

# 3

## Improving Individual Performance

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Reading this chapter will help you to:

- rehearse key aspects of your presentation
- anticipate and deal with your presentation nerves
- use mental rehearsal techniques to go through the presentation in advance
- study other presenters
- improve your awareness of how your body contributes to a successful presentation
- become more confident through using your voice efficiently

We believe that you can greatly improve performance by including rehearsal in the stages of preparation. In our experience, students often spend time on the planning and some research but frequently deliver the presentation without much rehearsal. Even if the content is good, the overall impression of the presentation may only be average if there is insufficient rehearsal to reduce your stress.

We are going to discuss rehearsal under the following two main headings:

- 1 Improving the content.
- 2 Improving your individual performance.

## 1 Improving the content

### Learn the factual content and structure of the presentation

Learn the factual content and structure of the presentation so that you gain a clear understanding of the topic. This will help you to feel more confident and should also help you to handle any interruptions more effectively. You do not have to know every single word of your presentation by heart, but you have to know the main points.

## Rehearse speaking aloud

It can be helpful to hear the sound and emphasis of your voice. It usually takes longer to say something than to read it and the audience will need time to gain an understanding of what you are saying. Speaking the content out loud can help you to use pauses to slow down your delivery. Most people speak quicker than usual when they are nervous, and practising pauses should help to reduce your nerves. How you actually speak, the vocal delivery that you use to make your presentation effective, is a slightly different issue, and we are going to consider that later in this chapter.

## Adjusting the content to fit the time

Where the presentation timing is preset, it is important that the pace of the verbal and image presentation are in a correct sequence. Rehearsal will help you to set realistic timing and adjust your pace of delivery to accommodate pauses and changes of voice tone for emphasis. You will then be able to edit the content, perhaps deciding what facts you need to discuss and what can be covered in the handouts or visual aids.

## Rehearsal as part of a group

If you are taking part in a group presentation, you will need to rehearse together *as a team* to make sure that there is a balance between the parts and that suitable links are developed between individual members. There is usually a tendency to prepare far too much content for the time available. So you may need to edit what you have found by giving key points with examples during the presentation but more detail in the handouts. This should prevent the presentation overrunning and will allow for some interruptions or delayed starts. We discuss working for group presentations in more detail in Chapter 6.

## Rehearse in the physical environment

If possible, try to rehearse in the actual room where the presentation will take place. If you can, check the layout of the room before the event and look at the type of furniture available to see how formal or informal the room will be.

Look at where the tables and chairs will be placed, how they are laid out and how far you will be standing from the audience. Check the height of the tables and the amount of space available to spread out your papers or cards.

Try to find out before the presentation whether you will be able to arrange the room and presentation area to suit your needs or whether you will have to accept the layout provided. (See also Chapter 10 on room layout.) With many student presentations,

re-arranging the room may not be an option but it is usually worth considering as this can influence your style of delivery or how confident you feel.

## **Practise using your prompts**

Speakers who have attended courses on public speaking often use cards with prompts during their presentations. However, although you may use this method, many students find it easier to use A4 sheets of paper for supplementary notes. For PowerPoint, use the notes option. If you want to use cards, use big ones!

## **Rehearse the use of technology**

You will want to feel confident so that you are not distracted by the technology during the presentation. Think about where the cables will be placed and whether there will be a need to use a microphone. If you are on your own, you will also need to consider whether you will require additional help to operate the technology. If you are in a group, who is going to operate the technology? Deciding this can reduce distracting movements by the group members as they change places but timing the technology with the delivery may need extra rehearsal. Also it may help each speaker to feel more confident to operate the technology while they are speaking.

The presenter should aim to keep looking at their notes and the audience rather than at each slide as it appears on the screen. As they turn to look at this, their voice will be less audible and the behaviour becomes predictable and tedious to watch. It can be more effective to just do this occasionally especially where the slide contains more detailed and important information. It may then be helpful for the presenter to move to the side of the room and appear to share the position the audience is viewing, and reflect on the content of the slide. This is exactly the sort of movement that can be practised in advance. We discuss using the technology in more detail in Chapter 8.

## **2 Improving your individual performance**

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### **Developing your self-confidence when presenting**

Many students feel highly nervous about undertaking class presentations, especially when there is a mark attached. This is very understandable. It is all very well for tutors to say things like 'Well, there is no pressure on you', 'You'll do fine on the day', or 'Don't worry, we will be doing it in quite an informal way'.

However, tutors have to stand up and present regularly each week. They are highly practised and usually fairly self-confident as a result. The first time you come to do a

presentation, you will not have had a lot of practice. You may not feel very confident about the subject area, and you may not have all that much time to prepare. So no wonder you might well feel nervous; it's a very sensible reaction to have. But that doesn't mean that you will 'fail', or that you will do a poor presentation. It simply means that you are understandably nervous. This is an appropriate feeling. So you will be pleased to know that there are many different ways in which you can overcome your nerves, and go on to do an excellent presentation.

Now we are going to help you to develop individual techniques that will give you authority, a confident posture and a confident voice.

## What are presentation nerves?

Imagine this scenario. You discover that in one of the modules in the new semester, you will be required to do a presentation to the class on a subject you do not know much about. This will count as 40 per cent of the overall mark. What are your reactions?

- Delighted?
- Appalled?
- Glad to accept the challenge?
- Already feeling terrified?
- Thinking of changing to another module?

*The symptoms of presentation nerves* If you said yes to some of the above, you may already be feeling the beginnings of presentation nerves. Have you already suffered from nervousness before a presentation? Most people have, and the symptoms might include:

- sweaty palms
- shaky hands
- dry throat
- increased pulse rate
- twitching knees or legs
- forced and unnatural laughter
- tenseness, pain in the stomach
- extravagant and unnatural hand gestures
- the brain just switching off – you cannot function properly

What are your personal symptoms of stress?

We are programmed to have nervous reactions and to be tense in certain situations. Sometimes it is highly appropriate to be tense. In an emergency, you probably do not want to be totally calm, collected and relaxed! But much of the time, stress is not an appropriate reaction. Or rather, too much stress is not an appropriate reaction. Some stress is helpful. When you are preparing your presentation, and when you are undertaking it, it is important to feel a little bit nervous, to have some kind of edge on your performance. You need to feel energized, positive and ready to go. Do not worry about nerves, but read the next section to learn how to build up your confidence.

## You can learn to build up your confidence

Your strongest single resource in developing presentation skills is your brain. But you can also use your body, your voice and your eyes to enhance the presentation and to boost your confidence.

*Using your brain 1. Association and disassociation* A key skill in any stressful situation is the ability to:

- be yourself and
- stand outside yourself

at the same time.

It is useful to know how to be able to move between being:

- 1 totally focused on your inner feelings and standing outside yourself and
- 2 able to look at what is happening around you from an objective perspective, without nerves, calm and objective

Some people do it naturally, and are not really aware that they are doing it. Some people very consciously use these techniques. These two places to be are sometimes called states of Association and Disassociation. See Table 3.1 (page 36).

In effect, when you develop an ability to stand outside yourself, you are acting. That's what actors do, they inhabit the body and the thought processes of someone else, for a short period of time. Some people are likely to be in this dissociated state for much of their professional life. If you do not cultivate a certain distance from pain and distress, you can get too close and get badly damaged.

**Table 3.1 Association or disassociation**

<b>Association</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> In the experience
Seeing the world through your own eyes	<input type="checkbox"/> Be here now
	<input type="checkbox"/> In touch with what is happening
	<input type="checkbox"/> Aware of own feelings
	<input type="checkbox"/> Not really aware of time
	<input type="checkbox"/> Seeing things with your own eyes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Example – on holiday, with a loved one; any time that you want to be yourself!
<b>Disassociation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly distant
Putting yourself at a distance;	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote
seeing yourself performing or going through actions	<input type="checkbox"/> On the sidelines
	<input type="checkbox"/> Watching yourself performing
	<input type="checkbox"/> Very aware of time
	<input type="checkbox"/> Able to stand outside yourself
	<input type="checkbox"/> Example – an examination, difficult meeting, being criticized

It is one way of successfully undertaking a presentation. You *become* the successful presenter. You do not have to stay like that afterwards, but for the period of the presentation, you have a special role to play.

This concept of association and disassociation can be used to practise for meetings, interviews etc. and for any experience that you might find challenging. It is linked to the technique of mental rehearsal, mentally practising the event over and over again.

**Mental rehearsal** You cannot actually do your presentation in front of an audience more than once. But in your head, you can practise many times. This approach is used by many top sports stars.

The following exercise combines both *association and disassociation* and *mental rehearsal*.

- 1 Imagine yourself undertaking a successful presentation.
- 2 Describe to yourself the performance that you are going to do. As you describe what is going to happen, you look at a picture of yourself, and hear yourself running through the presentation, standing in front of the group. Be absolutely clear about what is happening and see all the details. You are looking at somebody very much like you, and they are successfully carrying out the presentation.

- 3 The person you are watching is doing an effective and successful presentation. Notice the way that the audience is reacting; notice the confident posture of the speaker and how they engage with the group in front of them.
- 4 It is as though you are watching yourself undertaking a presentation and just seeing what happens. You observe yourself, coolly and objectively. If you want to, imagine sitting in a corner of the room in which the presentation occurs or yourself at the back of the room, watching somebody like yourself do the presentation. The point is that the you at the back of the room is separated out, disassociated, from the you at the front, successfully presenting to a group.

You might want to do this several times over. Be very clear about what is happening and what could be done to improve it. Focus on all the details including what the presenter is wearing, colours around the presenter in the room, what people are saying to the presenter, the atmosphere in the room. If for any reason, you just cannot imagine yourself doing this, fine. Who could you imagine doing it? A friend? Relative? Some celebrity? A television personality? Just imagine what it would be like if they were doing the presentation for you.

- 5 When you have run through your observation of the presenter and the successful presentation several times, just relax. Switch off for a couple of minutes.
- 6 Now become yourself. Visualize yourself actually doing the successful presentation. When you are ready, and only when you are ready, you then 'become yourself' and imagine doing the presentation from your own perspective. Step into your own shoes, looking out through your eyes at the audience. As you mentally rehearse, you see what you will be seeing in that situation, feeling the movements and expressions of your body, and hearing what your voice will sound like, and watching the reaction of your audience in front of you.

You are totally in your own body, doing the presentation really well and effectively. Make what you see happening in front of you as real as possible. Be very aware of colours around you, your voice tones, the reactions of the audience, as you begin to create a mood of successfully completing the presentation. What sounds will you be able to hear? What will the feelings both of tension and excitement be like? In which part of your body will you feel them? Imagining yourself dealing with questions, issues and problems with complete confidence and style!

- 7 Now have a quick break for one minute. Come back to the present. Do something else and distract yourself for a few seconds; for instance, count down from 100 to 40.
- 8 How did it go? You then ask yourself how the presentation went. You might want to be particularly aware of feelings of being comfortable or uncomfortable, tense or more relaxed, as you went through the presentation.
- 9 Make changes. If you need to make changes to the way you imagine the performance going, you might want to imagine yourself making a presentation as above, from Stage 1 onwards.

- 10 In conclusion. Continue to go through stages 1–9 until you feel really confident that you can do a superb job. When you have rehearsed it in your head several times, the actual event will feel much less scary, because you will have been there already.

These techniques of mental rehearsal are already backed up by studies in the literature on sports people and on medical patients. There is considerable evidence that mental rehearsal and visualizing your presentation will greatly improve your performance on the day.

*Using your brain 2. Thinking about excellent presenters* Do you know somebody whom you consider to be an excellent presenter? A tutor, a friend or a television presenter? What is it that makes them good at what they do? Make time to observe them. Look out for such characteristics as:

- body movements
- gestures
- eye contact
- voice tone and pace
- their powers of persuasion
- the kinds of language they use

Write down the points which you feel make the person a good presenter. Decide which of these you feel you are comfortable with. Use a friend to give you some feedback. It is quite likely that not all of your role model's skills will work for you. But some of them certainly will do. You will be able to tell which ones you feel comfortable with and which can, therefore, serve to increase your feelings of confidence.

*Using your brain 3. Have a powerful memory to boost your confidence* You will almost certainly have a positive feeling that you can take with you when you begin your presentation. This might be:

- an internal image of a presenter that you enjoy
- a photograph of someone you like or admire
- the sound of your voice when you made a previous successful presentation
- a particular piece of music
- a phrase that sums up your positive feelings such as 'I'm a winner', 'This is going to work', or 'I WILL succeed'

If you have had success of any kind in your life, you can take the feelings associated with that success with you when you do your presentation. All you need to do is practise recalling the feeling, the memory, and the image in advance and lock them in



position. Practice makes perfect. So start practising remembering positive feelings of success rather than feelings of failure, as so many people do when they think about presentations.

If you want a very quick and simple alternative, try associating a positive confident feeling with a smell such as peppermint or lemon aroma therapy oil on a tissue. Practise associating that peppermint smell with feeling confident. Before you start your presentation, simply have a quick sniff of peppermint oil, and feel the confidence beginning to flow through you. (Make sure it is a clean confident smell, not a gentle sleepy smell such as lavender!)

## Using your body confidently

Audiences and tutors make initial judgments about presenters on appearance and body language, even before they start listening to what you say. To build up good rapport with an audience and thus attract their attention and interest, you can help yourself by developing effective body language skills.

The following sections offer some guidelines on body language. There are two things that you can do to improve the way you use your body when you present:

- 1 practise the techniques below
- 2 observe professional presenters, such as those on television, paying attention to the way in which they use their hands and their eyes

*Use a video camera* If you have access to the technology, ask a friend to help you with a video camera. It can be useful to get some more sense of how others will see you. But do not allow the technology to distract you from how you look and move. Do not be discouraged if you appear different or sound different from the way you hoped to be.

*How you look: your clothes* You should ensure that what you wear is both comfortable and suitable for the occasion. You need to feel relaxed; you also need to present an appropriate image to your audience. So what is appropriate? For a very low profile presentation, you might do fine with your normal jeans, trainers and top, for instance. But if you are looking for marks and it is a more serious presentation, you will almost certainly want to dress slightly more formally.

You may have noticed that some professional presenters like to wear something highly coloured or bright, so that they stand out. But you will probably not want to allow what you wear to get in the way of what you are saying. You might want to consider a

colourful shirt for a man, a bright top or a scarf for a woman. The clothes need to be simple and smart, so that you look appropriately dressed, comfortable and relaxed.

*How you look: the way you stand* You can do something very useful for weeks before the presentation takes place – practise how you stand. Try this:

- your feet are apart, approximately in line with your hips, and your feet are slightly turned out
- your feet are relaxed and you can feel the ground underneath them
- you have made sure that your knees are relaxed, not locked; you can easily bend them
- your hands are relaxed and so are your arms, hanging loosely by your sides
- you are standing upright and your spine feels straight
- your neck is straight and your head is directly above your neck. In other words, you are not leaning forward nor leaning back. Your head is so positioned that you can imagine a golden cord passing up through your spine through your neck and up through your head. The golden cord carries on up pulling gently, so that your head, your neck and your spine are all in a direct line with each other. (In fact, your head is actually quite heavy, something like 4.25 kg or 9 pounds. If the head is not in line with your neck, the neck can get quite uncomfortable.)

In this open and relaxed posture, you will be able to breathe deeply and your voice will be clear and strong. Try to avoid crossing your arms on your chest, hunching your shoulders and crossing one leg in front of the other. Similarly do not lean forward, slumping onto the lectern or table, if there is one. These kinds of behaviour are all obvious signs of tension and they will not help you.

*How you look: your movement* A completely still presenter will soon tire the audience and a presenter who moves continually will distract from the words and be difficult for the audience to follow. You will want to move carefully and effectively, emphasizing points, helping your audience to relax and keeping them engaged.

It is okay to move but do not overdo it. It is better to move slightly than to keep completely still, like a frozen statue. A mirror; or even better a video camera, can be incredibly helpful for looking at yourself and examining your movements. Avoid rocking back and forward as some nervous presenters do.

Try rehearsing in front of a mirror or at a table, to get used to handling notes or cards, and check how much you use your hands. Whilst this can be useful for emphasis, it can also be distracting, so try to keep hand waving to a minimum. Using a mirror is a

technique used by many actors and professional communicators and can improve your performance considerably.

**Gestures** Using your hands can help in the same way that whole body movements can: to relax, stimulate and illustrate. If you find it hard to use your hands naturally, then the best policy is to hold them by your sides. Try not to:

- clasp hands behind the back. This looks much too formal.
- fold them in front. This is usually interpreted as a very defensive posture.
- keep them stuck in your pockets throughout the presentation. This can look either casual or nervous.
- scratch, poke or stroke yourself. As you have probably observed, this is quite a common nervous reaction amongst stressed presenters.
- wring your hands together. This can look dishonest or slightly peculiar.
- fiddle with keys, pens, pencils, coins, lucky charms, worry beads, etc. You will just look nervous.

If you enjoy using your hands, make them part of the presentation. Practise using your hands to make key points and to illustrate ideas. However the main issue with using your hands is to be natural.

**Eye contact** Eyes are one of your best tools for involving the audience in what you are saying. Good posture, movement and gestures will be of little use if you fail to support them with appropriate eye contact. If you are an inexperienced presenter, you might find it very difficult to look any member of the audience in the eye. A useful technique is to try to focus between and slightly above the eyes; the audience will feel that they are being looked at and involved, unless you are extremely close. The size of the audience will determine the appropriate level of eye contact but here are two important guidelines to follow, regardless of audience size.

- 1 Never hold one person's gaze for more than five seconds maximum.
- 2 Never appear to be 'watching tennis', swinging your eyes (and head) from one side of the audience to the other.

For presentation to small groups, fewer than about six people, focus on individuals in turn.

For medium-sized audiences pick out individuals at random, drawing them into the presentation. Take them from different parts of the room in turn. With a class of about 20 people, there would probably be enough time to look at every individual but please do

not do this by moving from one to the next in order of their seating arrangement! Do it randomly. Eye contact can also be used to 'pull back' any individual who appears to be distracted or bored, if you are feeling sufficiently confident.

In a medium-size or large group, if you look at one individual, several other people around that individual will also feel that you have looked at them. You can impact on five people just by focusing briefly on one of them.

With a big group, a presenter will probably be unable to focus on individuals. In this case, choose small areas of the audience at a time, looking either at the group or at one individual in the centre of the group. In this way, all of the audience can be involved. There is more on audiences in Chapter 6.

*Using your voice* Using your voice is a very specialist area. It is amazing that although we are all taught to speak, we are not taught to use our voice. Unless we become actors, singers or other kinds of voice professionals, or unless we damage our voices in some way, most of us will never receive voice training. What happens to most people's voices when stressed by a presentation? The voice can:

- speed up
- become higher
- become flat and monotonous
- become nervous and you start to stutter – if you have a hint of a stutter, that stutter may become worse
- become smaller – you may find it very difficult to project your voice
- display lack of clarity, so that you are constantly having to clear your throat
- become 'croaky' or harsh – the nervousness and tension cause the vocal cords to dry up
- become BIGGER – too loud and overconfident

So what can we do to prevent our voice deserting us when we are under pressure?

First of all, let us learn a little bit about how the voice works. Then we are going to suggest key activities that you can do to improve the quality of your voice for presentations.

There are three aspects to the voice – the lungs which generate the air, the vocal cords which vibrate, and the mouth, nose, palate, and so on which shape the sound.

*Breathing* The voice starts with breathing, and that means starting with a relaxed body. If you have a relaxed torso, you will be able to breathe properly. But if your

stomach and ribs are tight and tense, you will simply not be able to draw in adequate breath to push up towards the voice box or larynx.

Everyone instinctively knows that if you want to talk loudly, you have to take a deep breath. To be able to speak effectively in a pressured situation, we need to be able to take a deep breath and then take extra breaths as we talk, to keep the voice at an appropriate level. So adequate breathing is absolutely essential.

Start by relaxing your body. You might want to try this lying down in a relaxed position on your back, or you might want to do it standing, because that's probably the position you will be in when you are presenting!

Breathing through your nose and out through your mouth. Think about any physical tension that there might be – your feet, your ankles, your legs, your stomach, your back, your chest, your throat, your shoulders, each arm, your hands, and then back up towards your face and then up to the top of your head. All the time, keep breathing, and allow the air to flow in and out through your relaxed mouth.

When you start your presentation, you will want to feel relaxed and strong, safe in the knowledge that the breath can flow through you from the bottom of your lungs up to, and through, your voice box, the larynx.

Start today to become more and more aware of your breathing. When you come to present, you will continually be aware of your breathing right through the presentation. So you will be able to check your breathing and start to take a deep breath from time to time. Make your breathing strong and deep.

*Your posture* The way that you stand will have a huge impact on the way that you breathe. The way that you breathe will have a huge impact on how you sound. Think about whether you will be sitting or standing during the presentation and which will be most appropriate for the event. Will you need to move around the room or be expected to remain in one place?

Are you comfortable standing in one place? Some people are, and some people find that in order to express themselves, they have to move during a presentation. Avoid standing frozen like a statue, try not to pace about like a caged animal, but aim to move naturally and appropriately.

Whether you need to move around or remain still, it is vital to get your posture right, so that your voice box is relaxed. Follow our tips; stand tall, with your weight equally

distributed, in a straight line and with relaxed knees. If you can learn to stand in a strong upright and relaxed stance, you will feel much better and your voice will be stronger too. If you want to learn more about your posture, you might consider either Tai Chi or the Alexander Technique. Your local public library should have books on both of these.

*Your voice tone and pitch* Your tone is the sound you make. Everyone has an individual sound. It comes from the breath resonating in your chest, your skull and your mouth itself. The mouth is the most important contributor to tone because it can alter the sounds so dramatically. You can become more aware of tone by humming. Practise making your humming a little lighter and higher, or a little darker and stronger.

Pitch means the musical quality of your voice. Ideally you should be able to vary the pitch, but not be constantly swooping up and down in an irritating 'singsong' fashion. Your voice needs to be lubricated, and more specifically, the 'vocal cords' which vibrate need to be lubricated. So drink some water before the presentation and during it, have a glass of water with you when you are talking. Pitch is created by the vibration of the vocal cords. The vocal cords can only vibrate fully if the throat is relaxed. That means that you must do everything in your power to keep your throat relaxed. For instance, a tight collar can greatly restrict your throat and therefore affect your pitch. You will find a lot more about the more sophisticated aspects of voice production for presentations in McCarthy and Hatcher (2002).

*Tips on using your voice* Here are 12 different ways to prepare your voice for the presentation:

- 1 Practise. Try to get access to a tape recorder, video player, an MP3 player or some other form of recording device, so that you can listen to the sound of your voice. Even if it does not sound as good as you would wish, the recording will give you an impression of your voice. How does it normally sound? How would you like it to sound for the presentation?
- 2 Warm up the voice. Warm your voice up before you start speaking. Your vocal muscles, your larynx, need to be warmed up just like any other muscles. Drink some water before you start and then undertake a simple exercise such as repeating nonsense rhymes: 'Ding dong bing bong' – up and down the scales; or tongue-twisters such as: 'Susie sells sea shells on the sea shore'. It is perfectly okay to just speak nonsense, providing that you are using lots of different sounds, at different levels, and going up and down the scale. You might find it helpful to actually say some of the key phrases from your presentation. Try saying them in different ways. But focus on warming up the voice.

- 3 Do not fade away. Watch out for fading away at the end of sentences. This is normally associated with nervousness or lack of confidence. Practise in normal speech, with your friends. Aim to finish the sentence clearly and strongly. This is especially true of the last part of your presentation.
- 4 Keep breathing. Practise taking several deep breaths from the bottom of the lungs before you start speaking AND continue to take breaths throughout your presentation. Some people simply forget to breathe during their presentation!
- 5 Ensure that your neck is comfortable. If your neck feels stiff, gently relax it. You may want to search out a book on specific neck exercises. If not, gently rub your neck with your hands to warm it. Stand tall; allow your spine and neck to lengthen slightly. Relax your shoulder blades and then roll them forwards. Stand tall again.
- 6 Learn to yawn more often. Learn to relax the jaws before the presentation by moving them around and by deliberately yawning to keep the jaws relaxed. However, it is probably a bad move to yawn during the presentation, unless you want your audience to fall asleep!
- 7 Practise smiling. You can relax the facial muscles by smiling. Not only will a smile to your audience relax your face but it will of course also relax your audience. While you are preparing, you will find that a few smiles will relax you during the presentation, and an encouraging smile to the audience will help them relax too.
- 8 Practise your pace. Practise emphasizing keywords, practise going through key elements of the presentation, ensuring that you go at the right speed, not too fast nor too slow. You do not have to always start at the beginning. Keep it fresh by practising just some parts, or starting near the end.
- 9 Practise your tone and pitch. Consider learning more about your voice and how it works.
- 10 Be prepared for pauses. Pauses, given at key points in the presentation are also useful for the audience to reflect on the content or a question that you have posed. Rehearsal will help you to be more relaxed about providing these pauses and stop you rushing to fill any silences. Pauses may also provide opportunities for members of the audience to murmur in agreement or make a brief comment to another colleague.
- 11 Emphasis. Learn to emphasize key phrases during the presentation. You can use both pauses and emphasis to clarify certain points, and to repeat key messages.
- 12 Learn from experience. Always be prepared to learn from every lecture, every presentation that you attend. Keep learning.

## Conclusion

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Making sure that the presentation is well rehearsed will improve both your performance and enjoyment of the event. It will help to reduce your nerves and increase your confidence on the day. Rehearsal will also help to improve your understanding of the content and enable you to answer questions more competently. Practice does not

necessarily make perfect, but practice certainly makes sure that you will deliver confidently and powerfully.

#### KEY PRINCIPLES FOR DOING YOUR VERY BEST INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

- 1 Presentation skills are learned skills – and practice makes perfect.
- 2 Understand your presentation nerves.
- 3 Take a powerful image with you into the presentation.
- 4 Practise how you will stand and move.
- 5 Learn to use your voice.
- 6 Practise your breathing.

### Further reading

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McCarthy, P. and Hatcher, C. (2002) *Presentation Skills: The Essential Guide for Students*. London: Sage.