

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU PRESENT

Karen De Mauro's Ten Tips for Winning Presentations

Delivery matters as much as content. Content is what you say, your information, facts, and big ideas. Delivery is how you say it, how you phrase and sequence your content, the sound of your voice, and the underlying intention you emit.

Practice out loud and standing up. Get your body used to the athletic demands of right-sized volume, comfortable stance, and focused attention. Presenting is a physical act that requires practice. And practice giving your speech to another person, a colleague, a spouse, or a coach.

Use vocal variety. Break long sentences into short phrases of 6-8 words. Think "news anchor phrasing" so you don't come across like a talking encyclopedia. The ears cannot process compound sentences. Avoid vocal patterns like singsong rhythm, end-dropping sentences, and "Johnny one note" patterns like whining, selling, insisting, and fake enthusiasm.

Find a "home base" position so your body language doesn't distract from your content. Anchor one or both hands by resting them on a podium or table, to prevent random gestures. Ground your feet by placing them shoulder width apart and place one foot slightly forward to prevent swaying.

Learn and practice your beginning (the hook or grabber), your most important moment (the highpoint), and end (the closer) by heart, but don't attempt to memorize the whole speech. When you actually give your presentation, blend rehearsed and formal moments with conversational ones.

Keep your focus on your audience and conduct their attention. Show them where to look (at you, at the screen, at colleagues, etc.) by being a good spatial traffic cop. Do not simply glue your gaze to your laptop, rivet on them, or read off the screen. Practice a well-timed, fluid visual ping-pong back and forth.

Section the audience when you are in a large hall into right, left and center areas with yourself as the apex of a vector that extends out from the podium or stage. When presenting at a table, be sure you have the possibility of eye contact with everyone at the table and in the room. For audiences of over 500 divide the hall into six sections, three at the front and three in the back. Alternate sweeping your gaze over the whole hall, with "landing" on one person in each section.

When you write think in headlines that use active verbs that engage your listeners. Use visual, auditory, and kinesthetic language. For example, invite your audience in with phrases like: "Imagine that . . .(visual)"; "What this sounds like is . . ." (auditory); and "My gut response to this is . . ." (kinesthetic).

Condense and contextualize stories into anecdotes. Ask yourself “what’s the point” of this story for these people in this context”. Make the point of each illustrative story and example explicit; connect the dots for your audience.

With factual information readily available online, live presentation demands that you constantly ask yourself “Why me, why live, why now?” Actively engage people in the kinds of relationships, conversations, and Q & A’s that are most effective “in person”.

www.theactingcenter.com / KAREN DE MAURO / 421 WEST 24th ST., #5D, NY, NY 10011 / karendemauro@earthlink.net