

# HOW TO BE ENGAGING IN YOUR LIVE PRESENTATION

Presenting is easy; it only gets hard when you want to be good at it.

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION ENGAGING

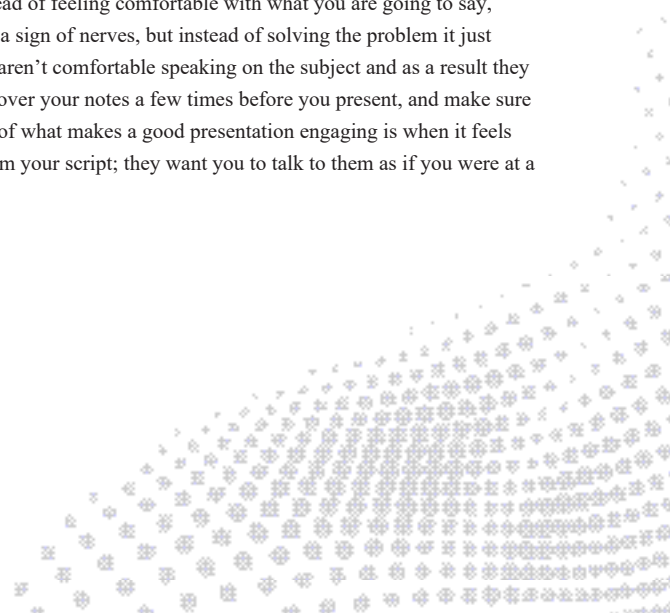
Being able to create a strong, engaging presentation isn't an easy task. There are a thousand things to consider, from the topic, to the gear you'll need, to the medium you'll use to present the topic. The one thing that shouldn't be a problem is whether or not you're able to make the presentation engaging; yet for a lot of people, this is the biggest challenge. Being able to present in an engaging fashion isn't difficult to do, and with the five simple steps you can be on your way to hosting gripping presentations.

### STEP 1: KNOW THE SUBJECT

The first and most important part of live presentations is making sure you know your subject, and we aren't just talking about a cursory glance at a Wikipedia page or LinkedIn. Part of the draw of a live presentation is that an expert – the presenter – is breaking down a subject in an entertaining fashion. Everyone is capable of using Google to answer their questions but Google doesn't offer the same interactive knowledge and experiences that can be gleaned from an expert. By ensuring you are well versed in whatever subject you're going to be discussing, you not only allow yourself to be prepared for any potential questions that may come up, but you create an environment where you are comfortable speaking on the subject; even adding in anecdotes from your own experiences. It's when you find that kind of comfort level on a subject that people will find you more approachable, more knowledgeable, and they will seek your advice. Part of what makes a presentation enjoyable is when it feels less like a lecture and more like a peer or mentor explaining something directly to you.

### STEP 2: DON'T OVER REHEARSE

Being knowledgeable is important, but equally important is that you don't over-rehearse what you are going to say. Think back to a time where you had to give a speech or had to listen to one. You probably heard the speaker stumble, as if they were trying to remember what they wrote down. This is what happens when you practice what you are going to say too much. Instead of feeling comfortable with what you are going to say, you end up memorizing it. Often times this is just a sign of nerves, but instead of solving the problem it just exacerbates it. To your audience it looks like you aren't comfortable speaking on the subject and as a result they feel uncomfortable listening to you. Instead, read over your notes a few times before you present, and make sure you have a gist of what it is you want to say. Part of what makes a good presentation engaging is when it feels natural. Your audience doesn't want you to preform your script; they want you to talk to them as if you were at a table together having a casual conversation.



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## STEP 3: IGNORE THE MIC

In keeping with the theme of casual conversation, you need to learn to ignore the fact that there is a microphone in your face. When you pay attention to the mic you lose your focus. Instead of sounding natural you sound forced. Some people change the tone of their voice, and others become nervous. All of this goes away with enough practice, but the easiest way to be comfortable in front of the microphone is to forget that you are speaking into a microphone. Instead focus on the person you are speaking to. By training your eyes to act like you're participating in a normal conversation you will train the rest of your body to follow suit.



## STEP 4: BE YOURSELF

One of the biggest problems people have when they get on camera or in front of a microphone is that they forget to be themselves. They put on a persona, trying to be who they think the audience wants them to be. Whether that's an anchor, a professor, or a radio host, it all comes across as unnatural. The same way you can tell when someone is trying too hard to be cool, your audience can tell when you are trying to put on a persona, and in both cases the results are the same. Instead of achieving your desired persona your audience will dismiss you because they realize that's not who you actually are. In order to be engaging you need to convey your personality, and the only way to do that is by being yourself.

## STEP 5: MAKE IT A CONVERSATION

Once you've got the first four steps down you'll be miles ahead of where you began, but the biggest thing you can do to make your presentations more engaging is to make them more conversational. People want to feel like they are part of a conversation, and if you can manage that then your audience will be much more engaged. A few ways to do that are:



- Interject. You wouldn't be afraid to interrupt your friend if you disagreed, don't be afraid to do it here
- Avoid question-answer style presentations. The formula of "I ask a question, you answer, repeat" is tired and boring. Instead treat it like a conversation, as a question and then follow the answers wherever it takes you. Bring up a point answering a question that hasn't been asked, and continue the conversation from there.
- Involve your personal experiences. People use anecdotes in casual conversation all the time. Don't be afraid to share some personal stories during your presentations.
- Don't be afraid to explore new conversations that may come up during your conversation. Unless you're on a strict presentation plan, there's no harm from venturing off topic and it typically leads to "real" moments that show off your personality and gets your audience engaged. Don't forget you can always circle back to the main topic.

Live presentations are some of the best ways to engage your audience as well as get your name, and your content, out there. Don't let your presentation skills be the reason you are unable to get valuable information out to your customers.

# BE ENGAGING IN YOUR LIVE PRESENTATION

## HOW TO PROPERLY PRODUCE A LIVE PRESENTATION

Now that we've spent all that time going over how to be engaging in a live production it's time we throw all of that out the window. The most difficult part of creating a good live production is dealing with the idea that the discussion content is largely irrelevant. Your audience may be interested that you have a unique topic, or perhaps they want to get advice from an expert in the field, but unless your show is polished and well produced, they won't care. Compare Neil Degrasse Tyson to some of the other leading astrophysicists. Tyson is exceptionally bright, but he isn't the leader of his field, yet the average person would rather listen to him over his peers. The difference is that Tyson's a polished speaker, his presentations aren't dry and filled with jargon; they're engaging.

So how do you get to that stage with your productions? You start in the studio, long before the production ever happens.

### STEP 1: SOUND

Even the most interesting topics are annoying to listen to if the sound quality isn't there. Making sure your studio is outfitted with high-quality microphones is essential to a good production.

#### CHOOSING A MICROPHONE

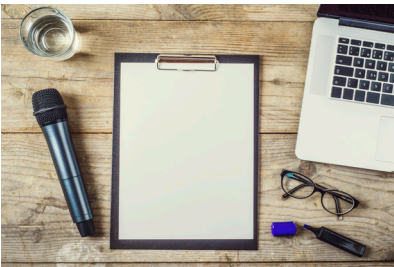
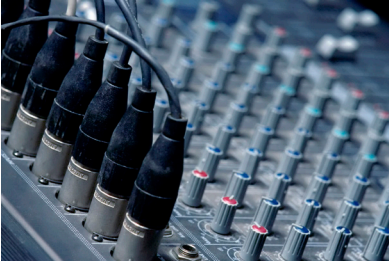
More than likely you are going to be using a studio microphone, but there are a couple of different options and a lot of things to consider, to make sure you get the best sound. The first thing you need to consider when choosing a microphone is whether you want it to be a condenser mic, or a dynamic mic. A condenser will give you much crisper audio, but it will pick up a lot of background noise, such as a panelist clearing their throat, or coughing. A dynamic mic will give your speaker a warmer sound, but will eliminate most of the background noise by only picking up sound directly in front of the mic.

The second thing to consider is whether or not you are going to use XLR mics or USB mics. Those using an XLR cable will give you much better sound quality but will require an additional power source, as well as a sound board to adjust the levels. These will be your best options in the long run, but for companies working with a smaller budget a USB mic might be more appropriate. One thing to consider is that most USB microphones are condenser mics. Here's a [list](#) of some of the better mics out there

If your production is going to incorporate live video, you may not want people to feel like they are watching a radio show. If that's the case you may want to use a lavalier microphone, or lav mic (also called a lapel mic).

Lav mics are nice in that they are small, discreet, and will make people who are uncomfortable speaking into a microphone forget that they are being recorded. It helps keep the conversation natural and doesn't obstruct the audience's view. They aren't without their downsides however. Lav mics are usually dynamic mics so if you wanted to use a condenser you may be out luck. They also come in wired, and wireless versions, a choice that you will have to make depending on how your studio is set up. Audio quality shouldn't be a factor here, wireless lavs are still very clean, however the price increases significantly if you decide to go wireless. It may be expensive but the [Sennheiser EW 100](#) is one of the best wireless systems out there, and is our go-to lav.

If you don't think that a lav mic is for you, then your other option is a boom mic. A boom mic is a directional microphone that is extended above (or below) the shot. One thing to keep in mind is that with a boom mic you don't have the same level of control in post-production or control over real time levels for individual speakers.



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## POST PRODUCTION

A great mic is only half the battle for good audio, the second step involves a little post-production. After your production you'll want to go back and clean up any hiccups that may have happened during the show (a panelist lost their place, someone coughed, etc.). To do this you're going to need an audio editing software. Adobe Audition is one of the best products out there for this, but if your company is on a budget the free software Audacity can perform most of the same healing touches. One thing to keep in mind when creating your audio set up is to make sure you can record each panelist on a separate track. This will make post production editing much more precise.



## STEP 2: LIGHTING

If you're creating an audio on presentation this portion doesn't apply you, but for the rest of you who are using live video of your panelists in your production it's critical you have proper lighting. A well-lit video is the difference between something looking professional, and your production looking like it was thrown together in a rush, and recorded on someone's camcorder.

The key to lighting is to have numerous sources, from different angles. You want to have light coming at a 45° angle to the subject(s) from both sides as well as a softer overhead light. If you're shooting against a backdrop or green screen, you'll want separate lights for that. Two lights at a 45° angle that evenly cover the backdrop are perfect. To avoid your talent's shadow on the backdrop make sure they stand roughly 6' away from the backdrop. There are a wide variety of lights you can use, but you want to make sure they are either full spectrum lights or daylight CFL bulbs. Tungsten bulbs typically are too orange and don't mesh with natural lighting.

## STEP 3: A HOST

As important as it is to have good equipment, and informed speakers, your panelists are still going to get nervous from time to time. They may not be comfortable opening the presentation, or transitioning from topic to topic, or they may simply have stage fright. That's where your host comes in. Having a dedicated person to keep the show on time, transition smoothly, and open and close the show is vital to creating a smooth production. On top of that you'll want someone that does a good job of connecting with people so that they can immediately draw the audience in when the show starts, or calm your speakers before they get going. No matter how much preparation you have, or what equipment you buy, a show is lost without a host.



## IT'S THAT EASY

Putting on a live show is easy. You get in the studio, talk for a little while, and then you're done. Simple as pie. Putting on a well-produced live show that captivates your audience, and brings them back for future shows, well that's a little more difficult; but with the right equipment, knowledgeable, comfortable speakers, and a captivating host, you can be on your way to creating high quality live productions in no time. For more information on how to be a great host check out our blog on how to master the art of the interview.