

Public Speaking and Making Presentations

Whether you're giving a presentation to your classmates, debating an issue or delivering a speech, following these easy hints can up your chances of wowing your audience or scoring some brownie points with your teacher.

As you go through school, public speaking and presentations become increasingly important and can actually count for a large portion of your final grade!

Your speeches will leave a lasting impression on both your teacher and your classmates; therefore, it is essential you learn how to effectively present on virtually any topic. After all, as your presentation skills improve, so will your grades.

Whether you're giving a presentation to your classmates, debating an issue or delivering a speech, following these easy hints can up your chances of wowing your audience or scoring some brownie points with your teacher. With practice, you'll develop skills that will last a lifetime.

Starting Points

Don't just jump blindly into creating your presentation; ask yourself the purpose of the presentation and what you'd like your classmates to learn. The next step is to determine if your audience knows about the subject you will be covering. If you are unsure, it's a good idea to stay on the safe side and provide an in-depth background description.

** Brownie Points Tip #1:*

Always remain one step ahead of your audience. Put yourself in their shoes and think of any questions they might ask you.

Collect Information

Now that your presentation is on the right track, research facts to support your topic. Keep in mind that you should only provide information relevant to your topic otherwise, you might overwhelm your audience or lose their interest! On the other hand, too little information can leave the audience puzzled and they might not understand your presentation. Basically, you must have a good balance of information supporting your topic.

** Brownie Points Tip #2:*

Pay special attention to the opening and closing of your presentation. Your classmates and teacher are most likely to remember these sections.

Visual Aids

You've probably heard of the expression a picture is worth a thousand words. Whether you give each student a handout or display visual aids for everyone to see, a visual prop is a great way to get your point across clearly, quickly and vividly.

Visual aid options include:

Computer presentation software (e.g. PowerPoint)

Using dry erase boards or blackboards

Poster boards / collages

Charts

Practice, Practice, Practice

If your teacher or a classmate asks a question, you should always be prepared. Before any presentation, make sure you know your topic well. Take the time to really learn the material, rather than trying to memorize key facts all at once. In case you get stuck during your presentation, make sure you have a backup. Prepare index cards that outline your main speaking points.

Practice your presentation in front of a friend or family member. You'll feel comfortable in front of them and they can help you work out the kinks. If no one can help you, practice in front of the mirror and make eye contact with yourself.

Deliver an A Presentation

Know your material well

Maintain a confident and relaxed appearance

Speak slowly and clearly

Utilize helpful visual aids

Make significant eye contact

Use colorful language

Create smooth transitions from point to point

Dress appropriately for your presentation

What to Avoid

A presentation no-no is anything that distracts and disturbs the audience, including extravagant hand gestures, excessive shifting or clicking your pen. If you catch yourself making any of these presentation mistakes, gently clasp your hands together and keep your weight distributed evenly between both feet.

Additionally, your audience might get distracted if you use too many filler words, such as like, you know or uh. Regardless of the speaking environment, always make an effort to avoid such words.

Relax and Be Yourself

It's hard to control nerves sometimes, but try to enjoy your presentation. If you're having fun, so will your audience. If it is appropriate, crack a joke or tell a funny story to lighten the mood.

Most importantly, be yourself and deliver the information in your own language, your audience will appreciate it! If you speak in a different tone or use complicated words, you risk tripping yourself up. If you know your topic well, you will feel more comfortable speaking in front of the class.

If you find yourself getting tense, nervously giggling or stuttering, there are ways to decrease anxiety. If you start speaking too quickly, take deep breaths and slow down your speaking pace. If you have a friend in the classroom, make eye contact with him / her. To ensure you don't feel nervous in front of your classmates, pretend they're dressed in funny costumes, such as a chicken suit. It'll distract you from nervousness.

Tips for Writing Reports and Presentations

When submitting a written version of your report or presentation, follow these guidelines to set yourself apart from your classmates:

An impactful opening

Grab your teachers attention with a captivating quote or a humorous, personal story

Bullet points

Use bullet points rather than lengthy paragraphs

Referencing

Plagiarism is a serious offense at many schools, so always cite the information. If you don't know how to properly source, ask a librarian or teacher for help

Conclusion

This is the main part of your presentation. Use this opportunity to sell your idea and point of view to your instructor.

** Brownie Point Tip #3:*

Make a good impression and help your project stand out from the crowd. Put your best foot forward and consider using report cover that will display your hard work (and help provide protection from the occasional soda spill!).

Whenever you give a speech, refer to these tips. Remember, great public speakers aren't made overnight, presenting skills are developed over time with practice. With a little elbow grease, you can become a top-notch public speaker!