

# Presentation best practices

**Know your messages.** Be sure that you can share your key messages clearly, concisely and consistently. Take time to understand the viewpoints of others whose perspectives may differ from yours and prepare to convey those messages in several different ways, depending upon the audience.

**Identify your objective.** Know what you want to accomplish in any presentation or interaction. What is the one point you want people to remember? Emphasize your key points throughout and ensure that how you present your information supports your strategic communications goals.

**Know your audience.** Depending upon your communications goals, you may be called upon to address physicians, patients, public officials, or other stakeholder groups. As you prepare for a presentation, it helps to ask, “Which of my talking points will resonate most with the audience?” Or, “What do the people in the audience want to know?”

**Prepare your elevator speech.** Create and memorize your own 15- to 20-second sound bite that introduces yourself and your role at the organization you are representing. Incorporate one to three key points about yourself and your organization. Be ready to expand on that initial sound bite with supporting messages that you customize for the audience and the occasion.

**Be personable.** You don’t need to check your personality at the door to be a credible spokesperson. Be yourself. Use your hands, gesture, smile while talking and demonstrate enthusiasm and respect. Be your most engaging self. Work to connect with the audience to whom you’re speaking – whether it’s one person or a room of 100 or more.

**Be prepared.** The best presenters are well-prepared and rehearse. Know your facts and be ready to offer proof points and documents that support your statements, if necessary. In the days before you make a presentation, take time to rehearse, preferably in front of a trusted adviser. Prepare answers to potential challenging questions.

**Tell your audience what’s in it for them.** Hook your audience by telling them why the information you are presenting is important to them. Whenever possible, convey messages in terms that show the benefits to the audience and the people most important to them.

**Build relationships.** Think of every conversation or presentation as an opportunity to build lasting relationships. Present your information in a way that makes it indispensable to the audience.

**Incorporate anecdotes.** Telling a story will strengthen your position as a credible spokesperson and help the audience gain a better understanding of your topic. Sharing anecdotes about real people also helps the audience relate to you on a more personal level.

**Have a call to action.** Tell your audience what you want them to do with the information you present to them. Show members of the audience what next steps they might take.

**Focus on your audience, not on your script.** Try to spend 90 percent of your time looking at and engaging with the audience.

**Be direct.** Short sentences are easier for audiences to understand. Direct, succinct sentences also will help prevent you from getting tangled in your own answers. This applies to your main point, as well. Say it up front. Don't save it for the end of a presentation or conversation.

**Watch your tone.** Audiences will pick up right away on your tone, so it's important to appear confident. Avoid words, tone and body language that others could read as defensive. Even if you don't have a good answer for a question, a measured, sure and friendly tone is always best.

**Avoid jargon.** Even if the audience is very experienced, they will better understand your points if you state them in simple language.

**Pivot when necessary.** Sometimes audience members will frame questions or comments about your presentation that carry biases and negativity that you want to re-shape or avoid. Your objective is to move away from the negative issue and create an opportunity to convey a positive key message. First, do not repeat the troublesome question. Instead, answer a small part of the question and reframe the issue in your preferred terms. For example: "As I see it, the real issue is this: (re-frame the question from a perspective that aligns with your position and key message)."

**Always "on the record."** Consider everything you say in any presentation "on the record." Because anyone with a cell phone can send your words viral in a matter of seconds, make sure that you stay on message. This is particularly important if you are representing your employer, or if your position may appear to conflict with that of your employer. Avoid any off-the-cuff commentary that others could interpret as critical to any individual or group, as well as any personal opinions that could reflect poorly on your employer.