Presentation Skills for Interviews

Being asked to give a presentation at your interview is a fantastic opportunity for you to shine and stand out from the crowd.

Why polish your presentation skills?

Many graduate recruiters such as Aldi and Rolls Royce use presentations as part of the selection process. However, it is not just graduate recruiters that use this method, many public sector roles do and the vast majority of teaching roles use them too. Presentations are also a common part of many jobs so it is an important skill to develop. A presentation enables you to showcase your attributes and qualities and your ability to research and put forward ideas in a coherent and engaging way.

If you are asked to give a presentation – regardless of the time available for presentation – welcome the challenge, be prepared, and make the most of your chance to show what you can do.

What can you do to prepare?

**Purpose:** It is essential that you understand what is being asked of you. Have this clear in your head at the start. Maybe write down a short ‘statement of purpose’ to refer back to throughout your preparation time.

**People:** Consider who your audience will be – how large (or small), what are they expecting, how might you engage them? You might ask questions of the audience or pose rhetorical questions such as ‘Have you ever wondered why...?’ to draw your audience in. Give your audience your attention (not your notes!) Smile and make eye contact.

**Place:** Understand what space you have to use, the resources and facilities available, and how that might affect how interact with your audience. Do you need to email a copy of your presentation or to bring it on a memory stick? – find out before you turn up!

**Planning and Preparation:** People are often engaged if there is a story that holds your presentation together. Structure is incredibly important; a presentation should be logical and well thought out. Good presentations have a clear beginning, middle and end.

- **Beginning:** Establish your relationship with the audience and let them know what to expect.
- **Middle:** The main part of your presentation where you will share your ideas or viewpoint providing a rationale for your thinking.
- **End:** Conclude or summarise the key points of your presentation. Remind them what you have covered.
**Positivity:** Thinking positively can influence how you act and acting positively can influence the way you feel. Visualisation is a technique used by many successful people, including Olympic athletes; they imagine themselves succeeding. Henry Ford said ‘Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right.’ Visualise yourself completing your presentation with confidence.

**Performance:** Presenting is a type of performance. Some people are more natural at performing than others but it is a skill that can be learnt or developed. There is some research to show that adopting a strong, open posture can help people ‘feel more confident’. So even if you don’t feel confident – you can ‘fake it till you make it’. Think about engaging performances you have seen before – it is likely that the speaker/performer will:

- Look relaxed and unrushed.
- Be clear and jargon free.
- Use stimulating and dynamic language.
- Vary their tone and place, pausing for effect, emphasising key words and speeding up at times to bring energy into their performance.

**Practise:** The more you are familiar with your material, and speaking in front of others the easier presenting will be. You could ask one of the careers team to be your practice audience if you know you have a presentation coming up.

**Does it have to be PowerPoint?**

Many presenters use PowerPoint or other presentation software which can help liven up a presentation that may have been quite static. Yet they also have their down falls. PowerPoint is a useful tool, but it isn’t the only tool. Other options include props, flipchart (either prepared or added to as the presentation progresses), post it notes, technology to engage audience asking questions.

Talk around your slides – avoid large chunks of text on a slide and then reading from it. Not only will you sound less engaged if you ‘read’ but your audience will have already read your slide before you will have finished and they may then become disengaged.

Use bullet points for key ideas – too many bullet points can make it more difficult for your audience to identify your key points.

Consider using images as prompts to tell your story.

**Messages from hiring managers:**

Hiring managers have said the most important thing is how you come across – this is above the content of your presentation. If you are engaging, it’s likely you will be forgiven if you slip up with some incorrect information. Errors can be fixed – your style and how you come across is harder to fix.

Relax and enjoy – and if you don’t enjoy it now – practise until it becomes second nature.

Managers also commented on the necessity for a coherent structure and a clear narrative that is well thought through. Avoid jumping from idea to idea without some sense of progression in your story. Be clear about what you intend to cover and summarise it at the end too.
Take the pressure and focus off you – introduce activities to encourage participation if you can – it can give you breathing space. Trying something other than a PowerPoint or alongside a PowerPoint will help you stand out from the crowd – especially at graduate level this will be highly valued. But above all, be confident with what you use.

**Top Tips:**

- Do your research and be confident that you understand the subject matter and the purpose of your presentation.
- Keep slides clean and uncluttered.
- Use whatever time is available to consider the following questions in relation to the employer organisation, their market place and how your filling the role can bring them what they need and more.
- Use breathing techniques to control your breathing and any nervousness.
- Visualise the way confident presenters deliver their material and learn from them.
- Use affirmations to remind yourself you can do this and do it well!
- **Practise, practise, practise...**

**Useful resources:**

**Quick online courses to help you prepare:**


**ISS Digital skills course online: earn points for Lancaster Award and a Digital Skill badge:**

[https://modules.lancaster.ac.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=823494](https://modules.lancaster.ac.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=823494)

**The surprising secret of speaking with confidence:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2MR5XbJtXU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2MR5XbJtXU)

**Two short clips showing how to improve your delivery style:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt8YFCveNpY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt8YFCveNpY)

**Avoiding ‘Death’ by PowerPoint:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRlcD7v-Vm8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRlcD7v-Vm8)

**Get in touch:**

[https://lancaster.targetconnect.net](https://lancaster.targetconnect.net)

[careers@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:careers@lancaster.ac.uk)

[01524592767](tel:01524592767)