

## Importance of presentation skills in contemporary business

### Značaj veština prezentovanja u savremenom poslovanju

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#### Abstract

*Improving presentation skills has been a popular issue since ancient times, and today is becoming a necessity in many activities, especially in the context of management. In modern business, according to experts in this field, the ability to present ideas is considered an important feature of employees. Professional presentations, in fact, are a significant and common method of disseminating information. Presentation skills are a real challenge in the case of teachers, researchers and scientists, who are at the beginning of their professional careers. They sometimes cause great anxiety. This paper therefore discusses various aspects of presentation skills, relevant to business people as well as researchers and scientists. Useful guidelines to help researchers and scientists hone their skills. The central part of the paper deals with the analysis of factors that affect the quality of the presentation for different purposes. The author's view is that presentation skills, like other skills, can be learned and developed through practice.*

**Keywords:** business communication, presentation skills, improvement of presentation skills, presentation style.

#### Sažetak

*Usavšavanje veština prezentacije je aktuelno pitanje od davnina, a danas postaje neophodnost u mnogim delatnostima, posebno u kontekstu menadžmenta. U savremenom poslovanju, po mišljenju stručnjaka iz ove oblasti, sposobnost prezentovanja ideja smatra se važnom osobinom zaposlenih. Profesionalne prezentacije, u stvari, predstavljaju značajan i uobičajen metod širenja informacija. Veštine prezentovanja su u slučaju nastavnika, istraživača i naučnika, koji su na početku svoje profesionalne karijere, pravi izazov. One ponekad izazivaju i veliku anksioznost. U ovom radu se otuda razmatraju različiti aspekti veštine prezentovanja, relevantni kako za poslovne ljude tako i za istraživače i naučnike. Predložene smernice mogu pomoći istraživačima i naučnicima da usavrše svoje veštine. Centralni deo rada se odnosi na analizu faktora koji utiču na kvalitet prezentacije za različite svrhe. Stanovište autora je da se veštine prezentovanja, poput drugih veština, mogu naučiti i razvijati kroz praksu.*

**Кljučне речи:** poslovna komunikacija, veštine prezentovanja, usavršavanje veština prezentovanja, stil prezentacije.

## 1. Introduction

Efficient and effective business communication requires mastering a whole set of skills. They apply equally to communication within the organization to communication between the organization and relevant public (Vuković et al., 2021; Vuković et al., 2021a; Vuković et al., 2021b, Denić, 2010a). Detailed analysis and research in practice show that the strategic orientation of business is the continuous improvement of business communications to achieve positive business results (Denić, 2010b). One of the regular tasks of

employees, especially those related to more responsible positions (for example, manager positions), is the occasional reporting of others on the achieved results. The communication competence of the manager and his ability to communicate effectively are the basic management and organizational activities of every successful manager. The personality of a manager is created by a complex of skills, competencies and knowledge, including the potential of managerial communication (Dancisinova et al., 2017).

One of the methods widely used for this purpose is

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public presentation. It is a special type of communication process by which messages are transmitted to the audience by applying certain audio-visual effects. The word presentation is of Latin root (*praesento*) and means a planned and organized process of transmitting content from the speaker to the audience. Presentation as a form of communication is 1) public, synchronous and mainly aimed at a large audience; 2) purposeful, organized, structured and planned; 3) time-limited and 4) performed most often in a formal environment (for example, in a meeting room, amphitheater, etc.) using a formal way of expression (Lamza-Maronić & Glavas, 2008, p. 106). The basic elements of the presentation are the speaker, the person who presents the content, the audience, the time, the space and the visual aids. Lucas cites planning of the presentation, preparation of presentation, rehearsal of the presentation, presentation and answering the questions of the audience as integral elements of the presentation process (Lucas, 2008).

Through presentation skills in the business environment, employees, participating in public appearances of this type, express their professionalism, seriousness, commitment and expertise. Presentation skills are becoming an integral part of the capital of the economy. This statement is in line with the fact that human capital with its knowledge, skills and abilities determines the degree of growth and success in economic development. An individual does not have to possess presentation skills, because those skills can be developed (Makinson, 2002). Improving presentation skills can be seen both as a goal and as a means of helping organizations achieve organizational excellence (Ilijeva, 2014).

Presentational skills are key to almost every aspect of academic and business life, from meetings, interviews and conferences to trade shows. Business presentations are widely used in the marketing sectors of companies; especially when consumers or users need to be informed, reassured or convicted of the quality of their products or services. When presenting a business idea, one should always keep in mind that „a weak presentation can ruin a business while a strong one can give wings“ (Weissman, 2007, p. 1). A well-prepared presentation is clear, concise and simple. Three key components are related to good presentation (Dolan, 2017): structure (relating to introduction, content and conclusion); body language and movements and; verbal expression.

Since the content that is presented is usually smaller than the subject (topic) of the presentation, and with its predetermined duration (depending on the type and purpose of the presentation), it is not easy for a person preparing for a public appearance to make a quality presentation. Preparation includes two basic steps: (1) shaping the content of the presentation and (2) personally preparing the speaker for the presentation. The complete preparation process includes:

- Choosing a topic and determining the purpose of the presentation (informing, motivating, persuading, encouraging or entertaining the audience);
- Collecting content for presentation;
- Analysis of the audience and other circumstances related to the oral presentation (space, technical aids, etc.);
- Designing and shaping the presentation and
- Rehearsal and final rehearsal before performance.

In the first step, it is necessary to determine the main idea and the general goal that is to be achieved by the presentation (for example, encouraging, convincing, informing the audience). It is also possible to set specific goals for different parts of the presentation. During the collection of sources, the most diverse content should be used for the presentation; starting from ideas, quotes, data, through photographs, tables, anecdotes, to analogies, metaphors, symbols, etc. The choice of content should be guided by the principles of significance and credibility.

At the heart of the audience analysis are the audience's attitudes towards the topic (in terms of its knowledge, values, interests, etc.), the speaker (repulsion, affection, etc) and the event itself, and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, professional and other group affiliations (Petrović, 2019, p. 264). Devising and designing a presentation which seems to be the most difficult part of preparation, consists of: determining key elements and structure, writing drafts and texts, making a presentation plan and writing notes. The last step of practice should not be left out of the preparatory work. Practicing achieves naturalness and spontaneity, removes anxiety and gives the impression of the length of the presentation and the scope of facts presented in the presentation.

Rouse and Rouse (2005, pp. 167-168) when it comes to the presentation only, list several activities involved in its preparation: (1) making of concept, (2) writing, (3) adapting the presentation format, (4) aligning the material with available time, and (5) audience analysis. Although the form of communicating results through presentation has become very popular in many activities, especially in scientific and research practice, experience shows that many authors (lecturers, speakers, actually presenters) make systematic mistakes. They are primarily reflected in the insufficient preparation of relevant elements of the presentation such as (1) technological aspect of preparation, (2) type of presentation, (3) rules of successful creation, and (4) preparation for presentation (Marković-Blagojević et al., 2013, p. 46).

## 2. Technological aspect of presentation preparation

Presenters use various aids to convey ideas and information to the audience in the most understandable way possible. Aids of this type only support the spoken (oral) part of the presentation and should be used in that sense. In the past, they used an overhead projector,

plates, slides, videotapes, movies, maps, etc. for these purposes. In modern business communication, thanks to the development of information and communication technologies, software programs are mainly used to support the creation of presentations such as PowerPoint (PP). It offers many ready-made templates for presentations for different purposes. The strengths of PowerPoint audio-visual technical support do not come to the fore if not used properly. In that case, even well-designed presentations will not leave a favorable impression on the audience. This is due to common errors when using PowerPoint: uploading too many illustrations or text per slide, setting too many slides, inadequate presentation design and introduction of too many audio-visual elements such as animations, sound effects, etc.

Every speaker should avoid the first mistake, that is, putting too much text on the slide, because it doesn't do any good for at least two reasons: "First, it is confusing, and second, some audience actors (individuals) can read much faster than the speaker can speak, and even if the speaker walks during the presentation, it will produce boredom in the listeners" (Marković-Blagojević et al., 2013, p. 47). The written text on the slides, actually on the presentation, should not be the main part (core) of the presentation.

**3. Type of presentation**

Preparing and creating a good presentation begins with defining its purpose. After this first step, the appropriate type of presentation is selected. It can be (1) informative, (2) teaching (educational), (3) stimulating, (5) persuasive and (5) presentation for decision making. Most often used are educational, informative and persuasive presentations (Schokley-Zabalak, 2015). At the beginning, it is necessary to determine the general and special goals of the presentation, depending on its purpose.

**Table 1.** Key questions in determining the general and specific objectives of the presentation

Serial number	Question
1	Why is this being talked about- now?
2	Why is this being done- now?
3	What effect do you want to achieve?
4	What results are expected?

Source: Lamza-Maronić & Glavas, 2008, p. 110

The purpose of the informative presentation is to acquaint the audience in a concise form with short and reliable facts about an event or phenomenon, while avoiding more complicated information. In the organizational context, informative presentations are intended to acquaint employees with the organization's strategy, problems that accompany the implementation of the work program, examples of good practice or recent developments in the activities of the organization.

Teaching presentations have been longer, compared to informative ones, because they present and give certain

instructions or tasks. A presentation of this type leaves space for two- way communication, which gives the audience the opportunity to ask questions or express their opinions. The content of teaching presentations, as a common part of the program development and training personnel in the organization, refers to the improvement of work skills, interpersonal relations, professional development, technological and organizational innovations, and management and communication skills (Petrović, 2019, p. 263).

The purpose of the stimulating presentation is to act equally on the emotions and the rational side (intellect) of the audience so that they think about a certain problem, and the way to solve it, from the point of view of the presenter. It is important to: (1) attract the audience's attention with a story that illustrates the problem; (2) point out the need to solve the problem and illustrate it with a general or common example; (3) describe a personally satisfactory solution to the related problem, show by example a comparison of the situation and consequences of the solved and unresolved problem, invite the audience to action in order to solve the problem; (4) give the audience clear, simple and direct guidelines (Marković-Blagojević et al., 2013, p. 48).

The persuasive presentation is intended to convince the audience to accept the speaker's proposal. Since a presentation of this type offers a solution to a dispute or controversy, it should be based on the principles of thought- logical presentation of evidence, but at the same time act on the feelings of those present in order to gain the support of the audience. It is not bad for the introductory part of the presentation to be a bit longer and to be used to present the most important aspects, because later, during the presentation, the audience's attention decreases, in order to reawaken interest in the presentation at the very end.

The presentation for decision making moves the audience to the proposed action. The presented ideas, proposals and evidence have the power to convince the audience of the necessity of a certain action in order to prevent the negative consequences of a possibly passive attitude towards a certain problem. In that sense, the audience has no doubt about what should be done and how to do it.

There are different types of presentations: (1) presentation of labors (2) round table discussion, (3) poster sessions, and (4) panel sessions and symposia. Performances and demonstrations are becoming less traditional, but more and more represented. Choosing the most appropriate format for a scientific presentation requires understanding and knowledge of each of these types of presentation.

The total time of the presentation, the ratio of the time of the presentation to the time provided for the discussion, the space and availability of equipment, the fluidity of the audience, depend on the type of presentation and the requirements of the conference. For example, while presentation of labors usually lasts from 10 to 30 minutes

per speaker, symposia, panel sessions, round tables and poster sessions can last up to 90 minutes, and workshops can last up to two days.

Duarte (2008, p. 249) believes that presentations are a wonderful medium to express passion, in which the presenter emotionally connects with the audience. Speakers must understand the format and type of presentation they use in order to announce the results of the research in the best way. In addition to report, symposia and panel sessions, a popular means of verbal presentation includes the use of presentation software such as PowerPoint, Corel presentations, Apple Keynote. Of these programs, the use of PowerPoint dominates (Parker, 2001).

In addition to background design, font type selection, or even font size, the most important part of a presentation is the content of the presentation and it must be emphasized (Alley & Neeley, 2005). No software tool can transform disorganized and unrelated content into a compelling idea, but a software package can improve presentation (Alley, 2003; Anholt, 2006; Kline, 2009). In short, the presentation is not what it is on PowerPoint slides. It involves talking and interacting with audience members about the topic being presented.

#### 4. Rules of successful presentation creation

Creation a good presentation implies commitment to all its elements, including: the title and name of the presenter (first slide), content (second slide), slide structure, fonts (standard Times New Roman or Arial size from 20 to 24 pt; no less than 18 pt), colors, background, graphs, spelling and grammar, conclusion, printed materials, audience questions (last slide), data for establishing content with the presenter and length of presentation. The Arial, Calibri, Cambria and Verdana fonts are more readable than the Times New Roman font and should be used for slide text when using the PowerPoint technique.

The structure of the slides is perhaps most important for the quality of a good and effective presentation. In order to achieve this, the principle of "less is always better" should always be adhered to, and this generally includes the following aspect (Marković-Blagojević et al., 2013: 49):

- The presentation is easy to read;
- There is a title on each slide (bold, clear, and easy to read);
- The exposure speed is one to two slides per minute;
- Slides are created in the form of a thesis and not as a complete sentence;
- Slides do not contain too much text and long sentences because it is distracting the audience from the oral presentation of the presenter;
- Theses on the slide contain only key words and phrases while detailed explanations are communicated orally
- The slide contains five to six theses (one thesis can take a maximum of two lines);

- Only one thesis should be shown at a time in order to achieve it maximum focus of the audience on oral presentation;
- The text within the slide is linked and there is a link to the next slide;
- Animations are used sporadically and only one type of animation;
- The number of slides is reduced to the right measure to allow time for further explanation.

The load of a slide with text is a mistake that is most often made when creating a presentation. In order to prevent such an omission, it is not bad to follow the rule "6-6-6" which states: (1) that there are no more than six words in one determinant (quotation); (2) that there are no more than six quotations on one slide; (3) that there are no more than six lines on one slide (Lamza-Maronić & Glavas, 2008, p. 112). The continuous use of capital letters as well as italic writing should also be avoided as this reduces readability.

The presentation is prepared on the basis of an already written work (for example, seminar, master of doctoral thesis, report, study, etc) or manuscript is written for a specific presentation. The first case requires the presenter to work on rearranging the content in order to single out key theses from the report or essay. The structure of the presentation should include three parts-introduction, elaboration and conclusion. During the presentation, 80 to 85 percent of the time is devoted to the main parts of the presentation, while the remaining time is set aside for the introductory and final part of the presentation.

The complete content of the report can never be presented during the presentation, nor is the goal for the speaker to demonstrate to the audience his excellent knowledge of the topic of the presentation. When preparing a presentation on a given topic, then you only need to start with the selection of appropriate materials that will be exhibited (Rouse & Rouse, 2005, p. 169). It is good that the logo of the institution is written on each slide. Thus, the presentation gained professionalism and a special relationship between the audience and the institution was established. Visual effects are especially important as an indispensable part of the presentation. The use of visual aids makes presentation up to 50% easier to remember (Lamza -Maronić & Glavas, 2008, p. 110). A well-designed slide presentation with picture, sound and videos can help to learn more easily from words and pictures than just words (Maier, 2005, p. 31).

When using colors, the basic requirement is that the font color be in clear contrast to the background; for example, blue on white backgrounds. The title of the slide can be light blue and the rest of the text dark blue. Color can be used to emphasize some words, but only sporadically. It is not recommended to use color for decoration as well as to emphasize theses with different colors. For the background of the slide, it is best to choose the light color throughout the presentation while avoiding too many color images that make it difficult to read. The chosen color should enable

maximum visibility of the text and images, which are in the foreground of the presentation. Moreover, some color schemes or templates may not load correctly on another computer (or laptop) than the one on which they were designed. So, the best advice is to use a fairly generic background. When the presenter opts for a simple background, the topic should remain consistent throughout the presentation (Mandel, 1999, p. 41).

Graphs contribute to the liveliness of the presentation and should be included in the presentation when they can explain the topic. Each chart, of course, should have a name. Graphs should not be overloaded with data because the audience's attention is distracted from the speaker. Too much data is counterproductive, since excessive and meaningless presentation of data without purpose and goal has the consequence that the audience "looks into the void" (Cvijanović et al., 2013, p. 272).

The conclusion is an indispensable part of the presentation. It gives an overview of the main theses and suggests possibilities for solving a problem in the future. The conclusion should be well used to present the key facts, since the concentration of the audience is again at a high level, as at the beginning of the presentation. Some authors claim that the beginning is the most important part of the presentation because that is the time when the relationship with the audience is established. However, the end is also an important part of the presentation, and some authors argue that the beginning and the end are equally important (Wineburg, 2004, p. 14).

The printed material (for example, a seminar page) that accompanies the presentation is useful to distribute to the audience before the presentation to allow insight into additional information. It is good to end the presentation with a slide that invites you to ask questions in order to eliminate possible doubts. This is a common practice in presenting the results of scientific research work at conferences. Since many people hesitate to ask a question in public or to engage in a discussion, it is good to leave the address (e-mail, phone or website) of the presenter on the last slide. There are three types of questions: (1) relevant and constructive, (2) irrelevant and superfluous and (3) questions to which the speaker doesn't know the answer (Žižak et al., 2012). The speaker should thank the audience for the first type of questions, because the answer to them makes it easier to understand the topic. Irrelevant questions are not directly related to the presentation, while the subject of superfluous questions has already been described and explained in the presentation, and accordingly, one should not waste time unnecessarily presenting the same interpretations. Sometimes it is possible that the speaker doesn't know the answer to the asked question. In that case, the speaker can promise that he will do his best to come up with an answer and forward it, that is, to invite the audience to join the discussion in order to find an answer.

The predetermined duration of the presentation has the greatest effect on the number of slides. For shorter presentations, lasting up to 15 minutes, one minute per

slide should be planned. Lamza-Maronić and Glavas (2008, p. 116) believe that it is quite enough that presentations lasting 15 and 45 minutes contain from five to seven or from 15 to 25, respectively. Longer presentations require extra effort to keep the audience's attention. The audience's drowsiness is eliminated by digression, the use of interesting examples or photographs, monitoring of reactions, etc.

## 5. Preparation for the presentation

The effect of elaboration with presentation depends to a large extent on the preparatory work and the presentation itself. High quality presentations take time. Most of the time is spent on the preparatory part. It is estimated that each minute of presentation requires 30 to 60 minutes of preparation (Kaltenbach & Soetikno, 2016).

With good preparation it is possible to eliminate typical mistakes, actually five "deadly sins" that accompany a bad presentation. Such a presentation (1) has no clear point, (2) is not useful for the audience, (3) no clear course, (4) contains too much detail and (5) takes too long (Weissman, 2007). In order for a person to master the art of presentation, it is necessary to leave a good impression with the audience, to establish and maintain direct contact with the audience and to express himself clearly and convincingly (Stanton, 2004). Appropriate behavior is therefore expected during the presentation (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Speaker behavior during the presentation

Desirable behavior	Undesirable behavior
Avoiding long explanations	Adjust the style of exposure to the audience
Bragging	Interactive relationship with the audience
Provocation and arrogance	Encouraging discussion and exchange of ideas
Excessive use of jargon	Ethical relationship with the audience

According to: Lamza-Maronić & Glavas, 2008, p. 110

The presenter should decide in advance which method to use to memorize the content for the presentation. The following can be used as effective techniques: (1) auxiliary cards with the key words of the main and auxiliary theses; (2) a cluster of ideas or a structure of ideas; (3) slides with or without auxiliary cards; (4) writing a short manuscript that will be read in detail and (5) memorizing the text of the presentation (Rouse & Rouse, 2005, p. 172). Word-to-word reading is the least desirable technique since the presentation seems artificial, no eye contact is established with the audience and, therefore, the opportunity to receive feedback is lost. The speaker should establish contact with each person in the audience for three to five seconds, and he should not look away from the audience for more than 10 seconds (Dolan, 2017).

Relying only on memory, which one might think at first glance, doesn't guarantee success or leave a favorable impression on the audience. Memory is a good choice if a person is adorned with an animated speaking style or

an excellent knowledge of the topic he often presents. When presenting the content, after all, the speaker must pay a lot of attention to his appearance. This applies to almost all aspects of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in public speaking (Gozalova et al., 2016). Personal style, actually, physical appearance is the first component that can be noticed in the speaker. Research has shown that appearance has a great influence on the general impression. The criteria that define a good appearance also depend on the culture (Borovac Zekan & Gabric, 2021).

The presenter should stick to a formal style of dressing. Clothes emphasize the personality, the clothes should be with a complete appearance, to reflect the occupation, status, individuality. Good taste in clothing means the right choice of clothes, shoes, jewelry and other details, but of course it should be adapted for every occasion. Clothing is not just a way of dressing, it is an external characteristic and feature of a person who appears in public (Castaldo Lundén, 2020; Efremov et al., 2021). Business attire implies respect for certain unwritten rules, to be elegant and unobtrusive, to emphasize and preserve authority, and not to act rigid or too nonchalant, to be in line with fashion trends, but not fashionable, because it is a bit frivolous (Ranisavljev-Kocareva, 2009). All business people and those who come into contact with clients, as well as people who come into contact with clients, as well as people who present their work, must act elegantly and authoritatively in the first place. Behavior and appearance are also important at work, because a person represents his company with his personality and clothes (Lukač-Zoranić, 2013). That is why all the details must be designed and carefully selected. The rules related to business attire are color harmony, simplicity, inconspicuousness, moderation unrelated to fashion trends. The business style of dressing will mainly depend on where you work and what the dress policy of that house is. Only respecting the rules guarantees success in business, a good impression on partners and a strong image of the company (Urošević & Pejčić, 2014; Vukovic et al., 2021). All the rules that apply

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to business attire also apply to presenter's attire, so this is another important requirement that is set before the speaker.

## Conclusion

The dynamic business environment and the constant development of modern technology force employees, especially in managerial positions, to constantly change and improve their personal skills and competencies. The development of methods to improve presentation skills is of particular benefit to modern managers as they are expected to be skilled presenters of their ideas. Employees don't need to have presentation skills; these skills can be learned and developed. Communication skills and their effect are one of the most important factors of success in modern business. The ability to present products and services, as well as conducting business conversation are crucial for success in a professional environment. It can be said that the ability to present is the skill to present a particular idea or knowledge to the audience in the most effective way. The demands presented upon a communicator (speaker) come down to gaining the audience's attention, showing emotional intelligence, which is reflected in controlling emotions and recognizing and controlling the emotions of the audience.

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