

# **How to Give a Successful Presentation in 7 Easy Steps**

**By Jenny Lynn**



## Contents

	<b>Page No:</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Know Your subject</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Exercise 1	6
<b>2. Organise your Talk</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 What is the goal or purpose of your presentation?	7
2.2 Who is your audience?	7
2.3 Call on your "Six Honest Serving Men" to help write it	7
2.4 Argue towards your conclusion	8
2.5 Get Your Materials Together	9
2.6 Power Point	9

2.7 Are you using Handouts?	10	
2.8 Flip Chart and Pen	11	
<b>3. Managing Your Audience</b>		<b>13</b>
3.1 Engage your Audience	13	
3.2 Do not pitch yourself as too high an authority	14	
3.3 Make Eye Contact	14	
3.4 Listen to your Audience	15	
3.5 Rolling your Sleeves Up!	16	
3.6 Greeting your Audience	16	
3.7 Using Common Experience	17	
3.8 Pace, Pace Lead – a Lesson from NLP	17	
<b>4. Pre-Presentation Self Talk</b>		<b>19</b>
4.1 What is the Point of Worry?	19	
4.2 Learning from your mistakes	21	
4.3 Don't Blag!	22	
4.4 Look Beyond your Presentation	22	
<b>5. Relaxation and Breath Control</b>		<b>24</b>
5.1 Breathing Exercises		24
5.2 Visualise		25
<b>6. Learning to Value Feedback</b>		<b>26</b>
6.1 Designing a Feedback Form		27
<b>7. Wear the Appropriate Dress</b>		<b>28</b>
7.1 For the Ladies		28
7.2 For the men		28
<b>8. In summary</b>		<b>30</b>

## INTRODUCTION

I have been giving presentations, classes, talks and training sessions for such a long time, I'd almost forgotten how I built up my confidence to give them. Nowadays I can talk for an hour or more to a room of several hundred people over a microphone about my favourite subject with relative ease. It was only when a client came in last week at the end of her sessions with me quite recovered from whatever she had come with who suddenly announced that she had a fear of giving presentations. It wasn't a huge deal, in other words, she wasn't phobic. It was just a huge challenge every time she did it. So I pulled out a few hints and tips and some wisdom I'd picked up over the years and gave her the information as part of her last session.

I reflected after working with her on what I remembered of the first times I gave a class of Spanish to adults around about 1991-92. It was a weekly trial. I prepped endlessly for these classes. I delivered them with absolute conviction and then agonised about it for days afterwards. How I got through those 10 weeks I don't know. But like a moth to the flame, I decided to go into teaching which is what I went on to train for the following year.

Over the years I have taught languages in business, at university, in schools and primary schools and latterly with my self development hat on, given talks to crowded lecture theatres and public speaking engagements, including NHS nurses, doctors, as well as business people and smaller engagements with various interest groups and clubs. I now run my own courses on my own specialism, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and more lately Self Development for therapists.

So it has been a motley journey of giving talks, presentations and courses. Each group of people is different to the last. Each time the chemistry different. Each time the audience needs are different. And each time is an opportunity to

meet new people, learn new things, and expand my own knowledge. It is often with great preparation and anticipation that I talk. And I am not complacent. Each time requires fresh focus and an element of nervous anticipation that keeps me on my toes. It is a joyous experience for me to give presentations. And I'd like to share with you how to be the architect of your own presentations and talks.

## **1. KNOW YOUR SUBJECT**

In order to talk confidently, you need to know your subject. There is nothing more important than knowing your subject inside and out in order to give a successful talk. Whatever you are passionate about should provide material for a great talk.

Many people know their subject pretty well but when it comes to the prospect of giving a presentation, all of a sudden they feel they haven't the knowledge to do it: that someone else will know more than them in the room, or that they just can't think on their feet if there are challenges. In addition to this, many doubt that they have the right skills to be able to share their knowledge in a presentation.

Firstly you need to realise just how much you know. If you have been placed in a position to give a presentation or perhaps you have chosen to put yourself in the limelight, you already have plenty of information to share. It's then a simple matter of learning how to communicate that knowledge to your audience.

When I was giving classes in Spanish and German years ago, in the early days of my teacher training I used to have terrible performance anxiety. I didn't know how to present this grammatical device or that piece of vocab and spent a long time thinking up clever ways to get the kids engaged. But it wasn't just an engagement issue. There were issues of whether what I had to teach was

valuable or not. Whether the kids would value or appreciate it and whether I could get the kids to value it. Our lecturers would tell us that we must not worry about the extent of our knowledge, that we had degrees and our students were total beginners.

Once I started to relax and realise that I had fluency in these languages and that I was excited about languages and valued my knowledge, I started to give much better classes. How could my audience value what I was giving if I didn't get excited and value it myself? Suddenly the focus was more on how to communicate my knowledge rather than had I got anything of value TO communicate. See the subtle difference of focus?

### **Exercise 1**

I want you as part of your prepping to give excellent presentations to reflect right now on what you know. I want you to list your speciality in all its complexity. Use a large flip chart and do a mind map or if you work better with pen and paper, sit down and write a list. I want you to chart how much you know. The reason for doing this is to pull out your specialism. If it's talking about icing a cake or pension trusts it doesn't matter. Each has its own specialism. And you have a unique history that brought you into this knowledge. Chart your history and your development too. Leave no stone unturned but be careful not to go into reams and reams of words. You need to have a one page picture of what you know.

Now you've done that, I want you to show this to a colleague or friend who doesn't know in too much detail what you do. Do this informally. Do not bore your friend. You are only trying to get some genuine feedback about how much knowledge you have. In doing this you might find a couple of knowledge gaps. If you do, go find out about them. Learn them. They often say in the world of teaching that you teach what you need to learn. This can make for a very dynamic and interesting talk as you haven't long discovered some of the information yourself.

## **2. ORGANISE YOUR TALK**

### **2.1 What is the goal or purpose of your presentation?**

Now comes the organisation of your talk. You must be clear what you want the outcome to be. What is the goal, aim or purpose of your talk? Is it:

- general information
- make a sale
- generate interest in your subject
- in-house training
- specialist training in a particular topic

There are lots of reasons for giving a presentation. Establish what the goal of the presentation is.

### **2.2 Who is your audience?**

Now look at your target audience. Who are they? What are their interests? Are they junior to you? Are they your peers? Are they just an assembled mix of the general public? Even if they are your peers, if you have done your knowledge specialism inventory correctly, you should be starting to realise that you have something of added value to convey to them

### **2.3 Call on your “Six Honest Serving Men” to help write it**

It is best to call upon our six honest serving men which is Rudyard Kipling's contribution to the world of presenting. The six honest serving men are:

**What – Why – When – How – Where – Who**

You decide which order they come in. But as you prep for your presentation, you need to list these questions and jot down the answers next to them. Now you have the structure. For example, one talk I gave was about Mental Health and how the NHS stigmatises and Isolates Mental Health patients.

**The purpose** of the talk was to controversially launch a new charitable network in my region. That was my brief. To be bold and controversial.

My **target audience** was very mixed. Key workers, psychiatrists, social workers, charitable organisations, local PCT, mental health patients. So I had to talk in far broader philosophical terms than in specifics. That was also evident from the brief I'd been given for the presentation.

So then I set about **what** I was going to talk about. I looked at **how** people became stigmatised, **when** it happened, **who** caused it to happen, and **what** was the failing of the system that made it happen (**why?**). I looked at **how** things could be improved, **where, when and who** could improve them.

#### **2.4. Argue towards your conclusion**

Another device I learned years ago, argue towards your conclusion. If you have a strong conclusion to make, you need to argue towards it. Then your talk builds like a crescendo towards the end, leaving your audience with an impact.

In my talk at this launch, I started with some hard hitting facts and conundrums. And then I went on to explore what had happened to cause the problem, and then I went on to describe the worst effects of the system. While I had seeded my talk with how the system had failed, I left the audience with many deliberately unanswered questions. I wanted the talk to cause people to reflect introspectively about how we could change the system.

However, if your audience is a work based audience, and you are selling a new company procedure, you may need to highlight the failings of the old procedure, and then using the 6 honest serving men, argue towards how the new system will benefit the company.

If you are a company director addressing your employees then you need to be the one leading the way. Your talk needs to argue very strongly towards your goal and aim. It needs to be inclusive and it needs to talk about how you are going to visualise your future with your team.

There is a lot I could talk about on leading from the front or from the rear. Your presentation as a director will detail your particular style of working. How you lead may depend on the existing structure of your organisation. Leading from the front means that you can potentially be a bottle neck to the growth of your business. In other words, your business can only grow insofar as you have envisioned where you are going and you monitor its growth.

Leading from the rear gives a company goal but essentially invites the workforce to plot the course for you, creating an ethos of ownership. This style of leadership is a skill set all in itself. It takes a very confident and self assured person to lead in this way. This is a topic for a different report.

## **2.5 Get your materials together**

Now your materials may just be you if you're confident enough or you may have a power point, flip chart or white board. You may even have an interactive whiteboard.

## **2.6. Power Point**

If you are using power point be sure to not put too much information on the screen. There is nothing worse than just a presenter just reading from a

screen. The sentence on your screen should stimulate you to talk more about your subject; it shouldn't in itself be an essay!

When you are rehearsing your talk, do it without using your notes too much. See what it feels like to relax and talk freely about what is your speciality. Your prompt cards or notes are just there to remind you if you go 'off piste'. I can frequently go off piste and then find myself having covered the next 1 or 2 points on my screen. I find that, far from detracting from my talk, it adds to my skill. If I know what I'm talking about that much that I don't need my prompts then I'm enthusiastic and excited about what I'm presenting. This will inevitably communicate with your audience. Your audience want to feel that your presentation is valuable to them. If it is valuable to you, they will be inspired by your enthusiasm.

## **2.7. Are you using Handouts?**

When you are preparing a presentation you need to decide whether handouts will be a help or a hindrance. Let me explain. Some presenters give out such detailed handouts that suddenly all heads are down reading and the connection with the presenter is lost. Presenters may choose to use this kind of tactic precisely because they don't want the focus to be all on themselves or because they don't trust themselves to give the information precisely while they are presenting. However, in my opinion, it detracts from your talk and can make for a very dry and uninspiring talk.

If you are using handouts, make sure they are brief and to the point. They should really be used just like your power point slide show as an 'aide memoire'. Alternatively, if you feel there is too much information for such a brief summary, try handing out the handouts at the end of the presentation. I often only work with handouts when I want my audience to do something. That means, they have to get into 2's and discuss something or work on something together. But if I can avoid that, I do, by writing what I want them

to do on a flip chart or projector.

The most important thing to remember is to maintain your connection with your audience. Produce relevant handouts that do not ramble and that act as an aide memoire.

## **2.8. Flip Chart and Pen**

If you are using flip chart and pens, don't spend an age forming every letter perfectly in the minutest handwriting. Practise before your talk writing and forming letters quickly on the paper. Avoid turning your back fully to the audience. Your audience does not want to see the back of your head. Practice keeping one eye on the audience and one eye on the board. In this way, you can 'feel' an audience reaction: for example:

- are they looking away when you turn to write on the board
- are they fidgeting when you write
- are they very still even though you've turned your attention away from them
- are they taking notes as you write
- are they not taking notes as you write

This kind of audience awareness will help you tailor your talk to the atmosphere. If there is any hint of boredom happening, you need to bullet point more briefly, call for feedback from the group and get the group engaged again. I'll talk more about managing your audience below.

In summary, make sure:

- you know your subject
- you understand your aim, goal or purpose
- you have some information about your audience so you can cater to

them

- you use the 6 honest serving men
- you use the right materials and handouts for the occasion
- you argue towards your conclusion

### **3. MANAGING YOUR AUDIENCE**

There are lots of ways to 'manage your audience' to ensure that they are engaged with you. Sometimes when I'm giving a talk there appears to be a wall of intransigent faces opposite me. I check in a second or so whether they are bored or whether they are rapt! It's interesting isn't it? When you see a wall of faces looking at you without expression, it's tempting to think they are bored. But invariably they are not bored at all. They are cogitating. They are filtering the information you are giving them against their pre-existing knowledge. They are often drawing from personal experience and comparing your information with their own experiences.

#### **3.1 Engage your Audience**

How can you check that? How can you engage your audience? If I see a wall of faces, I ask them "Are you with me?". I'll even ask them sometimes, "Are you interested in this?" I'm checking that my audience is with me. I might even say, "All I can see is a sea of faces....but I can see it all going on behind your eyes". These questions and observations from me often break the spell or the ice, depending on how you see it. People go off in reveries of personal experience when listening to a very interesting talk. But you need to keep your rapport building going throughout your talk. You need to get your audience agreeing with you, head nodding, laughing, and generally responding to you. I might often observe to the group "I can see a lot of you nodding your heads" or I might joke, "no one's run out yet!" or at a poignant moment, I might ask whether the nodding heads mean they are agreeing with me and then I might wait for a little audience feedback. I believe there are few subjects where you cannot engage your audience in this way. The one exception may, of course, be political oratory where the message needs to be compelling all of its own.

Sometimes, stating our fears and anxieties in front of audiences is also very

humanising. Don't forget, you are only talking to other human beings. I remember at a very large talk I gave in London a few years ago, saying to the audience that as I'd been the last one to talk and had had to sit through 7 other talks that weekend, I was anxious that parts of my talk hadn't already been covered! I said it jokingly but there was a lot of truth in what I said. The audience laughed warmly. Your audience can be your friend if you remain human.

### **3.2 Do not pitch yourself as too high an authority**

One of the biggest turn offs for me at least, and probably for many, when listening to a presentation is the person who does not engage the audience, does not make eye contact with anyone, who talks, eyes focussed over the heads of their audience, who talks condescendingly to audiences by not listening or not even inviting audience feedback.

In our nervousness around presenting, many presenters think they have to stand up as some kind of super hero or higher than God authority on their subject matter. Of course they are the experts on their subject matter, but if they are to make the information available to their audience, they have to interact with the audience on a human level. That means listening as well as talking.

### **3.3 Make Eye Contact**

Eye contact is one of the most important ways of engaging your audience. Do not choose one poor member of the audience to stare at for the duration of your talk! That would be most uncomfortable. Make sure you can sweep the room with your gaze catching people's eyes as you go. Talk directly into their eyes like you are talking to a friend but never longer than for a few seconds.

Often I notice someone's head hiding behind another and I make an effort to

crane my neck to catch those people's eyes too. Try also not to ignore, say, the front row, or the back row, or the sides. Be aware of areas that you haven't yet looked at.

Doing all this as well as presenting is quite a skill. As you gain in confidence you will find it easier and easier to do. Eye contact makes your audience feel included, it helps them relate to you, and even if you can see a wall of intransigent stares, if the room is quiet and they are focussed on you, I can guarantee there is all sorts going on behind those eyes. As I've already mentioned, draw attention to it. Show them you can see them listening to you. It's a skill in counselling called 'immediacy'. Draw attention to the stuff that is happening in the room as you present. This immediate observation breaks the ice, creates rapport, and helps you set the stage for your presentation.

### **3.4 Listen to your audience**

Listening to your audience is a very important part of giving a presentation. If I see a head shaking, ie: in disagreement or disapproval, I do not ignore it. I draw attention to it. If the person concerned is brave enough to voice their objection, I listen to it intently. I reflect it back and summarise it to the person concerned to check I've heard it correctly. Then once I've understood what their issue is, I can address it by going deliberately 'off piste' for a while.

On occasion, you will find your audience coming in to support you very keenly and will offer an overt defence or explanation to the objection in your audience. In one of my courses not long ago, I had a very challenging student who didn't quite understand what I was trying to convey. The rest of the class were well online with it but he continued to question and challenge what I had to say. This went on for 3 days, ie: the duration of the course.

On some occasions the rest of the group would try and explain things to him.

On other occasions I asked them to offer him feedback. I found his challenging actually brought more out of the class than may have otherwise been achieved. The class saw how to use the distraction constructively and how to develop their own skills at explaining and managing differences. This is the art of listening attentively and using whatever interruptions or obstacles that present themselves in your presentations.

At my London talk, one of my audience members asked me a tricky question. I was miked up and out at the front. In order to answer the question, I walked right into the audience to hear him more clearly. Once I'd heard him, I repeated his question. And then I was able to answer it. At that moment, only his question was important. At that moment, he had turned into one of my personal 1-2-1 clients. At that moment, I had to deal with the distraction before I could continue.

### **3.5 Rolling your sleeves up!**

Walking right into your audience is a device to use when you really want to get your audience onside. Walking into them signals that you are one of them and that you are listening to them and engaging with them. They learn to see you as expert but an available expert. At the end of this talk I gave in London, I had a line of people queueing to speak to me afterwards, something I'd noticed not many of the others had.

### **3.6 Greeting your audience**

A highly effective way of breaking the ice with people, is to greet them as they arrive or mingle with them before the talk. This actually gives you information you can use in your talk. You can refer anecdotally to someone you were talking to earlier to support a point you are making. You can talk about the weather! We love a discussion about the weather here in England! It gets us all flapping and chatting away excitedly, doesn't it? Well, we need to find some

enjoyment from our climate in this country. You can start your talk engagingly talking about the interesting people you have met, or the weather (yes, again!) or the hotel food, service, or the receptionist in your building, or the people who asked you to give the talk. There are endless ways you can start your talk by using common experiences to settle everyone down.

### **3.7 Using Common experience**

You can use common experience as a leveller. That is, that common experience takes the mystique or unavailability of the speaker out of the equation and makes the audience warm to them. I remember seeing an amazing talk by a man who survived kidnap by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. He had lost a leg below the knee and his right arm from the elbow. He was talking to a network of disabled people. He continually brought his experiences back to the basics and used his common experience with those disabled people in the room to great effect. The difference was, that instead of feeling defeated by his disability, he described how he had used his disability and it had enhanced his life. So he brought people onside by understanding their condition, but then showed them how they can use their disability positively. His was a highly charged, highly motivational talk drawing intensively on his own personal experience.

### **3.8 Pace Pace Lead – a Lesson from the world of NLP**

This speaker used the pace, pace, lead technique often used by people that are trained in NLP – that's Neuro Linguistic Programming. Pace, pace, lead, means you bring your audience onside by using common experiences initially before you lead them off to where you want them to go: the promised land, so to speak! If you have a new company policy to present, this is where this kind of style might be useful. As I mentioned above, detail the common problem with the existing status quo, and then detail how much better it will be once the new system is in place.

NLP helps you cut through the nonsense, or what I call the 'Fiction' that runs through our heads, and helps you get in touch with the 'fact'.

My next section describes how we can stay with the facts and minimise our fiction.

## **4. PRE-PRESENTATION SELF TALK**

If we are fully prepped for our talk and know our subject, the only thing that is stopping us giving a cracking presentation is the 'fiction' that we might fail. Once the fiction starts to root in our consciousness, we can start to give energy to the very thing we fear the most. And sometimes we can even create what we most fear because we have given it so much energy and attention.

### **4.1 What is the point of worry?**

It really does not pay to catastrophise and worry about what will happen if I forget my subject, or I dry up, or I look stupid, or I end up rambling etc etc. You can add one of many of your fears here.

The more you worry yourself about these things, the more likely you are to make them happen.

I want you to start practising saying things like:

- I am doing my best
- I have all the knowledge I need
- My audience are human beings
- I am fully prepared
- I am giving of my best
- Others have things to learn from me.

In fact, I need you to start detoxing any of your negative thoughts instantly with these more positive thoughts. And I'll tell you why.

The brain cannot hold more than one thought at any one time. If you fill your head with negativity, you will create negativity. If you fill your head with positive statements you will create positivity. It really is as simple as that.

However, you need to develop a certain belief in your own humanity as well. Sometimes we are extremely hard on ourselves and expect superhuman performances. We can work ourselves up into such a state of alert hyperactivity that it drives us to worry incessantly about our ability to give a presentation. In fact, we want to be so good we are untouchable. So good that no one can bring us down. We want nobody to be able to offer any criticism, constructive or otherwise about our performance.

This is unrealistic. As a human being your views will inevitably differ from other people's. This does not mean yours are invalid or stupid. It simply means they are different. We need to tolerate our differences not eradicate them. That's how war breaks out, ie: by imagining that you can eradicate differences.

And it's exactly what happens inside of us when we are intolerant of our differences with others. We get angry with ourselves or upset, or disappointed or depressed about the fact that we are different from others. You need to sit still and reflect on your humanity. Sounds very grand when all you're doing is giving a presentation or talk but it is essential if you are to allow yourself to engage with your audience and accept challenges without feeling like bursting into tears!

Other people have their opinions. And you have yours. You are giving this presentation because you have something significant to communicate to others. If they disagree with or don't like what you are saying, you need to start realising that they are probably going to object to many things that people tell them. That may well be their style. It doesn't necessarily mean you are wrong.

If you are certain of your message, and you have done your prep, you have understood your goals, and you are arguing strongly towards it, then you are

on task.

## **4.2 Learning from your mistakes**

Now I'm going to fly in the face of the above and tell you of a presentation I gave to a group I knew very well but to whom I didn't really know how to pitch. I'd done my prep. I knew my subject. But I was intimidated by what I felt they might think of me. I wondered whether they might have thought I was selling to them, and indeed I was, but though I knew my stuff well, I didn't know how to pitch a sales talk to them. So going back to an earlier point in 'How to Organise your Talk' (p7) my goal was unclear.

I gave the talk, confidently, but it lacked a certain content. Because I knew them well, I received their criticism after the talk with humility. I absorbed what they'd told me and understood how my anxiety about selling had stopped me communicating my essential message.

Following this talk, I spent the whole weekend working on what I was really selling. What was my product? Who were my clients? What did they need to know? I made notes, I listened to a number of motivational talks on the internet and then I began to realise the value of the feedback.

I realised that my product was me. That my clients were anyone. And what they needed to know was stuff that I could show them in my unique specialism: ie: the power of the human mind to recover and reveal our true humanity.

This refocused my talk and I delivered it again. This time, there was no doubt about what I was selling. I knew what I had to offer. I had done the work. The talk went down without any negative criticism at all. They were all clear about what I was offering and what the goal was.

So make sure your goal is very clear.

It might help to do some mind mapping around your goal so that you are absolutely clear about your motivation and your purpose in giving your presentation.

### **4.3 Don't Blag!**

What I mean by that is don't pretend you know something that you don't! There may be people in the audience who know you are blagging. The safest thing to do if you are being challenged by your audience, is to not blag but to say that you will check it out and if they want answers they can reach you by emailing or phoning or whichever way you would like your audience to engage with you after your talk. There is nothing worse than someone who is clearly saying something incorrect but authoritatively so that they think they're not looking stupid. The reverse is in fact true. Blagging is stupid!

### **4.4 Look beyond your presentation**

What I want you to do is imagine the time after your presentation. And you can do that in one of several ways. You can tell yourself that it'll all be over in so many days or hours time and you'll still be here to tell the story.

Alternatively you can tell yourself that the presentation is a stepping stone to somewhere else and imagine what that somewhere else is. Is it a promotion? A sale? An increase in status? A course filled?

Creating a powerful image of what the talk will achieve for you will help you get a perspective on the talk. Ie: if it is part of a larger plan for your business, or personal life, you need to imagine in great detail what the benefits will be of giving the presentation afterwards. You need to stay focussed on the benefits and temper any stray thoughts of failure with the immediate thought, that you

can only do your best on the day.

If you need to, write a plan down about how your presentation will fit into the scheme of things. How will it help your business, your position, your personal life? Etc. I keep a lot of this stuff in my head mentally. So I see where my presentations are taking me and where I want them to lead to.

I think in the early days of teaching, I had the teaching curriculum to stick to. I had to stay on track so that my students learned what they needed to learn to get the qualifications that they wanted. In between beginners level and qualifications were a whole range of measuring posts against which we measured our students achievements. We were constantly striving for the next post and the next stage of measurement for our students. So I learned to plan forward and have a context to putting myself daily in front of 5 classes of 30 boisterous kids!

And while classroom teaching in secondary school is quite a different ball game to presenting in business, there are some important lessons in content and organisation that you can draw upon. So it pays to measure what your presentation is going to achieve and where it will take you.

Measure where you are going, what you want to achieve, and stay focussed on the larger goal of what your talks and presentations are achieving for you or for those you are working for.

It is easy to be like a rabbit blinded by the headlights, working hand to mouth to get through difficult times. But you don't have to work like that and I'm aiming to show you how not to by your reading this e book.

## **5. RELAXATION AND BREATH CONTROL**

Now, I've never had to do this personally. But I don't think that's because I haven't done it intuitively. There are times, especially when I'm having to wait in a queue to give a presentation that I can feel my heart racing and my anxiety levels rising. But I frame it very positively. I always tell myself I'm going to give a great talk or presentation and I use my adrenaline as fuel to keep me alert and dynamic, not as a means of reflecting on my possible failure.

When I talk to myself positively, I can almost automatically still my heart and breathe much more freely.

### **5.1 Breathing Exercises**

So now I want you to take a few deep breaths only with a difference. I want you to place a hand on your stomach, just on and below your belly button and I want your hand to be the first thing that you push out when you breathe in. Allow the breath now to migrate from the tummy up through the chest. Then breathe out nice and slowly controlling the breathing as you go.

The reason I ask you to do this is so that you can bypass the shallow breathing that you are in the habit of doing when you are anxious about something. When we trap our breath in our chest and breathe too shallowly we actually feed our anxiety.

Now as you continue to breathe in and out deeply and slowly, if you start to feel light headed, just relax the breathe naturally again. I don't want you passing out! I just want to show you how you can take charge of your bodily reaction to anxiety.

Back to the breathing, I want you to affirm all the positive benefits of giving

your presentation. Again say to yourself:

- I am doing my best
- I have all the knowledge I need
- My audience are human beings
- I am fully prepared
- I am giving of my best
- Others have things to learn from me.

And then run through all the reasons as to how this talk will lead you on your stepping stone to the next phase in your personal or professional development or goal. Give your presentation a context. Understand it is but a few brief minutes in your week, your life, and your life's plan. It will go fine if you let it.

## **5.2 Visualise**

Now you're nice and calm I want you to visualise as powerfully as you can, giving your presentation and feeling relaxed and easy. I want you to visualise how you engage with the audience and how easy it feels to have a joke with them if appropriate or engage with them confidently and personably. Believe that you are a personable and easy going speaker who understands what it takes to talk to your audience as though they were friends and not the thought police that you once made them into. They are there to learn something and to support you. View them as a resource. They are there to give you some great feedback about your presentation. Some of that feedback will be very positive, some may be mediocre. You have succeeded in giving your talk. All feedback is just stuff you need to take on board to learn from. It's useful feedback to help improve your next presentation.

## **6. LEARNING TO VALUE FEEDBACK**

I once taught one of my courses for an organisation. On all my courses, I always ask for feedback so that I can use some of it promotionally but also so that I can learn how to improve my courses. I took my own feedback forms and at the end of the week, gave them to my students to fill in. They came back positively with some constructive comments to help me improve upon the next course.

Shortly afterwards, I approached the organisation to see if they wanted my feedback forms or whether they had conducted their own feedback. The answer was, "We don't ask for feedback in case it's negative. We don't want to read all that negative stuff". All this attitude conveyed to me was a lack of commitment and a lack of confidence.

This is a huge commercial error. You cannot improve on your performance if you don't know how well you are doing. You cannot sell a service if you don't know how valuable it is to your subscribers.

This is the same for your presentations. Value your feedback. Sift out what is constructive and helpful from what is negative and unconstructive. I don't think I have ever had anything personal or unkind written in my feedback forms. People are generally fairly generous with their comments and careful with their criticism. You really do have to be quite disastrous and self important to get severely negative feedback. I can think of a couple of talks where I've sat there wondering why these people are giving this presentation but my desire to support them has usually outweighed my desire to criticise them.

There is only one talk I can think of which I was absolutely alienated by.....but fortunately, so was every other person in that room! His clothing was totally inappropriate, his poise arrogant, his interactive skills appalling and his talk

oozed contempt. On reflection, I could see that it was his own insecurity that was feeding this terrible public persona. Feedback was not requested on that occasion.

## **6.1 Designing a Feedback Form**

I have seen many feedback forms of one type or another. When you are designing a feedback form, you have to decide what its purpose is. Is it for quality control? Is it for promotional purposes? Is it for improving your presentation? Is it for closing a sale?

Once you have decided what the goal is, you need then to construct questions that lead to your goal.

If you are using the feedback for promotional purposes, it is best to state on the feedback form that you will use their feedback on future promotional materials. You then need to specify that unless they indicate otherwise, you will be quoting their name and job title.

If the form is for quality control purposes either of your performance or for the quality of the information, you need more detailed questioning: perhaps questions where there is multiple choice that requires your audience to tick a few boxes than to write their own words.

Feedback forms are invaluable for analysing your audience satisfaction and for providing you with information that will improve your performance. Give them out either half way through with a few instructions to not complete till the end or give them at the end. The benefit of handing them out halfway through is that the audience can be mentally prepping for what they have been asked to feedback on at the end.

## **7. WEAR THE APPROPRIATE DRESS**

So the above brings me neatly onto the appropriate dress. Depending on your audience and the context, you will find it best to dress accordingly. Very few people can get away with dressing like a complete scruff and still commanding respect in a formal setting!

If you're unsure of the dress code, dress up, rather than down. It's better to be slightly over-dressed than under-dressed for the occasion.

### **7.1 For the Ladies**

Ladies, a word for you. I think it is a mistake to look too masculine when in front of an audience. We are women and as such I believe we can use our femininity to our advantage. I don't mean that you drape a feather boa onto the lap of your nearest male in the audience, but that you don't obscure your femininity to try and conform to masculine norms.

It's about self expression, isn't it? Do you like who you are and what you look like or do you reject it? If you accept and like what you look like and feel comfortable in your skin then you are going to communicate better than if you're constricted by the roles you feel you have to play to belong to a specific group. This is reflected in what you wear. Wear something smart that you feel comfortable in. Avoid overt sexual clothing but do not hide your femininity. If you're comfortable in a masculine style of dress then that's fine. But personally I would avoid trying to conform if that is not usually my style.

### **7.2 For the Men**

Men, if you are presenting would you please ensure that your trousers aren't too tight or too light!! Yes. It can be really off putting and not in the way you might think. I refer back to the person that dressed appallingly above. His

trousers left nothing to the imagination and if he had been a desirable, engaging and dynamic speaker it could have worked for him! But he wasn't. And it was awful to have to watch. It detracted entirely from any message that he was giving. I don't like to even remember it!

You are likely to know which dress code is more appropriate but if you don't, again, dress up rather than down. Obvious statement really, although it wasn't so obvious to the poor speaker above!

In one of my friend's line of work as an MD, he and his team didn't wear ties though they did wear suits and shirts to work. However, when he came to present he automatically reached for his tie. Perhaps the subconscious message was that he had to be an authority for his team when he was showing them which way he wanted the company to go.

## **IN SUMMARY**

There is a lot to summarise here and a lot to take in. I suggest you use the back of these pages to jot down notes and make your own inventory of how you are going to deliver your presentation.

In essence, from the beginning to the end, you need to:

- 1.** Know your subject
- 2.** How to organise your talk
- 3.** Manage your audience
- 4.** Talk to yourself positively prior to your presentations
- 5.** Practise relaxation and breath control
- 6.** Value your Feedback
- 7.** Wear the appropriate clothing

With your 7 point action plan to follow you'll be able to script your own presentation, deal with your presentation nerves, talk to yourself more positively, learn from your mistakes, and conceptualise how this stage in your life is helping you with your overall goals.

Presenting can be a hugely life enhancing thing to do and can set you up for success and for expert status in your chosen field. If you are presenting in-house in business the same rules apply. Exposure in your company can mean that you are more easily head-hunted when they come round looking for appropriate people to fill jobs. You have everything to gain by learning to master your fears and to step into a new way of working. Good luck!

For more online information from Jenny Lynn's Open Mind Group visit:

[www.openmindguide.blogspot.com](http://www.openmindguide.blogspot.com)

[www.theopenmindguide.com](http://www.theopenmindguide.com)

[www.openmindtherapy.co.uk](http://www.openmindtherapy.co.uk)