

Mark

In a presentation, a large part of your personality is communicated through the power of your voice. In fact, the word 'personality' comes from the Latin 'persona', which literally means 'through sound'. So if there's one thing you really need to master as a presenter, it's how you sound.

But when you're presenting in a foreign language, and finding it hard enough just remembering what to say, the voice often loses its personality. You quickly end up speaking like a robot and putting your audience to sleep.

So here are five simple ways to power up your public speaking voice and keep your audience engaged.

Number one: kill filler. Filler is, um, you know, like, what we say when we're, um, not sure what to say next. In a conversation, it's a useful signal that tells the other speaker we haven't quite finished. In a presentation, it's the surest way to sound boring and unprepared.

Number two: slow down. One reason we need to use filler in the first place is because we tend to speak too fast, especially when we're nervous. So, slow down; give yourself some breathing space.

Number three: pause. When you pause in a speech, you give yourself time to think about what to say next and your audience time to think about what you've just said. So whenever you feel like, errrrrr ... using filler, don't. Pause instead.

Number four: use emphasis. To make your message really stand out, it's crucial that you emphasise your key points. In English, some words – generally, nouns and verbs – are stressed more than others. This is not the case in all languages, but if you don't do it in English, you'll sound flat and monotonous.

Number five: vary volume. Don't limit yourself to the volume of your natural speaking voice. You can add extra emphasis either by speaking a little louder to reach out to your audience, or by speaking a little quieter to draw them in.

So let's just remind ourselves of how *not* to deliver your presentation ...

Presenter

Hi, everybody. Er I just wanted to ... oh, I just wanted, OK, I just wanted to ... I, um ... I finally got the opportunity to go through all the evaluation forms, um ... from er last week's ... um sales er sales training seminar and ... um ... wait a minute ... ah ... yeah ... last week's sales training seminar, so, er ... OK, er ... I just wanted to share with you ... some of the things ... that, um, people really gained from ... from the sessions ...

Mark

Stop, stop, stop! Oh dear – a lot of verbal junk there. Let's watch a different presenter using their voice much more effectively ...

Presenter

OK, as you know, for the last three months we've been rethinking the staff induction programme. We started out with the name 'Induction programme'. 'Induction programme'. Well, what does that say to *you*? ... Yeah, right. What it says to us – you're about to be sucked into the machine!

Well, isn't a welcome really what we're trying to provide anyway? Why are we making people's first weeks at the company a *bore* with all the health and safety regulations and legal forms to fill in, when we should be making them welcome? Why not a party, a well-chosen gift, a couple of long lunches with the boss, who, let's not forget, is the number one reason why most people quit their jobs!

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As you can see, this time the presenter makes every word, every phrase and every silence count. That's vocal intelligence.