



How to

GIVE A PRESENTATION

Panda Ambassadors



Even if public speaking scares you, well, speechless, there's hope! All it takes is some preparation and practice to give an engaging, meaningful presentation.

Step 1. Know the logistics

The first step in giving a presentation, before you even think about what you want to say, is to answer some basic information about the presentation format. If you're in charge of planning this event, you should already know the answers. If you've been invited to speak at someone else's event, make sure you get this information as soon as possible. The more information you have beforehand, the more comfortable you'll be when it's time to give your presentation.

- **The audience.** This is the most important component and we'll come back to it later. But for now, just get the basic facts—how many people? What age group? What education level or technical background do they have? Why are they at this event?
- **Time.** How long is the presentation? What time is it? What will the audience be doing immediately before or after?
- **Format.** Is it an informal group discussion or a formal presentation? Will there be a slide presentation? If so, when do the slides need to be ready? Will a computer be provided?
- **The space.** Where is the presentation being held? Will people be seated around a table or seated theater-style?
- **Content.** What is the purpose of the presentation?

Step 2. Analyze and empathize with your audience

The most important part of any presentation is to understand your audience. The more you know about your audience, the better you can guess what they want and make a plan to meet those expectations.

Imagine what this presentation will be like for your audience. If it is one of many presentations the audience is sitting through in a long day, make it fun, keep it light, and stick to a few high-level points. If your audience is there voluntarily just for your presentation, you know they are already passionate about the issue and you can go deeper into the topic, with a focus on how the audience can translate knowledge into action.

Step 3. Create an outline

Once you have the basic information and an idea of what your audience expects, you can draft a rough outline of what you want to talk about and how you want to allocate your presentation time.

THE CONTENT

Most presentations can follow a simple thesis format, just like you would use in a research paper. They don't have to follow this format, but it's an easy place to start if you're stuck.

- Introduce and explain the issue
- State your solution to the issue and explain why this solution works
- Provide supporting evidence
- Explain why your solution is better than other proposed solutions and/or address criticism of your solution
- Reiterate main points
- Restate your conclusion

You can fill out this formula with bullet points or in sentences—whichever helps you organize your ideas better. Now you can read through your outline, speaking out loud, to get a rough idea of how much time you are taking up.

BREAK IT UP

It's difficult for even the best speakers to keep their audience engaged for more than 15 minutes at a stretch, so it's imperative that you break up the format for longer presentations. Do this by adding video clips, group or solo activities, group discussions, question and answer periods, panel sessions, games, skits, or anything else that isn't you talking directly to the audience. Remember, not everything will be appropriate for all audiences.

PUT IT TOGETHER

Estimate how much time your breaks will take and add that into your rough outline. Now you can start adding or subtracting content and activities to get closer to your target length.

If you need to add time but you have as much detail as you think is appropriate for your audience, you can add stories, anecdotes, or provide other examples. You might also want to add time for questions at the end.

Step 4. Create visuals

If you'll be using PowerPoint, you can create your slide deck once you have your written outline. Remember, the slides are for your audience, not for you. Don't fall into the very common PowerPoint trap of writing out your entire presentation on slides! No one wants to watch you stand in front of a group and read from a screen. Don't do it! Use your slides to show, not tell.

- Add pictures, charts, graphs, or anything else that illustrates your point. Remember to include citations, and don't use any images without permission.
- Keep text on slides to an absolute minimum. Use bullet points, not complete sentences, so information is easy to read and digest quickly.
- Follow the 5-second rule: If a slide can't be understood in 5 seconds or less, simplify it!
- Have some fun! Make puns, use funny pictures, include running jokes—if it's appropriate for your audience.
- Make it pretty. Most presentation programs have plenty of built-in templates to make your presentation visually interesting, so even without any design skills you can make your presentation pop.

Whether you are using slides or not, think about other visuals or props you can use to help engage people. Think of show and tell from elementary school—is there anything you can show people that will help them connect to what you're saying?

Step 5. Practice

Start by practicing alone. Time a run-through of the entire presentation—with visuals, breaks, and activities—and start fine-tuning to meet your target length. Once you have the length right, practice a few more times with the timer. You can even make a note of important cues (at 5 minutes, talk about x; at 7 minutes, talk about y). You don't have to memorize each word—just get familiar enough that you trust yourself to hit all your main points.

When you're ready, practice in front of a few friends. Ask for feedback and make any needed changes.

Practice a few more times.

Practice a few times without your slides. Practice a few times with your videos not loading. Practice a few times where no one asks questions during your question/answer session.

Practice again.

Keep practicing.

Got it down? Practice a few more times, just for fun.

Step 6. Present!

After all that practicing, the presentation should feel like a relief! Here are some tips to remember before and during the actual presentation:

- Be ready for your technology to fail you. Slides won't load, the projector won't turn on, you can't connect to the internet to play your videos. Who cares? You practiced for this!
- Make eye contact with your audience. Check your notes and the time when you need to, but really talk to the people who are listening to you.
- Relax! You know this stuff.

Step 7. Share your experience

After the presentation is over, log on to the Panda Ambassador Facebook group and let everyone know how it went. You can even share your slides and your outline for other Ambassadors to use. Now that you're a seasoned presenter, what tips can you pass on? What went well? What would you do differently?