



Engaging the Audience

Being a presenter often means speaking to audiences for 20 minutes or longer on information that is sometimes dense, complex and uninspiring. These difficulties can make any presentation a challenge for the audience to pay attention. As many have seen time and time again, if a talk doesn't engage the attention of the audience, then they will start to feel distanced from the speaker, lose track of the structure of information and eventually fail to understand key concepts and key ideas.

To engage an audience fully, the presenter needs to have a wide array of skills and tools at their disposal. Below we will be covering a few ways to engage an audience and make sure that your message and voice is heard.

Tips for engaging your audience in the first 20 seconds

First impressions are always important. This is as much true in relationships as in public speaking. Below are 3 tips to make a strong first impression as a speaker and engage your audience right from the beginning.

1. Presence

- If you are speaking, presenting or communicating in an environment you need to understand that people will judge your credibility even before you speak. This judgement will be based on things such as; how you are dressed and how confident you look. Make sure that if you are presenting or speaking you give off an air of calm confidence. Let your body language be open, dress for that environment, have a smile on your face and get excited to speak.

2. Approach

- If you are called up to speak at the front of the room, then make sure you walk confidently to the front of the speaking area. Stand tall, have your arms at your sides, shoulders back and walk slowly to the speaking area. As you walk to the front of the room smile and enjoy the prelude to your talk.

3. The beginning

- Once you have assumed the front of the room or speaking environment take at least 5-10 seconds to relax. Do not begin speaking until your audience has locked attention on you and you have made eye contact with 2-4 people in the room. This will give you an air of confidence and create a bit of positive tension before you begin talking.





More tips for engaging your audience

1. Eye contact

- Eye contact is a form of non-verbal communication that can create one on one conversations during our presentations, which lead to more audience engagement. The best way to effectively use eye contact is to hold a person's gaze for 3-5 seconds or for an idea or sentence.

2. Transfer of state

- Our audience experiences the same emotional state that we are in. This means that if you are feeling nervous or don't want to be speaking, the audience will experience those emotions too. If you want to engage your audience and show them a great time try to feel passion, excitement and have fun.

3. Questions

- Asking your audience questions ("how many of you have experienced this?") during your presentation will help your audience to relate the material to themselves. This will get them thinking about their own life experience and cause them to become engaged.

4. Shocking facts

- These will engage your audience because it is something that they probably have not heard before or is challenging their beliefs. Ex. Turn to your left, now turn to your right, only one of you will pass this class.

5. Visualization

- Getting your audience to visualize something will allow them to use imagery to either learn a new concept ("I want you to picture ____") or using visualization to get them to think about something they have already experienced ("I want you picture someone in your life who is an inspiration").

6. Pictures

- Having pictures that are interesting, funny or inspiring can help the audience to become engaged and perhaps evoke certain emotions.

7. Flip charts

- You can get the audience to answer questions and write it down on the flip chart in front of them. Alternatively, you can use the flip chart to sketch an image or diagram.

