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# SPEAK EASIER

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how to be a perfect presenter



*by Richard Uridge*

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# Introduction

Giving a presentation fills most of us with dread. Even the thought of standing up in front of a few colleagues can turn our legs to jelly. So the prospect of speaking to an audience of hundreds can render normally calm and coherent individuals into gibbering, nervous wrecks.

It doesn't need to be this way. Say hello to your nerves. Embrace them and turn the energy they bring into something productive rather than destructive. Let that energy stir your creative juices and make your next presentation extraordinary instead of ordinary. Memorable instead of forgettable. Enjoyable instead of tolerable (for you *and* the audience). But, most important of all, effective instead of ineffective.

So how is this modest little book going to help you achieve all that? By breaking the business of presentation and public speaking into the following manageable steps:

1. Purpose - what you want your presentation to achieve.
2. Audience - who you need to achieve it with.
3. Context - the physical and intellectual “space” you and your audience are in.
4. Content - what you need to tell the audience.
5. Structure - the order you tell them.
6. Style - the way you tell ‘em.

The first six chapters of ***Speak Easy*** are arranged under the same headings in the same order. After that it gets a bit less logical with ad hoc chapters on practical issues like dealing with nerves and hecklers, selling yourself and your key messages, PowerPoint and other presentational props and tools and rehearsing. It's a book that's been 35 plus years in the making in the sense that it's based on the author's working life as a broadcaster, presenter and communications coach. And because he's still working - and learning - it's a book that'll never really be finished. So rather cutting down a whole forest of trees and committing to a paper version that'd be out of date before the end of the month (or even the end of this paragraph) we're making it available exclusively online. You can download it in either PDF or e-book format to read on a variety of different devices such as a smartphone, tablet or Kindle. And in order to make sure you receive notifications of additions and amendments (for example, the new chapter on how to deal with hecklers) we'd recommend you join our mailing list if you haven't already done just that to receive this version!

No time to read it all? Then you can listen to ACM Training's Five Minute Masterclass series which covers much of the same subject matter in short bursts or follow our blog for an article-by-article breakdown.

## About the author

Richard's fascination with the business of presenting can be traced back to an unfortunate incident involving a toilet window and a bed of nettles. Spectacularly misjudging an after dinner speech he'd been asked to give to a group of conservative farmers (and spectacularly misjudging the strength of the complimentary wine), he decided leaving through the window during a drinks break was a safer option than ploughing on. And so it would have been but for the stingers lurking the other side of the frosted glass.

He learned from his mistake (research the audience, don't drink, always carry a pair of leather gardening gloves) but never quite escaped his rural roots and went on to present programmes such as Farming Today and Open Country on BBC Radio 4. His audiences as a broadcaster regularly topped the million mark although he'd be first to concede that a live presentation to an audience a fraction of that size is way more nerve-wracking when they are in the same room.



Richard - letting his hands do the talking!

Richard has been passionate about communication - and words in particular - since he landed a job as a cub reporter on the Reading Chronicle in the days of inky-ribboned typewriters and hot metal printing presses. He writes about it at [blog.acmtraining.co.uk](http://blog.acmtraining.co.uk). And he stands up and talks about it at every opportunity, chairing conferences, giving speeches and, of course, delivering training.

One

# PURPOSE

## *What are you “selling?”*

I find it useful to remember everyone lives by selling something.

Robert Louis Stevenson

I spent three years of my life building a house. Digging holes. Pouring concrete. Mixing mortar. Laying bricks. Cutting wood. Boarding walls. Tiling roofs. Plumbing. Wiring. Painting...The only thing I didn't do was the plastering because it's the only trade that gets harder the slower you do it. But that's beside the point. To build a house you need a plan. Only then are you in a position to decide which tools you need. You don't just go to Screwfix, buy a hammer and start bashing things with it.

So what's my point? Well, too many of us start our presentations in a similar fashion. We don't draw up a plan and we grab the nearest available tool - usually PowerPoint. And, if you'll allow me to push this metaphor to breaking point, our whole presentation crashes around our ears. Or rather the audience's ears. So close that document, step away from the computer and think.

What do you want your presentation to achieve? I ask a similar question of delegates on my written word workshops. Hearing your words (rather than reading them) what do you want your listeners to do? How do you want them to act? Don't tell me you want to inform them. It's just not good enough. Information is a means to an end not the end itself. You want to inform your audience so that they: buy your product or service; invest in your company; sign off on your proposal; give you pay rise; promote you to the board; support your charity; smoke less; eat more fruit; drink less; exercise more...

In other words what are you selling? And if you're from the Third Sector don't be alarmed by my use of an apparently commercial word like selling. We're all selling something. Politicians walking the boards in the theatre of Westminster are selling us their particular brand of politics. Pop stars their music. Sportspeople their sport (and, increasingly, their merchandise). Charities encouraging us to give money or time are selling both a salve for our consciences and the prospect of a better, fairer world. If you still don't like the word, think of your presentation as increasing social rather than financial capital.

But whichever way you prefer to look at it, make sure you know exactly what you want your presentation to achieve. Ideally, crystallise your thoughts into one, or two or, at the very most, three pithy bullet points jotted on a note that you can stick somewhere in clear

view so you never lose sight of where you're heading as you build your presentation on these, dare I say it, solid foundations.

## EXERCISE

Grab a sheet of paper or, if you're fabulously wealthy, a block of eye-wateringly expensive PostIt notes. Looking forward to your next presentation or back to a previous one, complete the following sentences:

*By the end of the presentation I want my audience to...*

### TIP

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If you're struggling to complete this exercise or haven't yet given a presentation so haven't got anything to reflect on it might help to use the following example. You work for an NGO (non government organisation) whose job it is to reduce the amount of plastic that ends up polluting the world's oceans. You've been asked to give a talk to a group of secondary school children.

Your sentence might initially read something like this:

*By the end of the presentation I want my audience to understand the damage that plastic can cause to the environment.*

But I'd argue that understanding is a means to an end not the end in and of itself. Think about it. What you really want is for that understanding to lead to an actual behavioural change. So re-write that sentence and it'll probably end up reading something like this:

*By the end of the presentation I want my audience to reduce the amount of plastic they use in the first place, re-use the plastic they can't avoid or make sure it's properly recycled.*

Now look at what you've just written and underline the key words. Limit yourself to two or three - four or five at the most. The sentence will then morph into something like this:

*By the end of the presentation I want my audience to reduce the amount of plastic they use in the first place, and re-use or recycle what's left.*

Remember information is a means to an end, not the end itself. Information is passive. Reducing, re-using and recycling are active. Use information to activate your audience!

Want to read on? Then download the full version at <http://blog.acmtraining.co.uk/shop/> for the special price of just £4.99 (down from £9.99)