



Body language and gestures

What you say isn't the only thing that matters when giving a presentation: the audience will also pay attention to *how* you say it. Your presentation starts from the moment you walk in the room, not from the moment you open your mouth. So, here's how to make a lasting impression.

Dress the part

Your first priority is comfort: if you're not comfortable in your clothes, the audience will pick up on your discomfort.

Think of it like an actor putting on a costume: this is your presentation outfit, and when you wear it, you will be awesome.

Check your posture

Stand in a neutral, open stance, with your feet hip-width apart and toes pointing straight ahead. Make sure you're balanced on your feet, and not rolling onto the heel or ball of the foot. Keep your shoulders back and don't slouch. This stance will support your lungs and allow you to take deep breaths, which is essential for good voice control.

Keep your hands by your side

Well, unless you're making a gesture. Alternatively you can use one hand to hold your notes if there isn't a lectern. Some people don't like using a lectern or desk because it places a physical barrier between the speaker and audience that can become a mental barrier. Do what feels best for you.

Before you start, SMILE!

It might sound stupid, but **science has our back on this one**: when you smile, you relax and communicate to your anxious brain that there's nothing to worry about. When your audience sees you smile, they feel like you're happy to be there and they relax too. Amy Cuddy discusses the importance of body language in this TED talk: '**Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are**' (Online video, 21:02).

Face the audience at all times

Don't turn your back to the audience while you're speaking, because then your voice will be much more difficult to hear.

If you need to turn away to adjust technical equipment or for another reason, pause your speech. Practising using visual aids or changing PowerPoint slides will stop you from interrupting yourself just to adjust the visual.

However, you don't have to stand in one spot, either. Move around the room if it feels right to you, although take care not to pace unnecessarily and distract the audience.

Make eye contact with the audience

Firstly, if you are looking your audience in the eyes, then your head is raised and your voice will be audible. When a shy speaker stares at the floor, their voice goes to the floor, too.

Secondly, looking individual audience members in the eye makes them feel like you're really speaking to them. It makes them feel included and interested. Don't hold eye contact too long, though.

If you have difficulty looking people in the eye try looking at the forehead between their eyes instead – it has almost the same result.

Use gestures appropriately

Gestures can be used to make a point, explain a concept, or emphasise a word or idea. Let your gestures come naturally, rather than forcing them. Practising your presentation will really help you here.

Use your face

Lastly, don't forget about your facial expressions, because they help you tell the story. Practise looking at yourself in a mirror while talking if you're not sure what you might look like. Ask for feedback from a trusted friend on how you can improve.