

**PRACTICAL SELF-IMPROVEMENT**

**Session 2: Talk to the cam – the presenter’s guide**

**Notes**: “Wow” moments (make a note of the things which make you “click”…ie “wow moments” eg. key ideas, thoughts or statements – you can then refer to them in future)

George Jessel said “The Human brain starts working from the moment you are born, and doesn’t stop until you speak in public.”

Experience in your subject, being “a talker” at school, and having something you are passionate about to say does not necessarily an impactful presentation make. As a lecturer I have been treated to the tops of students heads as they grip their papers, often hearing the sound of the shaking script over their under-projected voices; as a trainer I have cringed when someone has delivered what would have been an interesting topic as a “sales pitch”…”Audrey, you need to hear this, because, Audrey, this will take you places…”; and as a speaker myself I have also thought — how do I revive this audience who have crumbled under “death by powerpoint.”

It’s why I combined my academic understanding of psychology with my experience as a theatre director to teach public speaking and presentations, and here giveth the programme in a simple “cheat sheet”.

However, I offer one word of warning here. While heeding the key points of this document, you will be able to structure a presentation you can believe in, thus giving you confidence when you stand and deliver **BUT** speaking is a performance skill…you need to PRACTICE in order to overcome your nerves, then to improve, then to experiment, then to master your style. (And “practice” is more than reading your prep in your head, it’s more than mouthing the words…although that’s a good start…it’s rehearsal, and it’s doing it live, and doing it some more, and more, and more…).

But let’s begin before the beginning.

**Entr’acte**

Your presentation begins before you step on the stage. I am not just referring to the planning, but the things that you can do to build your confidence prior to the event.

**1.** **Walk the stage**

Actors never move from rehearsal space directly into performance. This is because they have become familiar to one space and differences may throw them. Our memory responds to our environment, exemplified by that moment in a fitness or dance class when the instructor “turns the room” and suddenly you can’t remember the steps. While this is not an essential step, I certainly like to get a feel for the stage because — as I tell my actors — it means you can establish a sense of ownership of the space. Through doing this you will sub-consciously stand stronger due to confidence through a familiarity.

**2.** **Check the equipment**

Again, this isn’t always possible, but if you have the opportunity to make sure you know how the laser pointer, or the laptop works, this can avoid minor mishaps. This is a good opportunity to speak to the organisers with regards to microphones. There are often hand-held mics, lapel or headsets, or a lectern microphone. Because I like to move around in my presentations, I use props and I use my hands, my preference is always for a lapel or headset; however, if you know what is or is not available, you will swiftly be able to tailor any elements as you need.

**3.** **Know where you are sitting (prior) and use it to your advantage**

Your performance starts the moment you stand (or in the case of waiting in the wings) step onto the stage. It doesn’t begin with your first line. There is nothing more amateur in theatre to see an actor scurry across the stage only getting into role when he speaks. This is the same for presenters. Marketers will always remind us that people take 3–7 seconds to form a “thin slice” opinion (Thompson, 2012[[1]](https://www.wix.com/dashboard/03a1b233-297d-4053-b780-3cea4653803e/blog/create-post#_ftn1)) — this is an opinion which encapsulates an overall judgment about you, your character, your credibility and your likability — fair or not. Thin slicing will motivate us to pick one brand over another in a supermarket, in the same way as it will inform your audience whether they want to trust you or not.

It is important to remind you — as I do my actors, however — audiences actually do want to like you. In a business conference they want to learn something and in an event they’ve often come specifically for you. They are actually not your enemy, they want you to be awesome (for their sake as much as anything else, they’ve made the effort, they’ve paid their money).

Therefore, the optimal thing to do is to use from the moment you are introduced to both make a positive impression and compose yourself.

I take the time of the “stand and walk” to stand straight (better for the posture and your ability to project as it frees the lungs), to smile (you may acknowledge the audience, thank them or your host — your decisions here depend on the nature of the event) as well as take a couple of deep breaths while going over my first line in my head. (Once I start speaking, I am able to maintain the flow, but that first line, as we’ll see shortly, needs to be good.)

…and, because I know the stage (point 2) I head straight to my light!

BONUS TIP: A personal preference of mine is to use music to begin my presentation, this can also enhance your sense of ownership, and it can work to pique curiosity if the song relates to your talk. Further, the use of music, and the “stand and walk” can help you break any stale energy if the speaker before you bombed received muted “polite applause”. This is an NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) notion called “breaking the state.” (NLP World, 2020)[***[2]***](https://www.wix.com/dashboard/03a1b233-297d-4053-b780-3cea4653803e/blog/create-post#_ftn2) which means that while an audience may have been lulled into a specific energy by one person, doing something different, allows them to “break state” and watch you with fresh eyes and a clearer mind.

**Prologue**

**4.** **Start with a bang**

…or a statistic, a quote, a story, a statement, a joke — anything that will arouse curiosity, and anything other than “Hello my name is…and I’m going to talk about…” a) They KNOW that, your host has just said it; b) They can probably read it on your first slide anyway; c) Just think of your own reaction “BOR-ING!!!!!”

From the outset you must engage your audience’s thinking. A friend of mine, now a Judge, was recalling her days of advocacy where she too was taught the importance of the opening line. She was prosecuting a defendant who was trying to shift his role onto other parties, she began “Do you remember your maths classes? They’d often be a on damp rainy day — much like this. And you were taught about venn diagrams. Ladies and Gentlemen, I want you to think back to those diagrams to see that much like this case, although there may be many circles, the overlap always comes down to one thing — the defendant.” Not only did the jury find in her favour, but both Judge and defence complimented the metaphor. You need to get your audience to see your point of view.

**Act 1**

**5.** **Now you’ve captured the audience, you need to maintain their interest.**

This can take different formats — you choose which you prefer:

**a)** **Problem/Solution**

This is a common approach, especially when introducing a product or innovation. You identify the problem as something that the audience wants to solve…then present the solution as well as simple and accessible ways of implementing said solution (people are more often roused to action if they believe that they were i) part of the problem; ii) can be part of the solution; and iii) that solution is straightforward to action — a shortened version of the “Monroe Sequence” (Draw attention, Establish need, Satisfy need, Visualise future, Take Action) (Mindtools 2020)[[3]](https://www.wix.com/dashboard/03a1b233-297d-4053-b780-3cea4653803e/blog/create-post#_ftn3)

The more you can connect your audience to the story you are telling, the better.

**b)** **Interaction**

This can also be embedded into approach a) (above). I use this one most commonly as my key message is to progress your learning from one place to another. Within this document, I would perhaps, at this point as you to reflect on:

- What were the key elements of presentations you’ve loved?

- How can you utilise them?

- What presentation slip ups do you want to avoid?

Sometimes you can engage an audience by demonstrating a bias in thinking that you will solve: When I talk about the power of the mind and how we only choose to use a limited capacity of it I’ll ask my audience to “Take 10 seconds to observe the room” in such a way that they could describe what it’s like to be in it. (Perhaps you will do this too?) I then ask people to tell me their observations. The majority will talk about what they see, and I’ll also have observed the majority will also only look left and right — a couple may look up. At that point I’ll explain that “observe” doesn’t mean visual only…and even if it did, why not look up, down, under, round, inside? And further, what about the rest of our senses — how much more can we take in if we observe with those too? By revealing the audience’s own bias, they may be more receptive to my talk on broadening the mind.

**c)** **Gimmicks/Visuals/Props**

You may have noticed that none of the above actually requires powerpoint. (Note: if you are using powerpoint, hopefully the above will help you:

- NOT read your slides line by line

- Use it to enhance rather than make the point

…and, please make sure you load it up before the audience arrives…there is nothing that will make the heart of your viewer sink faster than seeing “Slide 1 of 64” while you are setting up…even if they are all images!)

Now a word of caution here, however. I too would rather watch the expert in their field read through a powerpoint than sit through what I sometimes hear referred to as “edutainers”…trainers who think their sole purpose is to make you laugh rather than make their point…and actually when there are too many gimmicks, I urge you to question the credibility of the speakers, so use these tips with care.

- If you are using props — lights and sound can help.

For a talk on the importance of speaking up, even if you are speaking solo, I clapped my hands for a blackout, then switched on a tealight (no candles — fire hazard, make sure your props are safe!) A change in rhythm is always engaging.

- Don’t act unless you can actually pull it off.

There is nothing worse for an audience than feeling embarrassed for you! When you are in the spotlight - you need to be deliberate.

**INTERMISSION**

Presentations don’t always have a break, so instead I thought I would use this gap for some extra bonus tips which won’t always feature in every presentation, but are helpful to know:

· If you are desperate for diagrams — use the flip chart — or print a picture out

· If you are worried about remembering everything cue cards. When I speak in front of audiences and I use them, I will have my name and website, or a key message printed on the back — it’s not just a cue card, it’s advertising.

· Involve your team — especially if you are trying to build confidence. You can’t tell them — “…just stand up and talk”, but you might work up to getting them to present little segments in your talks. They may never front the Oscars, but at least they won’t be so terrified! (Remember my first point — practice practice practice).

· Remember that your body and voice are free tools that you can utilize. Never under estimate the power of using your physicality to illustrate a point; vary your pitch, pace, tone and volume to maintain interest and avoid people becoming “hypnotised” to your voice; the power pause is huge, if you have the energy to maintain silence.

**Act 2**

**6.** **Make an impact with your close**

This is what the audience will remember, and it will also signal that you have ended. Please do not shuffle uncomfortably and say “Er, that’s it”. At the very least, and a strong last line and say “thank you.”

There are three parts to finishing strong:

- Wind down with something uplifting: Again, as with the opening, you may wish you use another story or a quote, ideally something that will uplift the audience.

- Give your details

- State your call to action.

A presentation is the start of your relationship with an audience who might be moving into the role of potential client, or if it is for people you know, it again deepens your relationship with them. Presenting is like the first date with someone you’d like to get to know better. Make them remember you…but be classy.

**Finale**

**7.** **Follow up**

If you have been able to network following your presentation, then follow up any connections with a simple — “Hi, hope you’re well”. Some contacts I made in 2016 only turned into leads in 2018, and in my case became firm friends by 2020…you don’t know how relationships will progress, but be proactive in your initiation.

Finally, follow up with your host as well — thank them for their organization. Build that relationship too, and you might be invited back…and the whole checklist can start again.

REFERENCES:

[[1]](https://www.wix.com/dashboard/03a1b233-297d-4053-b780-3cea4653803e/blog/create-post#_ftnref1) Thompson J (2012) Thin Slices & First Impressions, Psychology Today <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/beyond-words/201203/thin-slices-first-impressions>

[[2]](https://www.wix.com/dashboard/03a1b233-297d-4053-b780-3cea4653803e/blog/create-post#_ftnref2) NLP World (2020) <https://www.nlpworld.co.uk/nlp-glossary/b/break-state/#:~:text=A%20break%20state%20is%20a,is%20called%20a%20break%20state>.

[[3]](https://www.wix.com/dashboard/03a1b233-297d-4053-b780-3cea4653803e/blog/create-post#_ftnref3) Mindtools (2020) <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/MonroeMotivatedSequence.htm>