



Presenting an idea

Module 9

This programme has been funded with support from the European Commission



1 Presenting your idea / public speaking

Developing the confidence and capability to give good presentations, and to stand up in front of an audience and speak well, are extremely helpful competencies for self-development and social situations.

Presentations can have different formats and purposes:

- Oral (spoken)
- Multimedia (using various media - visuals, audio, etc)
- PowerPoint presentations
- Giving a talk on a subject to a group (impromptu or planned)
- Giving a speech at a weddings or a eulogy at a funeral

Anyone can give a good presentation, or perform public speaking to a professional and impressive standard - it just takes [preparation](#) and [practice](#).

2 Communication skills

Effective communication skills are fundamental to success in many aspects of life. Making friends, building self-confidence, having relationships and starting work - these all depend on being able to communicate well with other.

Communication is a two-way process, so improving communication involves both how we send and receive messages.

Communication is:

- 10% words
- 20% how we say them
- 70% body language

Improving communication skills

Effective communication is a key interpersonal skill and learning how we can improve our communication has many benefits.

Learn to Listen

Listening is not the same as hearing; learn to listen not only to the words being spoken but how they are being spoken and the non-verbal messages sent with them. Clarify and reflect to confirm what the other person has said and avoid any confusion. Try not to think about what to say next whilst listening; instead clear your mind and focus on the message being received.

Think before you speak

Do not say the first thing that comes into your head but instead take a moment and pay close attention to what you say and how you say it. Focus on the meaning of *what* you want to communicate. Aim to increase understanding by considering how your message might be received by the other person. By communicating clearly, you can help avoid misunderstandings and potential conflict with others.

Be clear

Present information in a way that its meaning can be clearly understood. Pay particular attention to differences in culture, past experiences, attitudes and abilities before conveying your message. Avoid jargon and over-complicated language; explain things as simply as possible.

Pay attention to body language

The way you look, listen, move, and react to another person tells them more about how you're feeling than words alone ever can. You can enhance effective communication by using open body language i.e. arms uncrossed, standing with an open stance or sitting on the edge of your seat, and maintaining eye contact with the person you're talking to. You can also use body language to emphasise or enhance your verbal message i.e. patting a friend on the back while complimenting him on his success, for example, or pounding your fists to underline your message.

Assert yourself

Direct, assertive expression makes for clear communication and can help boost self-esteem and decision-making. Being assertive means expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in an open and honest way, while standing up for yourself and respecting others. It does NOT mean being hostile, aggressive, or demanding. Effective communication is always about understanding the other person, not about winning an argument or forcing your opinions on others.

- **Value yourself and your opinions** - They are as important as anyone else's.
- **Know your needs and wants** - Learn to express them without infringing on the rights of others.
- **Express negative thoughts** in a positive way. It's OK to be angry, but you must be respectful as well.
- **Receive feedback positively** - Accept compliments graciously, learn from your mistakes, ask for help when needed.
- **Learn to say 'no'** - Know your limits and don't let others take advantage of you. Look for alternatives so everyone feels good about the outcome.

3 Watch your (body) language

We all use body language in day-to-day communication. Body Language is a process of communicating in a non-verbal way i.e. through facial expressions, gestures, postures and even hand movements. When talking to others, due to nerves or just lack of practice, you can be saying one thing, while your body is saying something completely different. Giving careful attention to improving body language can greatly enhance the impact of a presentation.

The thing to realise with hand gestures or any other presentation-enhancing behaviour is that you won't be able to conquer them all at once. It takes time, practice and dedication to actively seek ways to continuously improve your methods each and every time.

- **Eye contact**

Good eye contact helps gain and hold the attention of the audience and it establishes a rapport with them. Avoid looking down, off into space or over people's heads - make meaningful eye contact.

- **Movement and fidgeting**

Avoid fidgeting and unnecessary movement i.e. playing with your hair or swaying from side to side.

- **Facial expressions**

Smiling is a positive facial expression that helps relax you and the audience but avoid over emphasis. In addition to giving you a relaxed calm appearance, smiling actually releases helpful 'happy' chemicals into your nervous system, and makes you feel good.

- **Posture**

Good posture is crucial to looking professional as it exudes confidence and helps project your voice. Avoid leaning on one hip, folding your arms or crossing your legs and don't turn your back to the audience.

4 Handling nerves / anxiety

Lots of people stress out about talking in front of a group or getting laughed at if they make a mistake in front of an audience. Feeling nervous before delivering a presentation or having to speak in public is natural. If managed correctly, nerves can help to spur you on, but on the flip side if they are not effectively managed they can have a negative effect on delivery.

Good news ... there are many techniques that can be used to manage nerves and these can be learned and developed so that a you can call upon them when needed.

Techniques to manage nerves

Practice

Practice delivering your presentation as often as possible. This can be done alone in front of the mirror, with other members of your group or using friends and family as a pretend audience. This will help you feel more prepared and more confident. Nothing calms nerves like the confidence that comes from knowing you're prepared.

Prepare, prepare, prepare

On the day of the presentation, be as well prepared as you can possibly be so that you feel in control of the situation. Sound preparation includes getting to the presentation venue as early as possible and checking that you have all of your notes and visual aids in place before you arrive. If presenting using a computer and projector, it is always advisable to do a final check to ensure everything is working.

Slow it down

Nerves can cause you to speed up your speech. If you naturally get nervous or speak quickly, there are many ways to tackle this:

- Breathe
- Prepare a really strong opening as this will help you to develop confidence from the start
- Speak slower than you would in a normal conversation
- Ask yourself – am I making sense?

5 Top tips

If you feel yourself starting to get nervous, consider the tips above. You might also think about the people talking to you. They were once in the same position as you and they made it through.

Consider video-taping the next “dry-run” of your presentation and turning the sound off, so you focus completely on your body language.

There are many people who are born with natural enthusiasm and charisma, but working on body language is a tangible way that anyone can improve the level of presentation that is being given and the only prop you need is yourself.

Laughing releases endorphins that can help relieve stress and anxiety; most people like to laugh and will feel drawn to somebody who can make them laugh. Don't be afraid to be funny, but ensure your humour is appropriate to the situation. Use your sense of humour to break the ice, to lower barriers and gain the affection of others. By using appropriate humour, you will be perceived as more charismatic.