

Focus, confidence and the art of the successful presentation

 By [John Cooney](#)

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For young people embarking on a career in advertising or marketing, few skills are as important as good presentation skills.

Whether your career path is as a creative or a suit or a salesperson, the ability to deliver a persuasive and compelling presentation will help you get to the top.

We find that many of our students find the idea of presenting to be intimidating, whether it is an informal talk to some colleagues at work or a speech at an industry conference. But with a bit of confidence and these sensible tips, anyone can put together an engaging presentation.

1. Presentations are about persuasion, not showboating

Your presentation is about winning an audience over to your point of view, whether you're pitching for an account, trying to convince your bosses to sign off a new strategy or expressing an opinion to an audience at a conference.

Showing off to impress will alienate your audience rather than winning it over - so be relatable, compelling, and confident without being arrogant or boastful.

2. Logic is your tool of choice

A good presentation will engage the audience's hearts and minds. Put forward a structured and rational argument that can be interrogated and supported by logic to make your case successfully.

3. Keep it simple and straightforward

Your rational argument should be one that can be summed up in a couple of sentences. Even complex matters can be spoken about with clarity and precision if you keep focused on one theme.

If your argument is getting convoluted and complicated, look at where you can trim content to ensure simplicity.

4. Don't run ahead of your audience

Novice presenters often have so much to say that they feel they must rush through their presentation to make sure they get everything across. But rather take your time and make sure your audience can keep up, even if that means you'll cover less in your talk.

It is better to leave your audience with one or two messages that stay with them than to throw out a lot of information they will not be able to digest or remember after your presentation.

5. Relate to your audience in their terms

In communications in any medium, one of the foundational rules is to know your audience. You must tailor your content, your delivery style, the way you dress and so on to the people you are speaking to.

Use analogies they'll understand and relate to, talk to their level of understanding of your topic, and know what they will want

to get from your presentation.

6. Smile

Start with a big smile and you'll get the audience on your side straight away. Projecting warmth, enthusiasm and interest to the people you speak to will inspire these same emotions in them.

7. But don't try to be a comedian

Don't open with a joke because your entire presentation will be uncomfortable if your attempt at humour falls flat or, worse still, offends someone.

Humour should be used sparingly since it is so hard to be funny and because humour is so subjective.

8. Don't bury the intro

Learn from journalists: put your strongest and most important points right up front in your introduction. If your audience remembers nothing else, make sure they remember your opening statement.

9. The audience is on your side

Remember that most people will have empathy and interest for someone standing up in front of a crowd to talk. Relax and enjoy your audience's goodwill.

10. Keep summing up your main points

Winston Churchill, one of the world's great orators, said: "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you've told them."

That's still great advice today - subtle repetition makes content memorable.

And a good talk's conclusion should, with hindsight, seem inevitable when thinking back on its opening. Your audience should leave the auditorium or boardroom knowing where you started, where you went and where you ended.

ABOUT JOHN COONEY

Cooney's experience encompasses client service, agency and media management experience at some of South Africa's leading advertising agencies, including Ogilvy & Mather, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, Bates and Sonnenberg Murphy Leo Burnett. Cooney was schooled in Natal, has a Science Degree from UCT and studied Advertising & Marketing at Unisa. He has over 40 years of work experience, initially in finance and sales and then, for most of his working life, in the advertising, marketing and media industries.

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