

Tips For Speakers



About This Booklet

This booklet is designed for self-advocates and allies to assist in making effective presentations to a wide range of audiences.

First, the Summary gives a short list of Tips on how to be an effective public speaker when giving presentations to a variety of audiences. Then, for each of the Tips, the booklet gives more in-depth advice. At the end of the booklet, a special section gives tips for meeting specifically with lawmakers.

About The Authors

The booklet was developed by Nicole LeBlanc as part of her work with CQL | The Council on Quality Leadership and through a grant with the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities. It is intended to serve as a guide for self-advocates. The information reflects the core values of the self-advocacy movement.



Summary of Tips

1. Welcome and greet your audience
2. Presume competence of your audience
3. Use plain English
4. Keep your focus on the goals of your presentation
5. Use people-first language
6. Use personal stories
7. Keep your opinions to yourself
8. Make your presentation interactive
9. Practice aloud with all the other presenters
10. Get to your presentation site early
11. Engage your audience with strong speaking skills
12. Be sure to plan for questions and breaks
13. Be prepared for challenging situations

1. Welcome and greet your audience

- Introduce all presenters.
- Plan an interactive ice breaker.
- Tell everyone where the restrooms are located.
- Let the audience know when you plan to take a break.
- Take care of any other “housekeeping” or general business items



2. Presume competence of your audience

- To “presume competence” means to assume your audience is able to understand what you say and to do the things you suggest. Do not assume they are unable.

3. Use plain English

- Use words that everyone understands.
- No “alphabet soup.” In other words, do not overuse abbreviations. For example, rather than saying “NASDDD,” say “National Association of State Directors on Developmental Disabilities.”



4. Keep your focus on the goals of your presentation

- Focus on the essentials. Leave out details that aren't important.
- Understand the values of the group and speak with those values in mind.

5. Use people-first language

- For example, say “person with autism,” not “autistic person.” Say “person with Down’s Syndrome,” not “Down’s Syndrome person.”

6. Use personal stories

- Plan ahead what stories you will use to support your points. Work with your co-presenters.
- Make sure the stories are not too long.
- Use caution when sharing stories that may cause you to be overcome with emotion while presenting. You must be able to stay professional.



7. Keep your opinions to yourself

- Training is different than direct advocacy.
- You need to leave your opinions at home.
- Stick to the facts.
- As presenters and advocates, it's important to be value-neutral and unbiased when presenting.



8. Make your presentation interactive

- Keep your audience awake!
- Limit lecturing.
- Move around the room, if you don't need to stay with the microphone.
- Include group activities so the audience has a chance to talk.
- Use an icebreaker activity to let everyone get to know each other.
- Make sure the audience gets a chance to move around.
- It is important to keep the audience engaged and listening.
- Use a step-by-step process when giving directions for an activity. Model the activity and show an example.

9. Practice aloud with all the other presenters

- Practice before the day you will present.
- Practice out loud in front of others.
- If you are co-presenting with someone else, figure out who will talk about which slides.
- Practice the presentation using the slides so you are comfortable. Practice what you are going to say and use the PowerPoint as a cue.
- When you practice, time yourself. Make sure you don't leave too much extra time at the end, but don't run out of time, either.

10. Get to your presentation site early



- Get there at least 30 minutes early to set up. Be aware that the room might be locked.
- Try out computers, projects, monitors, or any other technology before you start.
- You may need to rearrange the tables and chairs.
- Use the restroom. You may not get another chance until you're finished.

11. Engage your audience with strong speaking skills



- Speak loudly, especially if there is no microphone or the microphone does not work.
- Try not to talk too fast or slow.
- Do not read from your script or the overhead slides.
- Look at people when you speak.

12. Be sure to plan for questions and breaks



- Always leave at least 10 minutes for questions at the end.
- Take breaks.
 - Breaks are more for the audience than for you.
 - Be clear about what time you will start again.
 - Tell your audience something exciting before the break, so they come back to hear more.
 - Use break time to talk to your co-presenters about how things are going.

13. Be prepared for challenging situations

- If you have time left at the end of your presentation, have a back-up activity planned.
- If you are running out of time, know beforehand which stories you will leave out to save time.
- Be aware of difficult audience members:
 - Sometimes people will ask a question and use it as an excuse to speak. After a minute, thank them for their comments and move on.
 - Hold on to the microphone. If you give it to someone else, you may not get it back!
 - If there are too many questions, you can say, "We need to move on, but we will take more questions at the end."
 - If someone in the audience is talking to someone else loudly or talking on their phone, simply stop and say something like, "In order to proceed, I need it to be a bit quieter." Then say nothing until they stop. It won't take long for total silence to give them the clue.



Additional Tips on Advocacy with Legislators

- Try to meet with them face to face in their home office. If that is not possible, then go meet with them in the state capital. You can also use mail and email or call them on the phone. However, face to face in their local office is always best. Don't call on the weekend.
- Be bipartisan. Disability has no party affiliation. You need to work with Democrats and Republicans. You need both to pass a bill.
- K.I.S.S.: "Keep it short and simple!" Keep your message simple, short and sincere. Limit yourself to 1 or 2 key points. Leave a 1 page fact sheet. Tell a story about your main point. Leave a business card.
- Know how to "pivot." Pivoting is a way to redirect someone who has gone off-topic. You pivot by saying, "It's great that you want to talk about tax policy, but I'm here to talk about _____."
- You cannot speak badly of Republicans or Democrats on Facebook or Twitter and be a successful advocate. Present yourself on social media the same way you present yourself in your advocacy work. Legislators are people, too.
- Dress professionally and look your best.

To find out how to call your lawmakers, you can do a Google search for your state legislative page and look for legislator contacts on that page. In Illinois, the state legislative page is <http://www.ilga.gov/>