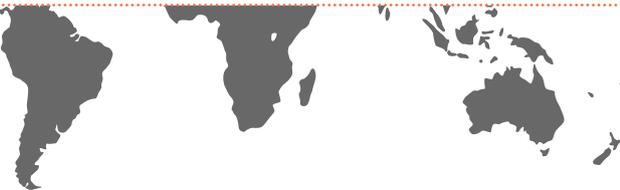




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## 5 KEY STEPS TO DELIVER A GOOD PRESENTATION

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Giving a formal presentation, whether it is a pitch for a donor, a conference speech or an update to colleagues, can be a terrifying experience. In fact in many surveys you will find fear of public speaking in the top five phobias (and in most cases it rates above the fear of death).

The good news is that it does not need to be like that; by just following a few simple rules you can feel differently about the task and, with practice, even get to the stage where you enjoy the challenge. The idea is not to get rid of the nerves altogether as this keeps us alert, but to remain in control of them and become a confident public speaker.

### 1. Purpose

Before you start to plan, take a little time to think about your audience and the key messages that you want them to go away with at the end of your presentation. This will give you focus and help you to remain on topic.

Remember that the audience does not possess the capacity to retain all of the information contained in your presentation but will just remember a couple of key messages if you manage to emphasise them.

A common error is trying to say too much. I was once asked to give a 15 minute presentation at an EU conference. We were asked to focus on how we ensured that the learning from our work reached other organisations. The speaker before me was stopped after 25 minutes, during which he had described the work of his project in great detail, but not touched on the topic he was meant to cover!

Hence keep your explanation short and to the point so you do not risk boring people. Do not swamp them with unnecessary detail; use simple language. Avoid technical jargon unless you are sure that everyone understands it.



## 2. Preparation

You may wonder why I have bothered to mention this, of course you will prepare for your presentation and will have probably spent hours ensuring that you have the hand-outs and audio-visuals to impress your audience. However flashy PowerPoint presentations and lots of paper will not help you if you haven't planned your messages properly.

Keep it simple and make sure that you have had the chance to run through what you are going to say. It is all very well having planned it in your head, but saying it out loud means that your words have to go through a different thought process. Initially you will probably find it uncomfortable speaking to an empty room but you will get used to it after a while.

Going through this practice will make you feel more confident and positive, and your audience will certainly notice it.

## 3. Breathing

This is the most natural thing in the world to us; that is until we are under stress! It is very common for us to hold our breath when we are anxious and that means your brain isn't getting the oxygen it needs to remain alert.

Proper breathing techniques have the added bonus of calming our nervous system and relaxing us, as well as stopping us from talking so fast that our audience can't keep up.

If you don't breathe you risk not being able to use your voice effectively, and often, by breathing in the wrong place, the audience find it more difficult to get the meaning of your words.

Good speakers take things slowly which allows them to manage their tone of voice and use intonation to add emphasis.

## 4. Body Language

Many people that I work with are astounded to find out that only 7% of our face-to-face communication is attributed to the words that we say. Over half of how our message is received is through our body language such as gesticulation and eye contact. Confident speakers stand up in a comfortable position, use few but well market gestures that add meaning to their words, and keep constant eye contact with their audience.

Remember that your audience is there because they want to hear what you are going to say.



## 5. Display interest and enthusiasm.

How many of you have already listened to speeches or presentations where the speaker seemed to be extremely bored about the content of his or her speech?

The communicator who is enthusiastic, energetic and genuinely interested in both the subject and getting his or her message across will evoke the greatest response from the audience. The presenter who lacks interest in the presentation, who has little or no enthusiasm for the subject and who merely goes through the motions of presentation in a mechanical way is a failure.

Make your explanations as colourful as possible, using examples to illustrate your point. Introduce humour, if you can do so effectively (forced humour may be counter-productive, and too much humour may be damaging).

Above all, be yourself. There is no one right presentation style, just techniques for helping you to find the way that you are comfortable with conveying the messages. Some of these will come naturally to you and others you may need to work at, but one thing is for sure the only way to become a good speaker is to take the opportunities to deliver presentation.

Remember the people that you admire as presenters will still have nerves before hand; they are just good at managing them. Watch them and learn from them but don't measure yourself against them. Be kind to yourself and focus on what went well before looking at the areas that you want to improve.

### About the author:

Sarah Lang is working as a communications trainer at inProgress. She is equally at home with engaging clients in small group work, as she is with lecturing at university level, delivering speeches at conferences, or presenting project learning at UN events. Sarah has extensive experience of partnership working, consultation with government on service design and mainstreaming learning from pilot projects in the UK and throughout Europe.

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