t overloaded with information.
* There are times when Simone stumbles over her words a little. Slowing down and making sure to pause will help reduce this, as well as giving the audience time to reflect on what has just been said.

## Presentation 2: Widening Participation

* Ros is reading directly from a script. There are no visual aids to distract from this.
* Ros has an excellent pitch and pace, and pauses well.
* Later in the presentation, Ros is only using the script as a cue card reminder. This enables her to maintain more eye contact with her audience, and use her hands to get her passion for the topic across.

## Presentation 3: Job Interview

* Jody uses a lot of verbal fillers such as “errr”. Further practice would help minimise this.
* Jody faces the screen a lot rather than looking at his audience.
* Jody moves around to direct us to the parts of the slides he is describing.
* At times Jody stands in front of the slides, blocking what he is describing.
* Jody seems confident with the equipment he is using to present on.
* Jody doesn’t invite his audience to ask questions, but when they do, he does seem prepared with well thought-out answers.

## Presentation 4: Applying for jobs

* Ammala maintains really good eye contact with her audience.
* Ammala uses a presentation remote instead of clicking a mouse or hitting the space bar on the keyboard to move her slides along. This means she isn’t distracted by her slides, which are a visual aid for her audience.
* Ammala gets through a lot of information in the presentation. However, pausing more and taking time to explain the key points will help the audience to understand and remember more of it.

# Critiquing yourself

Now that you’ve got a good idea of what you look for, it’s time to review your own performance.

As painful as it may sound, we recommend that you video yourself practising your presentation. You can then watch it back and critique your own performance as you just did with our exampel presenters.

Nobody likes watching or hearing themselves on video, but by doing this you’ll be able to pick up on things that you’ll never notice while you’re actually presenting (and nobody else will ever have to see it!)

[Download a feedback sheet template](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/handouts/presentation-feedback-template.docx).

## Common elements of poor delivery

You should now have a good idea of your own barriers to confident delivery of your presentations. Select those that you identify with most from the list on the right.

Then click ‘next’ to learn about some techniques you can try to overcome these barriers.

### **I get very nervous**

If you know that you tend to get nervous, make a plan to handle your nerves in a way that suits you best.

Think about the reasons for your nerves: what do you see going wrong, and what can you do to prevent that happening?

The most important thing you can do is practice as much as possible. Deliver it to friends first if you can and ask for their feedback on how you can improve.

### **I struggle to deal with questions**

You should always invite and expect questions.

You can minimize questions not relevant to your presentation by making your objectives clear at the beginning. You should also let your audience know whether you want them to hold all questions until the end or ask throughout your presentation.

If you’re anticipating difficult questions, think beforehand wabout what these might be beforehand and prepare some answers.

If you don’t know the answer to a question, be honest! Thank the audience member for the questions and advise them you will need to look into it and get back to them.

Remember: questions aren’t bad; they show your audience is interested and listening!

### **I don’t make enough eye contact**

Making eye contact with your audience is a must; it shows you are interested in talking to them, and helps to get them on board with your message.

Talk to members of your audience just before the presetnation if you can; once you’ve been introduced to someone you’ll find it easier to make eye contact with them. If there are people in the audience you arleady know, that’s a bonus!

You should aim to make contact with one person for a couple of seconds at a time before moving on to someone else; anything longer will feel uncomfortable for both of you!

Remember: keep an eye out for anyone smiling and/or nodding; think of these people as your friendly faces! They will always be the easiest to make eye contact with.

### **I forget what I am saying**

Ever heard the saying “Fail to prepare...prepare to fail”? Remembering what you’re saying is all about practice. As soon as you are given the task of presenting, work out your plan of action. It will include things like:

* Deciding what I will cover
* What structure/flow will I follow
* Designing the slides/visual aids
* Practising! As much as you can, to as many people as you can
* If you do all this, you should know you presentation inside out

### **I don’t face the audience**

It can be tempting to turn slightly away from your audience, whether to look at your slides or just to hide your nerves. This gives your audience a bad impression; it will prevent you from connecting with them, and they may also struggle to hear you clearly.

If you find yourself doing this, try moving around and making natural hand gestures. Having cue-cards (not a script!) can help you to resist the temptation to keep looking back at your slides.

Remember: Having a prop such as a lectern can force you to face forward, but it may also force you to stand still, which could make you more nervous. Decide where and how you’re going to stand before you start!

### **I rely too much on my script or slides**

This comes back to being prepared and having well-designed slides! See planning presentations and designing presentations resources.

If your slides are designed well, they will be a nice visual that complement the story you are telling rather than merely repeating it! Reading from slides is never a good idea; remember that your audience can read faster than you can talk.

Cue cards can eb a helpful prop in case you need to quickly remind yourself where you’re up to, but these should be simply a few key words or sentences. Avoid using a full script at all costs!

Remember: if you still need your script, you haven’t practised enough.

### **I talk too quickly or quietly, or don’t pause**

All of these things are usually always down to nerves and an eagerness to ‘get it over with’. You will improve with practice! In the meantime there are some simple things you can do to help.

Look at your cue cards to identify where your key points are; write yourself a note to pause there for 2-3 seconds. Pausing adds natural emphasis to your words, and gives your audience time to digest the information.

To avoid talking too fast, you’ll need to make a conscious effort to eb calm. Before you begin, take a few slow, deep breaths; talk too fast is linked to your adrenaline levels, and breathing exercise will force you to slow down.

Practise projecting your voice if you’re naturally a quiet talker. You want the person at the back of the room to be able to hear you clearly.

### **My hand gestures are overly animated**

We naturally use our hands to gesture and add emphasis to what we are saying.

It’s common to over-animate your hands when you’re rushing, nervous, or excited. Usually by making a conscious effort to slow down your hands will follow.

Having natural hand gestures is good! It’s much better than having them in your pockets or holding them rigidly by your sides. If you’re self-conscious, you could try holding cue cards to give your hands something to do.

### **I look stiff and awkward**

A lot of yoru impact as a presenter comes from your body language. If you look confident, your aduience will assume that you know what you’re talking about!

Stiff or awkward body language such as standing still with your hands in your pockets or holding A4 sheet notes does not proeject confidence to your audience. It tells them you are unsure of yourself and you possibly don’t agree or believe what you are saying.

You should get comfortable moving around. Try taking a couple of steps every few minutes and use hand gestures to emphasise your key points. And whatever you do, be sure to avoid having your hands in your pockets.

It may not come naturally at first, you will get better with practice!

# Summary

We’ve looked at what it takes to deliver an effective presentation, and you should have some tips to help you improve on any particular areas of concern. Now it’s all about practise! It’s also helpful to see as many examples of good presentation as you can. Watch some videos online and think about what it is that makes them effective, and how you can implement some of the good practice in your own presentations.

[TED](https://www.ted.come/talks) talks are a great place to start.