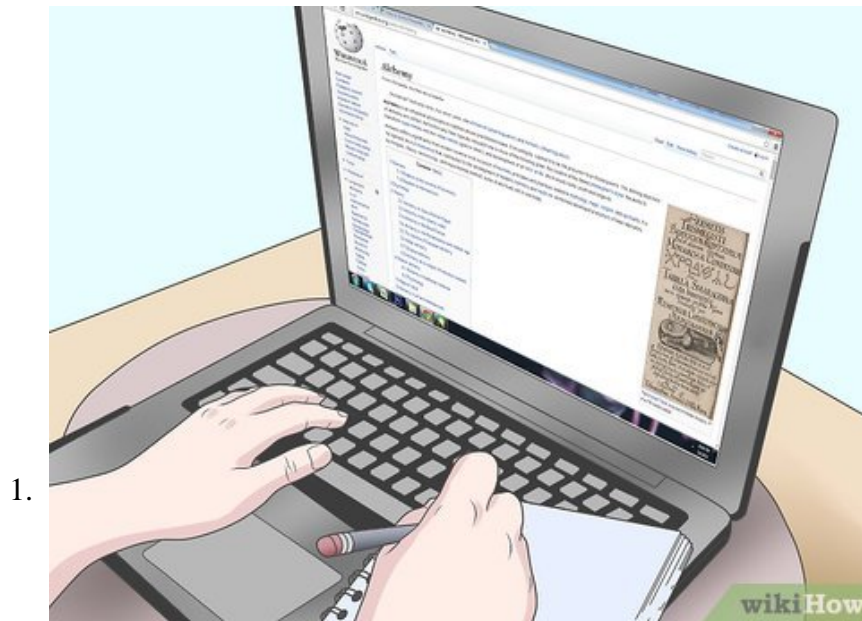


How to Give a Presentation

Giving a presentation terrifies most of us, especially when talking before a crowd of people about an unfamiliar topic. Never fear! There are ways to make a good presentation. The more presentations you do, the easier they will become!...

Part 1 of 2:

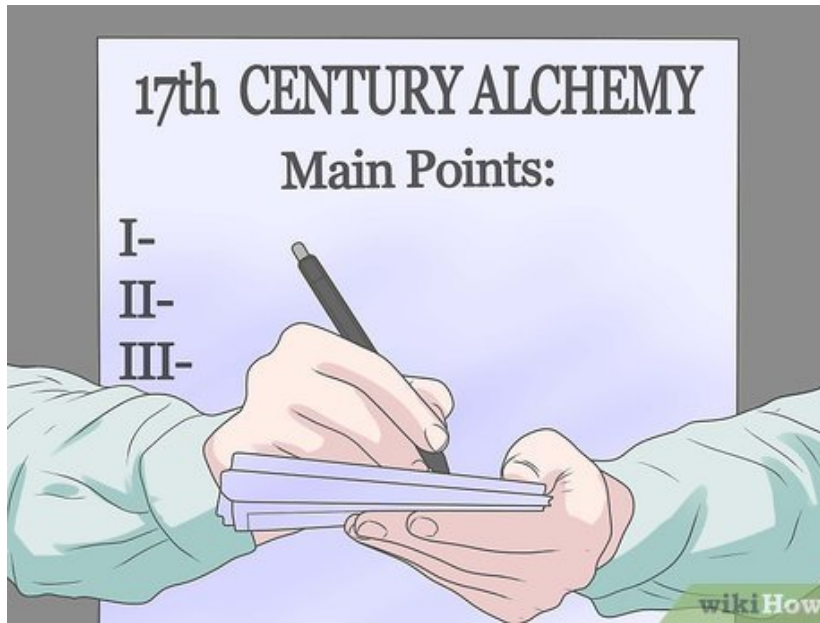
Preparing For the Presentation



Focus your presentation. Having a long, rambling presentation that is hard to follow is not going to win you any audience interest. You need to make sure that your presentation is clear and focused and that any asides you throw into it are there to back up the main point.^[1]

1. It's best to have 1 main thesis statement or overarching theme and 3 main points that back-up or flesh-out your main theme. Any more than that and your audience is going to start losing interest. This means that any facts and information that are a part of your presentation should back up these 3 main points and overarching theme.
2. For example: If you're giving a presentation about 17th century alchemy, bringing up the history of alchemy is fine (and probably necessary), but don't mire your audience in its history instead of focusing alchemy in the 17th century. Your 3 points could be something like "alchemy in public opinion," "famous 17th century alchemists," and "the legacy of 17th century alchemy."

2.



Less is more. You don't want to overwhelm your audience with information and important points. Even if they're interested in your topic they'll start spacing out and then you've lost them. You need to stick to your 3 points and overall point and you need to make sure that you only use the information that you need to support and clarify those points.

1. Pick your very best supporting facts, information, or quotes for your presentation. Don't bury your audience in information.

3.



Decide whether to use media or not. It isn't always necessary to use a powerpoint, or visual representation, especially if you're already an engaging speaker and have interesting subject matter. In fact, a lot of times, using visual media simply distracts from the focal point, that is the presentation.

1. Make sure you're using media to enhance your presentation and not to drown it out. The presentation is key. Anything else is just accessorizing.

2. For example: to get back to 17th century alchemy, to back up your information about alchemy in the public opinion, you might want to show images from public pamphlets about the dangers of alchemy and see what people of the time period had to say about it and see what the more famous alchemists had to say about it.
3. Also, you want to make sure that you pick a medium that you are comfortable in and thorough in knowledge. If you don't know a thing about powerpoint, maybe consider writing your main points on a white board, or passing out handouts with your main points and evidence on them.



Practice. This is one that for some reason, lack of time perhaps, people neglect to do and it is absolutely key to giving a good presentation. Running through the presentation before the actual event gives you time work out any kinks or problems with your notes and with your technology and makes the presentation itself go more smoothly.

1. A good tip is to film yourself or audiotape of yourself giving your practice presentation so you can see what distracting verbal and physical tics you have, so that you can work on eliminating them before the presentation itself. (Verbs tics would be things like "um..." and "uh..." and using "like" inappropriately; physical tics are things like shifting your weight from foot to foot or messing with your hair.)
2. Just remember that rehearsals usually run about 20% shorter than your actual presentation, so take that into account if you're running on a time limit.

5.



Visualize success. It may seem like a silly thing to do, but visualizing a successful presentation can actually help you achieve a successful presentation. You'll be more inclined towards success if you've been prepping your brain for it. So beforehand, sit somewhere quietly for a few minutes and picture the presentation going well.^[2]

6.



Dress appropriately. You want to dress for success. Wearing nicer clothes can help get you into the mindset of giving a good presentation. You also want to be comfortable, however, so you should try to find a reasonable medium between dressing super snazzy and dressing comfortably.

1. For example, if you aren't comfortable wearing heels, don't wear them just for the presentation. You'll be distracted by your discomfort and that will come across in the presentation. There are plenty of good shoe choices that have no or a low heel.
2. Clean, nice slacks or a skirt and nice, button-down shirt in neutral colors are always good choices for presentation wear. You also don't particularly want your clothing choice to distract from the

presentation, so perhaps avoid that brilliant hot pink shirt.

Part 2 of 2:

Giving the Presentation



Deal with the jitters. Pretty much everyone gets nervous about presenting, even when it isn't in front of a bunch of people. That's okay. All you have to do is mask the fact that you're nervous, since you won't be able to avoid the jitters themselves.^[3]

1. Before the presentation, clench and unclench your hands several times to deal with the adrenaline and then take 3 deep, slow breaths.
2. Call up a smile, even if you feel like hurling. You can trick your brain into thinking that you're less anxious than you actually are and you'll also be able to hide your nervousness from your audience.

2.



Engage the audience. One way to make your presentation memorable and interesting is to interact with your audience. Don't act like there's a wall between you and your audience, engage them in the material. Talk directly to them, not at them or at the back wall, but to your audience.

1. Make eye contact with your audience. Don't stare at one particular person, but section up the room and make eye contact with someone in each section on a rotational basis.
2. Ask questions of your audience and take questions during your presentation. This will make it more of a conversation and therefore more interesting.
3. Tell an amusing anecdote to illustrate your point. From the above examples about 17th century alchemy, you could find an amusing alchemical anecdote from the time period, or you could talk about your own forays into alchemy.

3.



Give an engaging performance. Giving an engaging performance isn't the exact same thing as engaging your audience (although, hopefully, your performance will engage your audience). It simply means that

you make the performance itself interesting and dynamic.^[4]

1. Move around, but make your movements deliberate. Don't nervously shift your feet (in fact, it's a good idea to imagine that your feet are nailed to the floor except for those times you deliberately choose to move).
2. Use your vocal inflections to create a more dynamic presentation. Vary your voice as you're talking. Nobody (**ever**) wants to sit there and listen to someone drone on and on in dull monotone, no matter how interesting the material (think Professor Binns from Harry Potter; that's what you don't want).
3. Try to create a balance between rehearsed and spontaneous. Spontaneous, on the spot, movement and asides can be great as long as you are really comfortable, otherwise they can sidetrack your presentation and make it rambling. Mess around with spontaneous and rehearsed when you're practicing and you'll get a feel for it.



Treat your presentation as a story. To get your audience's interest you'll need to connect them with the material on an emotional level and the best way to do that is to think of your presentation like a story you're telling.^[5]

1. Quickly introduce your topic and don't assume that your audience is familiar with all the terms, especially if your topic is one that isn't widely known.
2. Figuring out why you want (or have to) give this presentation will help you work with an overarching story/theme. Maybe you want to pass the class. Maybe you're convincing people to give you money or join you in a philanthropic endeavor or act for a social or political reason. Channel that desire into your presentation. You're answering the question of why they would want to pass you or why they would want to fund you. That's the story you're telling.

5.



Talk more slowly. One of the most frequent things that people do to sabotage their own presentation is talking way too quickly and so many people make this mistake. They get nervous and they whip through their presentation, leaving the audience gasping at the tidal wave of information. Don't do this.

1. Have water with you and take a sip when you feel you're going too fast.
2. If you have a friend in the class or meeting, arrange with them beforehand that they will let you know with a signal whether you're talking too quickly. Look over their way occasionally and check your progress.
3. If you find that you're running out of time and you haven't finished, simply drop or summarize your leftover material. Acknowledge the leftover material as something that can be discussed later or in the Q&A.

6.



Have a killer closing. The beginning and the closing of a presentation are the parts that people tend to remember, so you want to make sure that you end with a punch to the gut (figuratively speaking; don't hit

your audience). You'll need to reiterate those 3 most important points and make sure the listener knows why they should care about your topic.

1. Make it clear what the listeners now know and why it is important that they have this new information.
2. Conclude with examples or stories about your main point and take home message. You might want a slide which summarizes your presentation. For example, you might conclude with a story about the nature of alchemy in the modern era (perhaps in a film) to show its malleable nature.

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