

Presentations

Taking the stress out of presentations

Presentations

Being asked to present is an integral part of the recruitment process, but it can be a daunting prospect. Our step-by-step guide will help you put together a coherent presentation to show prospective employers exactly why you're the right person for the job.

If you're at an assessment centre you may be asked to prepare a short talk, usually between 10 – 15 minutes, and present it in front of the other candidates and/or the selectors. The selectors are looking to see how you assimilate information, whether you can communicate effectively and how you cope under pressure.

The presentation may be on a specific topic given to you either on the day (with a short time to prepare) or prior to the day (in which case you will be given a brief in advance). If you know that you will be required to give a presentation but no specific subject/topic has been given, it may be worth having a topic of your choice worked up into a presentation framework beforehand.

The presentation framework has four basic factors that affect the overall impression you make on your audience: These factors are:

- Structure and content
- Delivery
- Visual aids
- Handling of questions

We'll be covering all of these areas in the following sections:

Getting started

Ask yourself:

- What is the aim of my talk?
- What are the key points I want to communicate?
- How much time do I have?
- Who is my audience?
- How much will they know about my topic?
- What resources do I have available – for example, will I be able to use PowerPoint or a flip chart?

Find out as much as you can beforehand. Don't be afraid to ask.

Structure and content

Your presentation should have a logical structure - an introduction or outline, a main theme and a conclusion. Make sure you have researched and understood your topic and that it is at an appropriate level to your audience.

Introduction – briefly introduce your presentation. Give your name and the subject of your presentation. Outline the content and whether and at what stage you are willing to take questions.

Theme – this should develop logically. Make distinct points - not more than about five points in a 15 minute presentation. When moving on to a new point the transition should be clear. Use examples to illustrate what you are saying. Involve the audience if appropriate.

Conclusion – summarise your main points. It is important that you finish the presentation clearly – use a concluding sentence or two.

Delivery

No matter how good the structure of your presentation, the way in which you put it across is of key importance.

- Stand where the audience can see you and your visual aids
- Try to relax, smile and be positive. Avoid fidgeting or fiddling with hair, clothing or jewellery
- Look at your audience. Make eye contact with them in a friendly way. Take in all the audience as you speak
- Rehearse. Practise in front of a friend or a mirror. It won't make you perfect but it will build your confidence and help you with your timing
- Know your presentation well enough to be able to use prompt cards
- Do not read your presentation - the audience can do that for themselves and it can sound very wooden
- Speak clearly and loudly enough so that everyone can hear
- Slow your speech down - there's a tendency to speak more rapidly when nervous
- Use pauses to allow yourself time to gather your thoughts and for the audience to catch up
- Use language appropriate to your audience – avoid being too technical or patronising
- Be careful about telling jokes – not everyone may appreciate your sense of humour
- Stick to the time limit
- End your presentation with a closing message that you want the audience to remember

Visual aids

Find out what resources are available to you. If there's a choice, use what you're most comfortable with.

- Make sure you know how to set up, switch on and operate any equipment
- If you use PowerPoint think what you will do if there is a technical problem. Bring a copy on a USB in case of networking issues and have a few hard copies of the slides as a useful backup
- Remember that the visual aid should be used to support the spoken presentation, illustrating and highlighting points as necessary
- Consider providing a handout - is it strictly necessary? When to distribute it - before or after? Tell the audience if you are providing a handout or not. Handouts will reinforce your messages

You're likely to be using PowerPoint for your presentation, so here are a few points to help you make the best impression on selectors:

- Keep text and slides simple - not too many colours, different fonts, sizes, etc
- Make sure they are clear, and that text is large enough to be read by the audience
- Keep transitions between slides simple - too much animation and over dramatic slide changes can be off putting and detract from what you're saying
- Proof read carefully
- Practise whilst using your slides - try not to look at the slides whilst presenting as you don't want to turn your back on your audience
- Do not read your slides to your audience – your speech should provide additional information to support your slides

Handling questions

- Let your audience know at the beginning of your presentation when you will take questions – during it or at the end
- Try to anticipate and prepare for any likely questions
- Ensure that you fully understand the question – ask for clarification if necessary
- Answer clearly and concisely
- If you don't know the answer it is safer to say so than try to bluff your way through

Remember – many people are nervous before giving a presentation. Your audience will understand that and make allowance for the occasional stumble over your words. Don't worry – keep going.

If you follow these tips, you'll have a well-structured and informative presentation. You'll benefit by being calmer and more confident, which will enable the selectors to see your true potential.