



*at the Centre for Health Promotion
University of Toronto*

Strengthening Personal Presentations Workbook

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Core Skill One: Understand Your Audience	4
Core Skill Two: Have a Three-Point Plan	6
Core Skill Three: Use Support Materials Creatively.....	10
Core Skill Four: Make an Effective Delivery	12
Core Skill Five: Learn and Keep Improving	15
Useful Resources on Public Speaking	24
References.....	25
Appendix 1: Planning Your Presentation.....	27
Appendix 2: Personal Assessment Tool	28

Introduction

An effective presentation provides the audience with the information they seek in a stimulating manner so that they are inspired to act on the message. This workbook focuses on five core skills for achieving this.

The Five Core Skills

- 1. Understand Your Audience**
- 2. Have a Three Point Plan**
- 3. Use Support Materials Creatively**
- 4. Make an Effective Delivery**
- 5. Learn and Keep Improving**

Table 1: The Five Core Skills

Core Skill One

Understand Your Audience

Building a relationship with the audience can help make your presentation informative and useful. Doing this requires an understanding of the information needs, values, opinions and experiences of the people that you will be talking to.

There is one guiding principle that will help you tune in and truly connect with your audience:

Assume nothing!

Take the time to find out what the audience members really need and want from the presentation. Do not assume you already understand what is best for them.

Pre-presentation

There are a variety of things that you can do before and during a presentation to ensure that you understand your audience.

Define your audience as narrowly as possible. There will always be variation within a group. Identify the part of the audience that is most important to you and pitch your presentation to them.

Research your audience. Review trade publications, do Internet searches or mail a needs assessment form to your audience.

Speak to some of the people that will be at the presentation. These low-key interviews can expose some very useful information about the audience. If you are unable to speak directly to an audience member, try talking to someone who is close to your audience such as the organizer or coordinator of the presentation. But be careful! People who think they know your audience may mislead you. It is always better to rely on multiple information sources.

Imagine following a typical audience member through an average day. This will help you understand the audience member's needs, challenges and concerns.

Learn the audience's language. Avoiding unfamiliar jargon and using appropriate terminology shows that you have done your homework and will help you connect with the audience on a more personal level. You will find that your audience is more friendly and interested when you use appropriate language.

Incorporate your findings. As the presenter, it is your responsibility to research audience needs and tailor the presentation to those needs – even if you are using previously developed materials!

Greet the audience as they enter the room. This will help you understand the type of people you are speaking to and establish a rapport with the group.

During presentation

Be proactive in responding to audience's needs. If your audience seems to be getting distracted or uncomfortable, the problem may not be you. It could be room temperature, sight and sound distractions, etc. Try to solve the problem the moment it starts.

Provide opportunities for audience participation. Involve the audience from the start. For instance, solicit introductions from the participants instead of harping on your own credentials. Other participation techniques such as games or question and answer sessions may also be appropriate.

Note: Never call on someone who is not prepared to answer. This might be embarrassing for the individual.

Observe the audience for feedback. Watch the audience's body language and facial expressions. These are important sources of instant feedback on the progress of your presentation. Make special note of parts that seem to interest the audience and use this feedback to inform the rest of your presentation.

Core Skill Two

Have a Three-Point Plan

A noted speaker was asked the secret of his success as a speaker: "First," he said, "you write an exciting opening that will draw the attention of everyone in the room. Then you compose a dramatic summary and closing words that will leave the audience spellbound. Then," he advised, "You put them as close together as possible" (as told at <http://aerg.canberra.edu.au/edu12min.htm>).

In other words, once you know exactly how different you want the thoughts and actions of your audience to be after your interaction with them, you should develop a plan. You may be an expert in your field, but if you don't give shape to your thoughts you may end up giving a lecture instead of offering ideas. A three-point plan can help you present information in a coherent fashion and ensure that the core message is captured in a concise form.

A three-point plan consists of

- an **Opening**, where you tell them what you are going to tell them;
- a **Body**, where you tell them what you have to tell them; and
- a **Closing**, where you tell them what you've already told them.

The Opening

How will you get the group to pay special attention to what you have to say? Your opening is probably the most important part of your presentation as it sets the mood for the rest of your presentation. Here are some tips for making a strong opening.

Hook them in the first 90 seconds with an anecdote, prop or story.

Get to the point. In the first five minutes,

- State the objectives of your presentation in a way that tells the audience "what's in it for them."
- Give a brief overview of your main message. This way, you will have succeeded in conveying your message, even if an audience member leaves before your presentation ends.
- Present a brief outline of your complete presentation.

Explain why you chose to speak on this particular topic. Your presentation may be more persuasive when audiences realize that you are not talking to them just for the money.

Do not spend too much time in introducing yourself. Some professional speakers prepare an introduction that they ask to have read.

Do not open with an apology, a clichéd expression, a long statement or anything that is irrelevant to your speech. The audience needs to be reassured that listening to you will not be a waste of their time.

The Body

The bulk of the subject matter and related materials are presented in the body of your presentation. In the main body it is important to stay focused on one idea and a few supporting ideas. One useful way of organizing the body content is by using a **mind map**.

The mind rarely presents ideas in perfect order and sequence. A mind map allows you to list ideas as they come to you. A mind map can be used as a guide to create your formal outline.

To create a mind map,

1. Write your topic in the middle of a blank page.
2. When you think of a unifying theme, write it near the topic.
3. As ideas come to you, add on to your bottom line message, key supporting points, a strong opening idea and a strong close.
4. Add in all of the tools you will use – statistics, examples, stories, visuals, etc.
5. Use connecting lines and doodles.
6. Number the notes and doodles in the order you want to move through them when it is your turn to talk.
7. Double check to ensure that you are focused on one main idea and a few supporting ideas.
8. In more formal situations, transfer your rough mind map to a final organized version or to presentation cards.

The basic structure of a mind map is shown below.

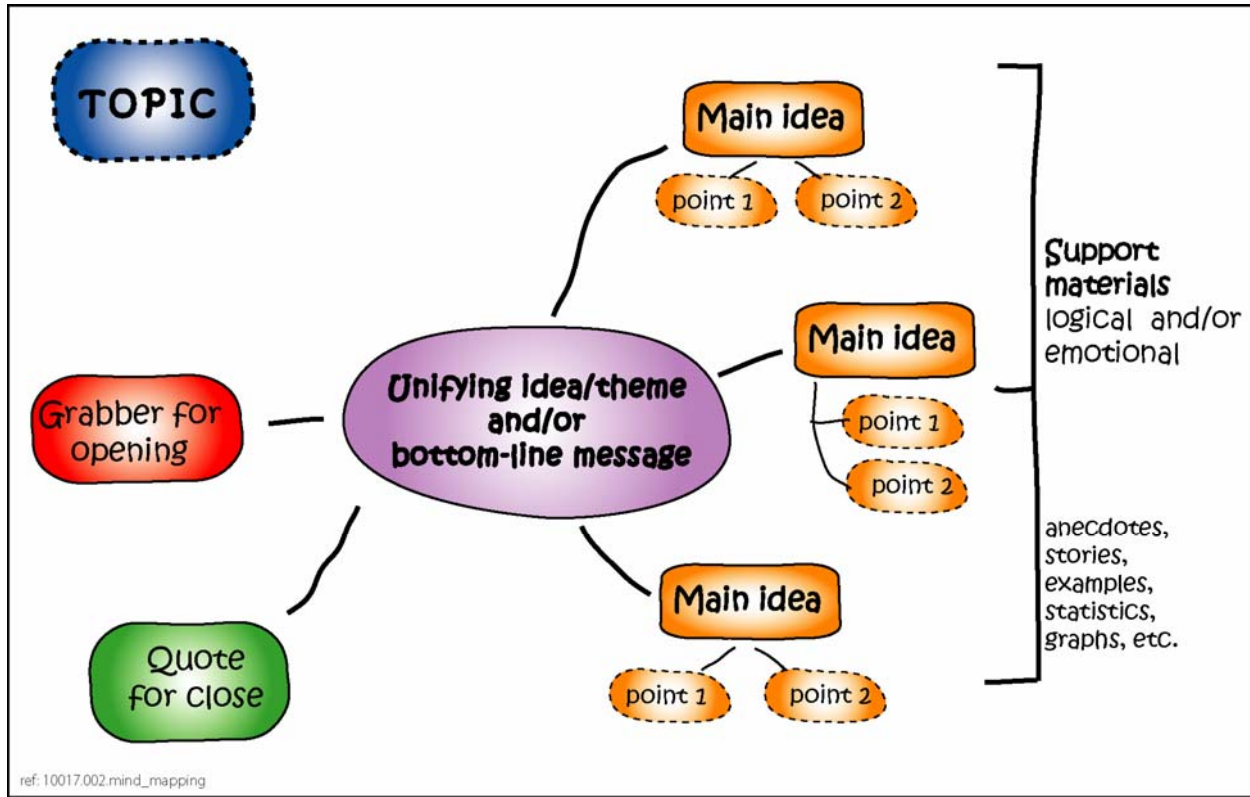


Diagram 1: Mind Map Structure

The Closing

Your closing statements are as important as your opening and should be strong and conclusive. Studies have shown that the first and last 30 seconds of a presentation make the most impact on an audience. Unlike printed materials that can be re-read, this is your last chance to reinforce your message and to leave a lasting impression on the audience. So, don't waste it with the clichéd "Thanks, I guess I am done" or "I guess that's all...any questions?" Use your final opportunity to make an impact more wisely.

Approaches to Making a Strong Close

Concisely restate what you already told them. The closing should relate to the opening. It may even be appropriate to repeat the opening and tell the audience what you already told them in a more conclusive way.

Make a call to action. This is your last chance to persuade or make your point. Give the audience something to think about or take away.

Reduce your point to a slogan, image or anecdote that the audience will easily remember.

Complete the story you started. If you started your presentation with a story, finish it in your closing with a thought-provoking or witty sentence.

Never apologize for running out of time. You knew ahead how much time you had. Calling attention to your lack of time management will only reflect poorly on your image.

Core Skill Three

Use Support Materials Creatively

Support materials may be visual or non-visual, but the point is always to make the presentation both lively and memorable by painting a picture. Indeed, "seeing is believing." A creative combination of support materials will also help your audience understand your ideas faster and more completely.

When choosing or creating support materials, ensure that they are **simple** and **relevant**. Support materials should be clear, easy to understand and obviously linked to your presentation content. Visuals in particular should be designed to convey with just once glance a message discussed in your presentation.

A good presentation properly **balances emotional and logical approaches**. Most good presentations include both, but the ideal balance will depend on your audience. A primarily logical approach should be analytical and highly organized and rely heavily on supporting evidence. A primarily emotional approach should be surprising, creative, and to an extent, unpredictable.

Materials to Strengthen the Emotional Component

Narrate stories of your own personal experiences. Audiences will not care about what you say until they see you care about the issue. However, make sure that the audience sees the relationship between your story and the point you are making, and avoid unnecessary detail and length.

Use relevant short statements such as quotations from historical figures and folk sayings. An interesting and witty quote can grab an audience's attention and help drive home the message instantly. Anecdotes can be very effective in conveying a message if they are interesting and relevant. (Visit http://www.motivational-inspirational-corner.com/motivational_inspirational_quotes.html and <http://www.bartleby.com> for quotes on different topics.)

Use highly descriptive stories and illustrations that evoke emotion. Use your words to create emotional dramas in the audience's minds.

The use of **music, tape-recorded voices, cartoons and powerful pictures** can also appeal to the emotional dimension of the audience's mind.

Testimonials can be very powerful especially when the audience member is able to identify with the person giving the testimony.

Materials to Strengthen the Logical Component

Use descriptive statistics, charts and graphs. Some people listen to numbers. Descriptive statistics explain things in terms of size and distribution. When used properly, these are very persuasive because they give the impression that they are the result of a thorough scientific study. Descriptive statistics can also be made visual using charts and graphs.

Use well-researched documents such as surveys, research reports, articles, studies and recommendations to prove your point. Facts and figures are verifiable units of information and will support your rational arguments.

Use local examples and case studies to demonstrate how your recommendations have worked and continue to work. Audiences are always interested in knowing what others in their position have done in similar situations.

Supplemental information in the form of handouts or worksheets that the audience can refer to during the presentation and take home as a guide is also useful.

Core Skill Four

Make an Effective Delivery

A very important thing your audience is expected to do during your presentation is to stay awake! As a presenter, your job is to present the audience with the information they seek in an entertaining and engaging manner. Entertainment does not mean distracting your audience from their everyday worries. Entertainment is about delivering your speech in a way that helps audiences remember and stay interested in what you have to say.

The following factors determine the effectiveness of your delivery.

Image – think about your dress, posture and the image that you are portraying. Audiences tend to assess these things to make judgments about you, particularly if they do not already know you, so be sure check out dress standards ahead of time. Better still, read up on image management!

Body language – use your body language to communicate how you feel. Movement keeps audiences awake! Try and synchronize your movements with the content. For instance, if you are making a strong point, you could take a step forward to show how strongly you feel about it. However, avoid making the same gestures repeatedly. It may be annoying to audiences who are looking at you all the time.

Energy level – avoid being laid back even when it is a small crowd. A common presenter mistake is to unconsciously lower their enthusiasm and energy levels when they are addressing a small number of people. Your audience, be it 5 or 20 people, needs to know that you care about them and not the numbers. So, energy up! – even with a small audience.

Use of your voice

- **Be loud and clear.** Work on your diction and pitch of your voice. Remember that you may have to compete with surrounding sounds, audience whispers and other distractions. You need to ensure that the audience hears every word of what you are saying. It doesn't hurt to actually check with them at the start of your presentation.
- **Vary the pitch of your voice.** A monotonous pitch can put people to sleep. Monotony also includes maintaining a high pitch throughout the presentation. You might make it difficult for people to sleep but may not be effective in being interesting and remembered.
- **Pace your delivery.** Don't be too fast or too slow. Speaking fast may be a sign of nervousness, while speaking too slow will bore the audience.

Use of silence

- **Pause after a key question to and from your audience.** A silent moment prior to answering questions or after posing questions gives the audience a moment to consider what you just said or understand what someone else asked. Give audiences at least 10 seconds to respond. Many people feel pressured to respond immediately to every question, but pausing for a few moments is a wiser thing to do. Pausing gives you a moment to channel your thoughts and ideas before you provide an answer.

- **Use pauses to punctuate your ideas.** The impact of what you say will be much greater and your audience will be able to absorb the information better.
- **Use of transitions.** Transitions give audiences a chance to proceed to the next topic. Transition opportunities include pausing and asking a question or using creative materials that will help lay the foundation for the subsequent section.

Use of speaker's notes – never read your presentation content. Talk to your audience about the topic. If audiences really wanted to read they could do it anywhere. Talking will also help you use plain language instead of complicated sentences.

Likeability – if people don't like you, they will not listen to you. Remember, audiences are very good at "turning people off" when a speaker is annoying, untrustworthy or emotionally inert.

- **Use humor appropriately.** It's hard to dislike a person who makes you laugh. But humor should be exercised with caution so as not to offend anyone. Avoid telling generic jokes or humorous stories. Instead, build humour into your examples. For instance, you could relive an embarrassing moment, but ensure that the audience laughs with you, not at you! *Note: Do not overdo humour. There should only be two or three instances of humour in a 15–20 minute presentation.*
- **Show your humanity** by telling stories about emotional and humorous situations in everyday life. Many speakers feel strongly about the topic but turn cold when asked to give a speech. Remember, audiences like and will listen to a speaker who shows enthusiasm, dedication and emotion through the presentation.
- **Avoid frequent references to your credentials.** Audiences do not like arrogant speakers who keep reiterating their expertise.

Level of personal connection with the audience

- **Make eye contact** with multiple audience members and spend time looking at the audience. Looking into the eye shows confidence and is a sign that you are trustworthy. Wandering eyes can be a sign of nervousness and looking down may be construed as trying to figure out what's next.
- **Do not ignore one side of the audience.** It is very easy to focus all of your attention on one section of the audience – perhaps there is a friendly face in that section or perhaps that section is more attentive. At the beginning, you may do this to feed your confidence but then gradually extend your energy across the room.
- **Face the audience.** Do not hide behind the computer. The audience needs to see you to reinforce their view of you as an expert, leader, communicator and moderator.
- **Use names.** When you address an audience member by their name, you not only come across as a friendly person but also as someone who actually knows the audience.

Finish without rushing.

Core Skill Five

Learn and Keep Improving

The process of learning is perennial. All presenters, whether experienced or not, must constantly make an effort to acquire new skills and refine existing presentation skills. Here are few tips to deliver an effective presentation every single time.

Emulate successful speakers. Sometimes you will be amazed at how much you could learn by just observing an excellent speaker. While watching experienced presenters don't just listen to what they say; also pay attention to what they do, how they move, how they sound and how they organize their thoughts.

Keep track of your time. You could split your content into two-minute chunks or be aware of your words per minute (WPM). The only way to make sure that you follow your time limit is by rehearsing your speech as many times as you can. Exceeding your time limit will be proof of lack of practice.

Practice your presentation in its entirety. Don't just practice your talk. If you get a chance, you should rehearse using the materials and the equipment that you'd be using for your presentation. If you are ordering equipment, ensure that the equipment arrives early enough for you to troubleshoot technical problems.

Always arrive early for your presentation. Arriving early gives you the opportunity to get comfortable with the room and the technical details and lets you greet the audience members as they walk in. Knowing your audience and the room in advance will boost your confidence levels.

Be your own critic. Practice in front of the mirror or video-tape yourself. Alternatively, you could also ask your friends and peers to offer constructive criticism.

Learn from the audience. Be open to obtaining insights from the audience and use this information to enhance the rest of your presentation.

Worksheets

1. *Core Skill One: Understand Your Audience*
2. *Core Skill Two: Have a Three-Point Plan*
3. *Core Skill Three: Use Support Materials Creatively*
4. *Core Skill Four: Make an Effective Delivery*
5. *Core Skill Five: Learn and Keep Improving*

Core Skill One: Understand Your Audience

Tuning Into Your Audience

1. Take a few minutes and identify the different audiences that you will be talking to.

2. Write down what you know about the audience's routine activities, concerns and probable challenges that relate to your topic.

3. Identify two things that already exist in the audience's minds and hearts that will support your message.

4. Identify two things that already exist in audience's minds and hearts that will oppose your message.

5. Identify at least two sources that can provide additional information about your audience.

Core Skill Two: Have a Three-Point Plan

Making a Strong Opening

1. Decide which techniques (e.g., anecdote, prop, story) you will use to hook your audience in the first 90 seconds. Describe it below.

2. Give a brief overview of your main message.

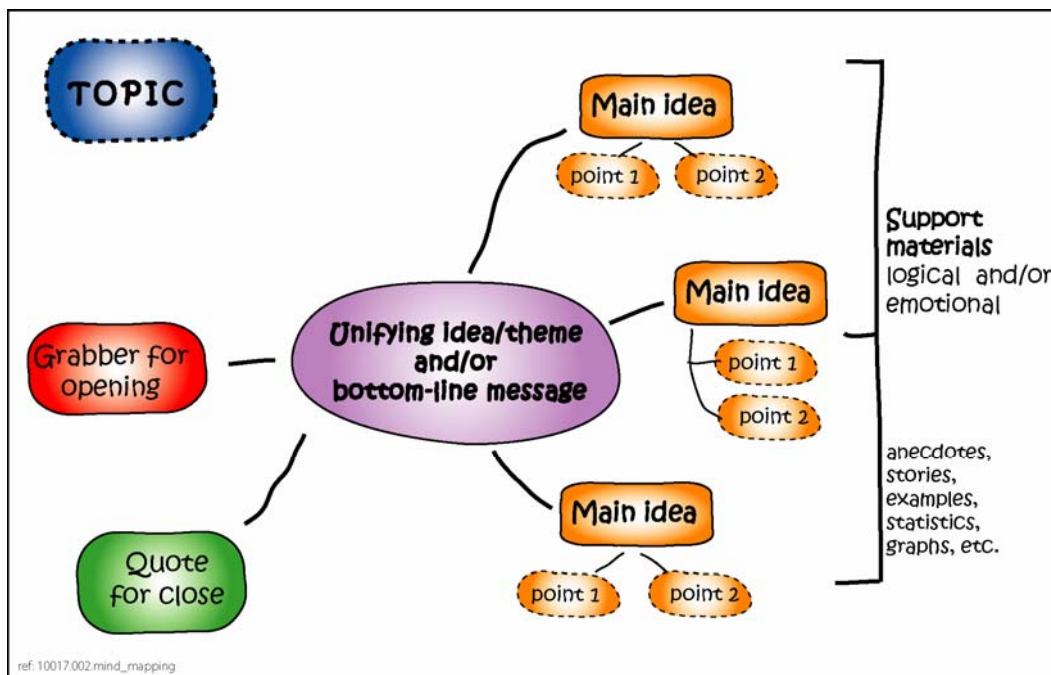
3. Write the objectives of your presentation.

4. Explain why you chose to speak or will be speaking on the topic.

Using a Mind-Map

Think of a topic for a practice presentation, and create a mind map based on the model given below:

1. Write your topic in the middle of a blank page.
2. When you think of a unifying theme, write it near the topic.
3. As ideas come to you, add on to your bottom line message, key supporting points, a strong opening idea and a strong close.
4. Add in all of the tools you will use – e.g., stats, examples, stories, visuals.
5. Use connecting lines and doodles.
6. Number the notes and doodles in the order you want to move through them when it is your turn to talk.
7. Double check to ensure that you are focused on one main idea and a few supporting ideas.



Making a Strong Close

1. Decide which technique (e.g., concisely restate main point, make a call to action, reduce main point to a slogan, complete the story you started) you will use to close your presentation. Describe it below.

Core Skill Four: Make an Effective Delivery

Develop a practice presentation and record it on videotape if possible or on an audiotape. Observe and/or listen to yourself for the following:

1. What image are you portraying through dress and posture?
2. Is your body language enthusiastic?
3. Is your energy level high?
4. Is your voice loud and clear?
5. Do you have signature gestures or facial expressions that you are using too often?
6. Do you vary the pitch of your voice throughout your presentation?
7. Are you going too fast or too slow?
8. Are you using effective transitions?
9. Are you reading from your notes, or talking to your audience?
10. Are you pausing at "strategic" moments?
11. Are you making eye contact with the audience?
12. Did you finish without rushing?

Notes for future improvement

Useful Resources on Public Speaking

To view some great resources on public speaking, please access the below THCU webpage:

<http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/Step8MessageDevelopment.htm>

You will find the links under "Relevant Websites" on this page.

Great Canadian Speeches is a wonderful collection of over 60 of the greatest speeches in Canadian history. More details about the book are available at

<http://www.fedpubs.com/subject/refer/speeches.htm>

The American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speechbank.htm>) includes some of the greatest American speeches of all times.

The computerized speech writer available at <http://www.school-for-champions.com/speaking/autowrite.htm> is an online course in public speaking and helps a speaker to create a presentation.

This site (www.speeches.com) includes several examples of special occasion, business and persuasive speeches, and also provides an instant speech builder for those who want to create their own speech.

References

The following articles and books were consulted in the development of this resource and are recommended as additional reading.

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Appendix 1: Planning Your Presentation

INTRO

Grabber	Theme	Plan

BODY

Main Point 1	Main Point 2	Main Point 3

CLOSE

Summarize	Grabber	Call to Action

Appendix 2: Personal Assessment Tool

Please consider how often you do the following and circle the appropriate number on the scale provided below each question.

1. Define your audience	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
2. Get information on what the audience thinks/feels about the topic prior to the presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
3. Prior to presenting, talk to someone who has worked with the audience in the past, or to someone who will attend the presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
4. Incorporate the findings about your audience into your presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
5. Greet audience as they enter the room on the day of the presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
6. Provide opportunities for the audience to participate during your presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
7. Observe the audience body language and behaviour throughout your presentation to assess how you are doing as a presenter.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
8. Know exactly how different you want the thoughts and actions of your audience to be after your interaction with them.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
9. Use a technique such as a joke, a strong visual image, a quick anecdote, or a prop to 'hook' the audience in the first 90 seconds of your presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
10. State your objectives early in the presentation, answering the audience question "what's in it for me?"	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
11. Give a brief overview of your main message in the first five minutes of your presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
12. Give a brief outline of your entire presentation, in the first five minutes.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
13. Stay focused on one idea and a few supporting ideas during your presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
14. Summarize your theme and key supporting points at the end of your presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
15. Make a call to action in the final few seconds.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
16. Use a slogan, image or anecdote at the end of your presentation that leaves the audience with a powerful emotional reminder of why your message is important.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always

17. End strongly without apologizing.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
18. Use techniques such as stories, quotes, music, cartoons, pictures or testimonials to convey your message in an emotional way.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
19. Use techniques such as descriptive statistics, charts, graphs, well-researched documents, local examples or case studies to convey your message in a logical way.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
20. Dress according to accepted standards for the event.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
21. Let your body language show how you really feel.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
22. Avoid repetitive gestures.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
23. Keep energy level high, regardless of the size of the audience.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
24. Be loud and clear throughout the entire presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
25. Vary the pitch of your voice throughout the presentation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
26. Use pauses after questions and key ideas to add emphasis.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
27. Talk to your audience, rather than you're your notes.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
28. Show your humanity by telling stories about touching and humorous situations in everyday life.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
29. Make eye contact with your audience.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
30. Finish on time without rushing.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
31. Practice the presentation in its entirety.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always
32. Get feedback about your presentation from your colleagues and/or from videotapes.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	Always