



Interview testing: presentations

Congratulations! You've passed the first hurdle and have been offered an interview for your dream job. Whether it's a first or subsequent interview, many employers like to ask candidates to undertake tasks or tests to help them in their assessment process.

Hoople has created a number of helpful information sheets on interview testing. This one looks at interview presentations. For help with interview testing, including psychometric tests, please refer to our other information sheets.

Presentations

Being asked to make a presentation can be daunting. The interviewer is testing your confidence levels and ability to communicate clearly. They'll also be checking your timekeeping skills (they may have set you a specific length of time for your presentation) as well as your ability to persuade, analyse and to be creative.



First things first

As the old saying goes, failing to prepare means you prepare to fail, so:

1. Allow yourself plenty of time

To create an impressive presentation, you must allow adequate time to plan and rehearse. Don't leave it until the day before and rush it because it will show!

2. Be clear about the facilities available to you

Most presentations are done using Microsoft PowerPoint so check to see if you need to bring your own laptop or USB stick or if you should send your presentation to the company before the interview.

3. Know how long your presentation slot is

Some interviewers might allow 5 minutes, others might allow 30 minutes so ensure that you clarify how long your time slot is before you begin the preparation work.

4. Do your homework

Your presentation will come across best if you are confident in the subject area that has been chosen/allocated to you, so make sure you know and understand what you are talking about.

5. Find out exactly who your audience will be

Have you met them already? Will you be presenting in front of other candidates? If you know in advance, there will be no unpleasant surprises on the day.

Putting the presentation together

The following tips apply mostly to Microsoft PowerPoint but can also be used across other presentation formats.

1. Give it focus

Presenters who jump between points and ramble can come across unprepared or disorganised so take care when structuring your presentation. Outline your key points in a way that people can follow easily.

2. Keep it short-ish

Winston Churchill once said: “I’m going to make a long speech because I’ve not had time to prepare a short one.”

Studies show that the average person has a three minute attention span so it’s crucial that you take time to really consider what is and isn’t important. Think about your own experiences—how long are you able to pay attention when listening to or watching a presentation? Only include the important, relevant and interesting bits.

3. Prove your passion

It's important to really believe in what you're saying. This is when your passion and enthusiasm will shine and captivate your audience. Dynamic visuals and interesting content themselves are not enough, they must be partnered with a strong belief in what you are presenting. Don't hold back—be confident and get excited!

4. Only use media to enhance

PowerPoint is a powerful tool when used correctly but it should never be enough to replace you. If your audience would learn just as much from reading through the slides as they would from listening to your presentation, you haven't got the balance quite right. Keep wording on your PowerPoint to a minimum but use imagery and graphics to support your points. Even include a short video if time allows—this can be great for enhancing an important point but only if it's really relevant.

5. Make it personal

Where appropriate, explain your points through short stories and anecdotes. This engages the audience on a more personal level and the interviewer will get a much better feel for your personality.

6. Silence is golden

Had you ever considered planning silences throughout the presentation? Pauses are the hallmark of a confident speaker whereas nervous speakers tend to ramble to fill gaps. Use pauses to organise your thoughts or before making a key point to give the audience a breather before engaging them again.

The slides

1. Effects

Don't get carried away with flashy PowerPoint transition effects. If you do use effects, choose one or two and stick to them all the way through. Too many effects can look disjointed and will also distract attention from the content.

2. Design

PowerPoint offers a wide selection of slide design templates which can be used. Make a sensible choice when choosing the one to use—it's usually best to stay away from anything too bright and garish.



3. Fonts and colours

There are many **colours** and **font**s available on PowerPoint but, again, try to avoid anything too bold unless drawing attention to a specific point. Stick to one of the colour schemes provided or select three or four colours of your own to use.

4. Mix it up

There are ways other than using fancy colours and effects to hold an audience's attention. Make sure your slides offer plenty of variety and are clearly broken up into sections. You could try using different media/slide formats for each section eg:

Section 1: Bullet points and image

Section 2: Full size images to act as a background for 'story telling'

Section 3: Short video

Section 4: Individual words on each slide for emphasis

Section 5: Blank screen allowing for 'story telling'

Section 6: Charts/graphs

Section 7: A humorous image to support your point (only if appropriate!)

As mentioned previously, human attention span is very short so you need to make every slide just as exciting, interesting and well thought out as the first.

Then...

Put yourself in the shoes of an audience member and try to see it from their perspective: (Use WIIFM (What's In It For Me) to help you.)

- What might they not understand?
- What might seem boring?

Ask a family member, friend or colleague to watch your presentation and to provide constructive feedback. Or film yourself and critically review your performance.

Once you're at the interview...

- Remember that the group you are presenting to are just people like you. You will be trying to impress them, but remember that they are not trying to catch you out or deliberately setting you up to fail
- Maintain eye contact with your audience. Be careful to give each member of the panel equal levels of eye contact and attention
- Speak clearly and calmly. Take deep breaths before you start and try not to rush
- Avoid the temptation to read out what is written on the slides. The slides are there to provide structure to your presentation and to add specific relevant information that is more easily digested when visually presented
- By all means use notes to help you, but they should be unseen by the panel and not just repeat what the interviewers can read for themselves on the slides
- If you've been given a specific length of time for the presentation, ensure that you keep to these timings
- Leave time for and invite questions from the panel at the end of your presentation

Found this guidance useful? Need more advice? Then stop by our website, www.hooplerecruitment.co.uk, and follow @hoopleltd on Twitter for weekly #TuesdayTips!