

Secrets for Successful Presentations



81 Tips to
Prepare and
Deliver Every
Speech with
Confidence!

Susan Fee

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Introduction

Whether your audience is two people or two hundred, making a presentation can be nerve-racking. Suddenly, everyone is staring at *you*. Doubts can fill your mind: Is my face red? Is my voice shaking? What if my mind goes blank? What should I do with my hands? If you've ever felt this way, you're not alone!

Many people avoid public speaking at all costs - and there is a cost. In a competitive marketplace, your presentation skills can be the determining factor in whether or not you will receive a promotion, recognition, or a new opportunity. Public speaking helps you build professional visibility and credibility. Improving your skills will give you the confidence to speak up in any situation and participate more fully in your community.

The formula for a great presentation includes planning, skill development, and practice. These are the same elements that will help you manage fear. (Notice that I did not say "eliminate." A little fear can be a good thing!) Use the tips in this booklet to increase your confidence, polish your skills, and deliver a successful presentation every time!

About the Author

Susan Fee is a licensed mental health counselor and presentation coach. She has been a professional speaker and trainer since 1991 and teaches college public speaking classes. Prior to becoming a counselor, Susan was a TV and radio news reporter with years of experience writing and delivering stories. She is the author of three other booklets: *Positive First Impressions*, *Dealing With Difficult People*, *Building Resiliency* and the college survival guide, *My Roommate Is Driving Me Crazy!* (Adams Media). Find out more about Susan's books, audio products, and services by visiting www.susanfee.com or www.myroommateisdrivingmecrazy.com

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Planning and Preparation

- 1 **Define your purpose.** Why have you been asked to speak? What type of presentation has been requested? Informative speeches teach something new. Persuasive speeches are meant to change attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. An entertaining speech can inform, but is more light-hearted.
- 2 **Know your audience.** Create a relevant, interesting presentation by researching your audience ahead of time and customizing your presentation to suit their needs. Helpful information includes: gender, age, socio-economic background, education, interests, and their knowledge of your topic.
- 3 **Choose the right topic.** If you don't care about your topic, neither will your audience. A good topic is one that you care deeply about and have researched thoroughly. 
- 4 **Offer value.** Give your audience a reason to listen by providing something beneficial. What new fact, information, skill, insight, or answer will you leave with your audience? Research and organize your topic with this in mind.
- 5 **Appeal to common interests.** By finding and addressing commonly held interests, you will be able to build rapport with your audience. Examples include belonging to the same association or company, or sharing similar needs, hobbies, or backgrounds.

6 Determine size of audience. Consider what your audience will be able to see and hear. As the audience size grows, so should your voice projection, broadness of gestures, and size of visual aids.

7 Review room setup. Knowing the audience seating and table arrangement will help you plan staging, activities, and placement of visual aids.

8 Set presentation length. How much information you present depends on how long you have to speak. The shorter the time, the more focused your material needs to be. If your time limit is open, you should determine a set length and prepare accordingly.



Developing Your Speech

9 Avoid procrastination. Waiting until the last second to prepare your speech or “winging it” are two common ways to procrastinate. Take away these excuses for not doing well by preparing your speech immediately with ample time to practice.

10 Start with the end. Focus your material by answering this question: What do I want my audience to know when I’m done? If you can’t say it one sentence, it’s too vague.

11 Conduct research. Provide accurate, current information by consulting experts, books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and reputable Web sites. Mentioning reliable sources within your speech will make you appear more credible and believable.

12 Follow the rule of three. Simplify material by keeping it grouped in threes. Make three main points, give three examples, or provide three descriptions. It’s the perfect number to remain substantive without rambling.

13 Organize content. Create an easy-to-understand format by organizing material in one of the following ways: subcategories of your main topic, chronologically, cause-effect, pro-con, or problem-solution. Or, compare the past with the present, then explain how it changed.

14 Use signposting. Help listeners follow you by planting verbal signs. Examples of signposting are: “Remember three tips; number one...” or “The most important point is this...” or “Follow three steps, first...”

15 Write for the ear. We write more formally than we speak, so a speech written word-for-word can sound stiff and unnatural. Stay in the present tense and use contractions to keep your language flowing smoothly.

16 Create note cards. Writing out your speech can be helpful in organizing your thoughts, but avoid reading from a script. Create numbered note cards listing one main point per card, or a one-page outline listing your main concepts. Write largely enough so that you can glance at bullet points if you need a prompt.

17 Kill clichés. If you’ve heard a phrase before, assume your audience has too. Replace tired clichés with original language. Rather than saying, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” use more

detailed descriptions, new examples, or personal stories.

18 Make it memorable. Stories and examples create pictures for the mind, anchoring them to memory. Think *show* versus *tell*. Put facts and figures into perspective by turning them into metaphors, stories, and examples.

19 Incorporate visual aids. Appeal to visual learners by supporting your points with handouts, props, or PowerPoint. Reveal visual aids only when you are referring to them so they don't become distracting.

20 Open with a bang. People remember how you start and finish. A strong introduction should grab attention and set expectations. Open with an anecdote, rhetorical question, shocking fact, or thought-provoking image.



21 Make 'em laugh (maybe). If you are naturally funny, then it's fine to open with a joke or humorous story. But, if you are serious by nature, then your delivery could fall flat. Keep humor clean and non-offensive. Aim punch lines at yourself, not others.

22 Invite questions. Let your audience know upfront if and when you plan to take questions. Q&A should come before your prepared close. Otherwise, you risk ending with an uncomfortable silence if no one asks a question, or ending on a negative note with a hostile one.

23 Close with impact. A strong ending summarizes your main points and reiterates what you want your audience to take away from your presentation.

Practicing for Success

24 Rehearse start to finish. If you make a mistake during a presentation, you can't stop and start over, so you shouldn't practice that way. Rehearse your entire speech start to finish, then go back to rework any rough spots.

25 Time yourself. Time your rehearsals so you know the length of your presentation. Edit or add material as necessary.

26 Practice out loud. Speeches sound different in your head than they do out loud. Learn what you really sound like by practicing your speech at the same volume you plan on delivering it.

27 Forget memorizing everything. Trying to memorize your entire speech creates too much pressure. Forgetting one word can trip up your entire delivery. Memorize your opening and closing and use note cards or a one-page outline for the rest.

28 Wear your speech clothes. Practice your presentation in your speech clothes and shoes to make sure you feel comfortable. Clothes affect the way you move and express yourself. Choose attire appropriate for the topic and occasion. In general, speakers should dress more formally than the audience.

29 Look in a mirror. Practice in front of mirror so you can see how you look. Make frequent eye contact with yourself

to ensure that you're not reading your whole speech.

30 Recruit an audience. Ask a few good friends or colleagues to preview your presentation and offer feedback. The bottom line for every presentation is not what you intend, but what the audience perceives.

31 Record and review. Our self-perceptions can be quite different from how others see us. Recording and watching your presentation allows you to see yourself exactly as your audience will see you. This self-awareness can dramatically improve your delivery.

Managing Fear

32 Keep perspective. What's the worst that can happen? Compared to other challenges you've overcome, making a presentation probably ranks low on the list.

33 Use fear. Feeling nervous shows that you care, and that's a good thing. Let it motivate you to create a better presentation. The goal is not to eliminate fear, but to refocus it in positive ways. Use it to plan, prepare, and practice.

34 Answer unknowns. Have a plan for every "what if" scenario that scares you. Knowing you have a plan will help you feel more in control. For example: What if I trip? Then I'll get up and keep walking.

35 Visualize success. If you can think it, you can do it. Create a detailed picture in your mind of yourself speaking confidently and the audience responding with enthusiastic applause.

36 Breathe. Calm yourself with deep breathing. Inhale through your nose, expanding your diaphragm (your belly will push out slightly, but your shoulders should not move). Exhale through your mouth, doubling the time it took for your inhale.

37 Meet and greet. Arrive early and meet the people in your audience. Introduce yourself as the speaker and ask what interests them in your topic. Once you get to know people one-on-one, they're not nearly as intimidating.



38 Stay content-centered. Nerves increase when your thoughts stray from content to yourself such as, "I know I'm going to mess up. I can't wait until this is over." Keep your thoughts content-focused such as, "I know my subject well. I know what points I want to share."

39 Find kind eyes. Look for the people in your audience who are smiling and nodding in agreement. While you don't want to speak only to them, seeing their eyes will offer you reassurance.

40 Move to diffuse. Shake speech jitters by moving. Before your presentation, take a short walk, shake your hands, and wiggle your toes. During your presentation, cross the room, gesture to a visual aid, or incorporate an activity.

41 Relax and recover. If your mind goes blank, it's not the end of the world. Stop, breathe, and refocus. Check your notes or ask the audience to prompt you. It won't be a big deal to the audience unless you make it one.

42 Assume goodwill. Know that your audience wants you to succeed! They have enough patience and understanding to overlook the little things. No one is expecting perfection.

Delivering with Confidence

43 Be yourself. Honor your personal style rather than imitating others. The most interesting speaker is not perfect, but authentic.

44 Wait a beat. Command attention and establish a confident presence by waiting one beat before you begin. After you finish, be prepared for a half-second of silence before applause begins. Even if it feels like an eternity, stay silent and maintain eye contact.

45 Accept mistakes. Audiences don't know what you had planned to say and, in most cases, won't notice a mistake unless you announce it. Move past obvious mistakes with a little humor, otherwise roll right through them.

46 Make no apologies. As the speaker, you are in charge of directing attention. Apologizing for nervousness, poor skills, or technical malfunctions highlights the very thing you want to diminish.

47 Lose the podium. Resist hiding behind a podium or lectern unless it can't be moved. You may feel safer having something to hang on to, but white-knuckling it will make you appear stiff and scared.

48 Gesture naturally. Use the same hand movements and facial expressions as

you do in personal, relaxed conversations, just bigger. When using your hands to emphasize points, keep them above your waist so audiences can see. Otherwise, let them hang naturally by your side.

49 Plant your feet. Assume a confident stance with feet placed shoulder-width apart rather than locked together. Be aware of rocking back-and-forth, foot-tapping, or leaning to one side. Turn nervous energy into purposeful movement by walking, using a visual aid, or involving your audience in an activity.

50 Walk your talk. Standing like a statue while speaking is unnatural. Movement is energizing as long as it's consistent with your message. Avoid nervous pacing by planting your feet when delivering key points.

51 Make eye contact. Establish trust and confidence with eye contact. For larger groups, mentally divide the room into thirds and distribute eye contact evenly to each section as you speak. For smaller groups, make individual eye contact.

52 Talk to people, not objects. If referring to a visual aid, be careful not to start talking to it rather than your audience. Place visual aids in front of you, or to the side to avoid turning your back on your audience.

53 Speak up. Project your voice to the back of the room. Maintaining eye contact will remind you to speak up versus talking to the floor. Modulate your pitch and emphasize important points to add vocal variety.

54 Repeat questions. In larger groups, some people may not be able to hear audience questions, so repeat them before answering. This also gives you a chance to clarify the question to make sure you understand.

55 Use silence. Replace filler words like “um” and “you know” with pauses. They are verbal commas that give listeners a chance to digest your message. Silence can be very commanding.

56 Drink water. The longer you speak the drier your mouth becomes. Be prepared by drinking plenty of water beforehand, and having some available during your speech.



57 Carry a clock. Constantly looking at your watch during a presentation makes you appear nervous and anxious to leave. Just in case there’s not a wall clock, carry your own small travel clock. Place it in your view to keep longer presentations on track.

Presenting with PowerPoint

58 Supplement content. You are the main program, not your slide show. Use PowerPoint to support your main ideas, but avoid relying on it as your entire presentation. If your equipment fails, you should still be able to give your presentation.

59 Make copies. Prepare for a possible computer crash by creating a backup copy of your slide show on a disc, jump drive, or by emailing it to yourself. In addition, print a hard copy.

60 Keep it simple. Use no more than six points per slide, and six words per line. Cramming too much information on a slide makes it cluttered and difficult for the audience to read.

61 Make it readable. Choose easy-to-read fonts like Arial or Verdana, keeping sizes between 48 and 36. Anything smaller is too hard to see. Use the same font style and size throughout.

62 Skip bells and whistles. Graphics that randomly spin, wipe, and pop up are distracting. Apply a consistent slide transition to your entire program. When in doubt ask yourself, will this help my audience understand? If not, simplify.

63 Display as needed. Reveal bullet points as you are talking about them rather than showing the entire slide at once. Doing so keeps people focused on what you’re saying rather than reading ahead.

64 Go to black. If the topic changes from something other than what your slide is displaying, put your screen to black by clicking “B.” Hit any key when you are ready to return to your slide show.

65 Resist reading. Be careful about turning your back to the audience and reading your presentation from the screen. If you have to read it, you put too much content into the slide show, and not enough into your delivery.

66 Use a remote. Have the freedom to move by using a remote to advance slides. You will appear more dynamic and energized.

67 Practice. Prepare your slide show early enough so that you can practice talking and advancing slides at the same time. The smoother your transitions, the more polished you will appear.

Speaking Impromptu

68 Anticipate speaking. You won't be caught off guard if you plan on being asked to comment, rather than hoping you're not called on. Remain engaged and participate in conversations, meetings, or presentations.

69 Lighten up. It's understood that everyone could speak better if they had time to prepare and practice. No one is expecting a flawless presentation on the spur-of-the-moment.

70 Clarify. If you're not clear on the question or topic, clarify before speaking. It will help keep your comments focused.

71 Go with the flow. Give the first response that pops into your mind and expand on it. Too much self-editing gives you time to doubt the quality of your answer.

72 Make one point. Prevent rambling by sticking to one clear point. You can always provide more information later. Keep your answer brief by stating your point, supporting it, and repeating it to close.

73 Keep it personal. Support your point with a personal experience, observation, or example. You lessen the chance of going blank by relying on information you know well.

74 Practice frequently. Just like any skill, your speaking ability will improve with practice. Encourage friends to ask you random questions. Practice giving thirty-second responses. You will train your mind to think quickly.

Improving for Next Time

75 Invite feedback. Gain valuable feedback by distributing a short audience questionnaire following your presentation. Or, arrange for one or two people to offer you personal feedback. Ask for one thing you did well and one thing you could improve.

76 Acknowledge strengths. Give yourself credit for what you did well! By repeating and expanding what worked, you will continue to improve.



77 Set one goal. Concentrate on improving one specific presentation skill for next time. Once that skill has been mastered, focus on another.

78 Observe others. You can learn a lot by watching other speakers. Notice what worked and didn't work. Apply the same ideas to your delivery. See a variety of speech examples online by visiting <http://www.americanrhetoric.com>.

79 Sign up for SpeakerNet News. This free weekly email newsletter provides helpful tips from speakers, consultants, trainers, coaches, and authors that will apply to most professionals who give presentations. Find out more by visiting <http://www.speakernetnews.com>.

80 Join Toastmasters International. This non-profit organization helps members hone their communication and presentation skills. Local clubs meet weekly giving everyone an opportunity to practice in a supportive environment. Find out more by visiting <http://www.toastmasters.org>.

81 Hire a coach. Presentation coaching provides one-on-one feedback to improve your wording, delivery, and staging. Typical sessions last one hour and include practicing, recording, and reviewing your presentation. Find out more by visiting <http://www.susanfee.com/coaching/PresentationCoaching.htm>.

10 Tips to Promote YOUR Business with this Booklet!

(It can even be customized for you.)

- 1** Market your product or service by delivering compelling business or sales presentations.
- 2** Use this booklet for staff training to improve customer relations and increase sales.
- 3** Persuade more customers to do business with you by conducting effective meetings.
- 4** Include this booklet with your product or services as a value-added bonus.
- 5** Give this booklet as an incentive for completing a questionnaire or survey.
- 6** Offer this booklet as a gift to the first “X” amount of people who enter a drawing or come to your store.
- 7** Provide this booklet free with any purchase during a specific time, with a certain purchase amount, or when opening a new account.
- 8** Encourage stronger trade show and convention traffic by offering this booklet at your booth.
- 9** Provide copies of this booklet to people and organizations that can refer business to you.
- 10** Package this booklet with a note thanking a client or individual for helping you.

Notes