

Presentation Skills: Keeping Your Audience Engaged

Brought to you by Assemble You.

Today, we're discussing a particularly important aspect of presenting: how to retain the attention of your listeners.

Whether you're presenting to a room full of colleagues, a small team, or a virtual audience, keeping people engaged is key to ensuring your message is heard and remembered.

We'll explore how to use your voice effectively, project confidence, handle nerves, and convey your message with clarity and impact.

By the end of this lesson, you'll understand the key techniques for maintaining audience engagement through your delivery, body language, and presence. You'll come away with the knowledge you need to captivate your audience and ensure your message makes an impact.

Engaging Delivery Voice

First, let's talk about your voice.

Your voice is one of the most powerful tools you have when presenting. According to Chris Anderson, curator of TED (making him THE expert in presentation best practices), the way you deliver your message is just as important as the content itself [1]. Your tone, pitch, and pace can either captivate your audience or send them to sleep.

To keep your audience engaged, vary your tone. Avoid a monotone delivery by emphasising key points, asking rhetorical questions, or simply pausing to let important information sink in.

This variation helps to maintain interest and signals to your audience that what you're saying is important.

Another tip is to match your energy to the content.

If you're passionate about the topic, let that enthusiasm come through.

But remember, it's not just about being loud; it's about being dynamic. Slow down for serious points and speed up slightly when you want to convey excitement.

This contrast helps to hold the attention of your audience.

Body Language and Presence

Next up is body language. How you move and present yourself physically can significantly impact how your audience perceives you and your message.

Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist known for her work on power poses, suggests that confident body language can actually make you **feel** more confident—something that's vital for keeping an audience engaged [2].

Stand tall, with your shoulders back and head up.

This posture not only makes you look confident but also helps you breathe better, supporting a strong, clear voice.

Use your hands to emphasise points, but avoid overdoing it. Gestures should be natural and complement your words. Too much movement can be distracting.

Eye contact is also super important, so do everything in your power not to read your slides and look up at the audience instead.

This helps you connect with your audience and makes them feel involved.

If you're presenting to a large group, try to make eye contact with different people around the room, or if you're doing it remotely, look directly into the camera.

Confidence and Dealing With Nerves

Confidence is key, but it's natural to feel nervous before a presentation. According to Sarah Gershman, the fear of public speaking is common but can be managed with the right techniques [3].

One of the most effective ways to build confidence is through preparation and practise.

The more familiar you are with your material, the less likely you are to get flustered if something goes off script.

Rehearse your presentation multiple times, ideally in front of someone who can give you feedback. If no one's around, consider practising in front of a mirror or even recording yourself so you can review your performance later.

When it comes to nerves, focus on your breathing. Deep, steady breaths help to calm your mind and body.

Also, try to reframe your nervousness as excitement.

According to Harvard professor Alison Wood Brooks, telling yourself "I'm excited" rather than "I'm nervous" can shift your mindset and improve your performance [4].

Conveying Your Message

Finally, let's talk about conveying your message.

At the core of any great presentation is a clear, compelling message. It's super important to structure your presentation around a central narrative – something your audience can easily follow and remember [5].

Start with a strong opening that grabs attention. This could be a surprising fact, a question, or a powerful story.

From there, make sure each part of your presentation logically follows the next, building towards a clear conclusion.

Keep your language simple and avoid jargon unless you're sure your audience is familiar with it. If you need to use complex terms, take a moment to explain them.

Remember, it's not about showing how much you know – it's about making sure your audience understands.

A Story of Success

Now, let me share a story about an employee who developed these skills and saw remarkable growth in his career.

Davide was great at his job, but he really struggled when it came to public speaking. His presentations were often met with blank stares, and he felt his ideas weren't getting the recognition they deserved.

Davide decided to work on his presentation skills.

He started by focusing on his delivery voice, practising variations in tone and pace to make his presentations more engaging.

He paid attention to his body language, ensuring he stood confidently and used gestures that supported his message.

Davide also worked on maintaining eye contact with his audience, which helped him feel more connected and less nervous.

Copyright © 2024 Assemble You. All rights reserved.

Over time, Davide noticed a change. His colleagues were more engaged during his presentations, asking questions and giving positive feedback.

His ideas were being noticed, and he was even asked to present at a company-wide event.

By working hard to develop these skills, Davide didn't just become a better presenter; he became a more influential leader within his company.

To wrap things up, let's summarise the key ideas.

Keeping your audience engaged during a presentation is all about how you deliver your content.

By using a varied and engaging voice, confident body language, and a clear, compelling message, you can hold your audience's attention from start to finish.

Remember to practise, manage your nerves, and stay authentic to who you are as a speaker.

So now, as you prepare for your next presentation, focus on one area we discussed today – whether it's your delivery voice, body language, or message clarity.

Practise in front of a mirror or record yourself to identify areas for improvement.

And most importantly, remember that every presentation is an opportunity to connect with your audience and share something valuable.

Keep practising, keep refining, and most importantly, keep presenting.

[1] *How to Give a Killer Presentation*, Chris Anderson, HBR (2013)
<https://hbr.org/2013/06/how-to-give-a-killer-presentation>

[2] *Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are*, Amy Cuddy, TED (2012)
https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are

[3] *To Overcome Your Fear of Public Speaking, Stop Thinking About Yourself*, Sarah Gershman, HBR (2019)
<https://hbr.org/2019/09/to-overcome-your-fear-of-public-speaking-stop-thinking-about-yourself>

[4] *Get Excited: Reappraising Pre-Performance Anxiety as Excitement*, Alison Wood Brooks, American Psychological Association (2014)
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/xge-a0035325.pdf>

[5] *Author Talks: Am I Making Myself Clear?* McKinsey & Company (2023)
<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-on-books/author-talks-am-i-making-myself-clear>

Copyright © 2024 Assemble You. All rights reserved.