

Public Speaking? 8 Tips for Making Your Audience Love You

Have you ever wondered how it is that some people can grab your attention quickly at a presentation and keep you engaged the whole way through, while others have you feeling as though you're slipping into a coma?

It can be hard to pin down exactly why this happens, but if you're about to give a talk or presentation for the first time, these eight tips can help make sure you engage your audience and keep them wanting more, rather than send them to sleep!

1. Deal with the nerves

Nervousness before speaking in public is fairly normal. It can be very hard to engage your audience if you're shaking like a leaf though.

You can stay calm by:

- Rehearsing your presentation, so that you are well prepared.
- Taking some deep breaths before going onstage.
- Not worrying too much about being nervous – the more you worry about nerves, the worse they will be. Remember that your audience will more than likely be understanding about a wobble or two.

2. Nail the opening

The starting point of your presentation is as important as the content, and you want to make it as interesting as possible.

- Start with a question or present a problem – from which you can launch into the search for the solution.
- Start out with some startling facts or statistics that will have your audience intrigued and wanting more.
- Use music or present a humorous slide to get the audience's attention.
- Use a quote or a metaphor that everyone can relate to.

3. Gain rapport with your audience

Gaining rapport with your audience is essential. After all, your audience isn't likely to be engaged in your presentation if they feel as though they can't relate to what you're saying, or they are not included.

You can overcome this by using 'universals' – that is, statements or questions that everyone will be able to relate to or has experienced in some way, such as a day where everything seemed to go wrong, or working with a very difficult colleague.

'Or not' statements can also make sure that no one feels left out. For example, the phrase "whether you have ever been stuck in heavy traffic or not..." is inclusive for everyone.

4. Use language that is emotive as well as factual

Even if you are giving a facts-and-figures presentation, it's important to frame a narrative around it. If you don't bring it to life, you run the risk that it's just going to fall flat because it's dead boring.

Remember that humans are wired for stories – which is why we keep finding ways to deliver them!

So use examples to illustrate your points. Don't just present the facts, also share your ideas. Don't try to cram in too much either – limit your presentation to the key elements and do them well.

You might want to consider using Dale Carnegie's Magic Formula for storytelling – this involves choosing a message you want to convey, and telling a story about it. The format is:

- Incident – the bulk of your narrative.
- Point – which highlights the main points of the story.
- Benefit – outlines how the audience will benefit from acting on the points made.

5. Be ready for questions and interruptions

A Q and A session is a fantastic way to engage with your audience – as long as it runs smoothly!

- Allow the audience member to finish their question, then thank them and ensure everyone heard.
- Answer the question and ensure the questioner understands and is satisfied.
- If the question is not appropriate or relevant at the time, you can either ignore it or ask the questioner if they would like to discuss it later.
- Use the question as an opportunity to open up a discussion or brainstorming session if it's appropriate.
- If questions or interruptions are taking up too much time, signal the audience that you need to move on.

6. Handle hecklers with aplomb

The possibility of hecklers during your presentation can be daunting, but there are ways to turn the tables on those who interrupt you in this way.

- Assume the heckler has good intentions – that is, they really aren't out to get you!
- Relate to them directly by using their name, using eye contact, and moving towards them.
- Incorporate their statement into your presentation if it's appropriate.
- If it all goes on too long, ask if you can continue the discussion with them later one-to-one.

7. Avoid the common mistakes

These are a few things that almost every speaker will have done at some point, and that are best avoided! These include:

- Using industry jargon – unless you are 100% sure everyone will know what you mean.
- Boasting – no one ever liked a show off!

- Reading – if you are not good at memorising, use prompts such as cards to jog your memory, but avoid ‘reading’ to your audience as much as possible.
- Overdoing the tech stuff – slides, videos and other media are there to complement your presentation, not be substitutes for it.
- Pretending something that went wrong didn’t happen – for instance if you drop your notes, look for a chance to incorporate it rather than ignore it!

8. Make the closing count

If the opening is all-important in grabbing your audience’s attention, the closing provides you with an opportunity to reinforce what you’ve said.

- Present an overall summary of the material covered.
- Use a call-to-action to indicate what people can do next.
- Use a story to round off.
- Play some music.
- Thank your audience for attending.

Finally, remember that there are really no formulas for every situation – every presentation is unique. The main thing is to find the best way to intrigue your audience and capture their attention, and provide them with something of real value and substance. And if you’d like help brushing up on your public speaking skills, get in touch!