

# **Jerry's top ten presentation tips**

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# How to stand up and present: A few points for beginners...

If you have prepared a six month analysis of the criminal milieu it will be a real shame to stand up in front of the boss or a colleague and look like a bit of a dork. Alas this does happen to many in both the fields of intelligence and academia. Now I'm not making any claims to being a great presenter myself, but I have gathered these tips for your benefit. You don't have to use them, but most of them are garnered from personal experience of presenting myself and being subjected to the dire presentations of some others. If you have seen me present, then all I can say it 'do as I say, not as I do'!

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## Ten tips for a top talk!

### Tip 1: First impressions count

It is refreshing to know that you can lose the interest of your audience before you even start talking. The first 7 seconds or so are vital, and if your manner in the first 30 seconds doesn't impress the audience then it will be hard to recover the situation. Although we shouldn't judge a book by the cover, in terms of people - we do. In the law enforcement intelligence world this is a reality, so anticipate and live with it.

Try and be as smartly dressed as the smartest person in the room, but don't dress too flashy. Criminal justice is a conservative world. Few people appreciate having to wear a suit, but if the audience have to, then the presenter should.

Start with a warm smile, stand erect and look confident – even if your guts are doing a triple somersault. Although it is good to start with a smile, move to more serious expression when you begin to talk. Try not to use the podium as a prop because it looks weak. This of course is difficult if you have prepared a 30 page script you want to read. The best speakers don't use a script and are therefore free of the podium. Good presenters also do not unleash on the audience the sheer monotony of having to watch someone read a document, or worse, read PowerPoint slides one after another.

### Tip 2: Man versus machine

Before the audience are even in the room, get your PowerPoint presentation ready and cued. I've seen lots of presenters (often academics) wander to the front of the room and start fiddling about with the computer. It always looks amateur, especially if when the output is going to the big screen. Don't let the audience see that you don't know how to run Windows or which folder has their presentation. Cut the screen output or at least put a piece of card in front of the projector until you are ready to go.

Finally, have a backup plan for **when** it goes wrong. Take a copy of your presentation on a laptop, a copy on a CD and a copy on a thumbdrive. Be prepared for these systems to fail.

### Tip 3: Simplify, then simplify more

PowerPoint slides should be a summary of what you have achieved and not a blow-by-blow account of everything you have done for the last six months. Impress them with what you know and not how much you have done. You might want to look at *Jerry's top ten PowerPoint tips*, also in this series! The more that you have in your slides, the more you have to talk about. The audience expect you to talk about what is in your slides, and skipping through slides because you have run out of time looks bad.

### Tip 4: Don't use your gut as a screen

In other words, don't wander in front of the projector. Decide on which side you are going to stand and try and stay there. If you are prepared with a laser pointer it saves you having to either mess about with the mouse, or drift over to the screen. When using a pointer, avoid talking to the screen for protracted lengths of time. The screen will give you neither feedback nor a raise!

### Tip 5: Eye contact

Long enough to look earnest, not long enough to appear psychotic! Like a box of chocolates, share your eye contact around and don't linger too long on any individual. Senior executives or bosses tend to get stared out because the speaker perceives them to be the most important person in the room, but it does make them uncomfortable. Make sure you don't single out any group or individual.

If you take a question, respond to the person who asked, but after a few seconds open your answer out to the whole room. You never know who else might be interested in the answer too.

### **Tip 6: Talking and windmilling**

Project your voice into the room. The lights are often dimmed for PowerPoint presentations and if you are speaking after a big lunch then you have to work over the human physiological desire to shutdown and digest. Projectors can have fans that are noisy, and the room can be warm and stifling inviting a quick snooze. Don't yell of course, but make sure you can be heard. Speak a little slower than you might normally, especially in front of an international audience. Don't rush and charge through your slides. Don't panic about brief silences - they always seem worse to the speaker than to the audience who often appreciate a moment to gather their thoughts. If you need to pause for a drink, do so. Better than drying up.

Try and avoid windmilling – waving your arms around like a maniac. Gestures can be difficult to see in a dimmed room or from the back, though don't stick your hands in your pocket unless you are aiming for a very casual look. In many cultures it is rude to point (especially in SE Asia). Small note: 'windmilling' in British Army parlance is what you might do in the middle of a pub fight. Please don't confuse the two!

### **Tip 7: Humour**

Use humour carefully. Not everyone will get the joke. Don't be horrified if they miss your joke, and certainly don't explain it. Those that did get it but didn't find it funny will think even worse of your attempt! Go ahead and be smutty – if you want to alienate at least half your audience and invite a law suit. A few dry puns can however break the ice if delivered well.

Ask your friends beforehand if they think it is appropriate, and think about your subject matter. Jokes to start a presentation on increasing child mortality or heroin overdoses probably wouldn't go down too well. Short presentations (15-20 minutes) only have time for one or two witty comments at best.

### **Tip 8: Language**

Never start with "*I put these slides together five minutes ago*", even if you did. If the audience have paid good money to attend a conference they want to hear well-prepared speakers. Avoid weak

language like "*This is a good idea, right?*" or "*Hopefully I've done a good job*". Project confidence! Of course your ideas are spot on, otherwise why would you be presenting them? Don't give the audience ammunition to destroy you – let them come to their own conclusions about your work. Try and avoid inflecting up at the end of a sentence (Australians do this a lot) because it can be interpreted as a question and not a statement. Sounds tentative and kills your credibility.

### **Tip 9: Practice, practice, practice**

If you want to appear as if you are doing an impromptu, off-the-cuff presentation, then practice an impromptu, off-the-cuff style. Run through your slides enough so that you know what is coming up next and can lead into it. This is especially important if, like me, you don't use notes but use your slides as a prompt.

Practice your timings. If the conference organiser gives you 20 minutes then **don't** go over time. It annoys the audience and really pisses off the next speaker who is left with less time. You may think that your talk is more important than the next person - and it may be, but they will be thinking that their work is more interesting than yours! This is important because the audience might have come to hear the other speaker and not you, or worse, the executive in the room that you want to impress has another appointment afterwards. It is disheartening to watch them get up and leave before you have finished.

### **Tip 10: Anticipate questions**

You can use PowerPoint to have hidden slides ready for questions. This looks really good if you get a question and can jump to a previously unseen slide to answer it. Winner. In tip 8 I said project confidence, but if there are good questions that have you stumped, field these honestly. Project confidence, not arrogance. If you are going to give a presentation more than once, note the questions from the first time and anticipate answering them when next giving the talk. Field questions initially back to the questioner, but then after a few seconds address the rest of the room (see tip 5). Finish on a slide with your name and contact details. If they are impressed they might just want to contact you and offer you a job!