

28 Qualities of a Skillful Presenter

Outstanding presenters continually pursue these qualities

“Wow! Now I understand why it’s so difficult to become a good presenter,” gushed one of my students in a recent class I conducted on presentation skills. I had just put up a slide that, one by one, enumerated 28 qualities that every good presenter not only exhibits, but also embodies. These qualities seem to flow effortlessly from skillful presenters.

To become a skillful presenter, you must embody them too.

Twenty-eight qualities. Outstanding presenters continually pursue these qualities.



Here they are, listed alphabetically accompanied by a brief description of each quality. Because it might be easier to understand a quality by knowing its opposite, I’ve listed those too. You can see how diametrically opposed these qualities can be.

One last

point. Try to visualize each of these qualities to get a better idea of how to exhibit them.

1. Adept nonverbally: clear communication with body language. Your nonverbal communication—body movements, gestures, posture, and facial expressions—speak louder than your words. *Opposite:* stilted.

2. Adept verbally: full speaking command; uses great words. Your verbal communication—the way you speak—can carry an audience: your tone, inflection, and volume, and how you pace, pause, and enunciate. *Opposite:* speechified (in other words, as if you are reading a written speech—for the first time. Yikes, how boring!)

3. Animated: full of life and excitement. Act alive! *Opposite:* lethargic.

4. Assertive: being strong and forceful (but not overbearing). This is in between the bookends of aggressive and passive. *Opposite:* timid.

5. Astute: keen ability to accurately assess a situation or person and turn it into an advantage. *Opposite:* unintelligent.

6. Cheerful: noticeably happy and optimistic. Simply smile while you present. *Opposite:* dreary.

7. Clear: easy to perceive, leaving no doubt. Attain clarity by testing your message beforehand. *Opposite:* vague.

8. Commanding: being authoritative. You should own the room, while enabling your audience to freely participate. *Opposite:* withdrawn.

9. Confident: being self-assured; a quality that is catchy. *Opposite:* uncertain.

10. Credible: convincing and believable. That seems inherently obvious. *Opposite:* unconvincing.

11. Dynamic: stimulating. Make your audience think; it’s one way to garner participation. *Opposite:* halfhearted.

12. Effective: successful in producing the desired result. Ultimately, this is what your presentation is all about. Ensure your audience gets what they expect and want. *Opposite:* ineffective or weak.

13. Energetic: demonstrating vitality. Pace yourself as you move about the room. *Opposite:* lifeless.

14. Engaging: attracting and occupying interest. Another key quality: connect individually with both large and small audiences. *Opposite:* unappealing.

15. Engrossing: absorbing all attention. Keep all eyes up on you, and not down on mobile devices. *Opposite:* boring, which is the kiss of death for any presentation.

16. Enthusiastic: showing intense and eager enjoyment. *Opposite:* depressed.

17. Focused: paying particular attention to the topic at hand. Keep on point; don’t allow your audience to take control. *Opposite:* flighty.

18. Innovative: original and creative thinking. Give your audience more than what they expect. *Opposite:* hackneyed.

19. Knowledgeable: intelligent and well-informed. Know a concept well enough to explain it to the uninitiated. *Opposite:* uninformed.

20. Logical: clear, sound reasoning. What you present must make immediate sense. *Opposite:* illogical or irrational.

21. Memorable: easily remembered; worth remembering. Make sure your audience takes something away with them. *Opposite:* forgettable.

22. Natural: smooth and polished. All this takes is a bit of concentrated practice. *Opposite:* self-consciousness or awkward.

23. Organized: structured and in control. Respect your audience by taking the time to adequately prepare. *Opposite:* disorganized or inefficient.

24. Passionate: showing strong feelings. If you are not passionate, how can you expect your audience to follow suit? *Opposite:* apathetic.

25. Poised: graceful and elegant. This is the quality that encompasses many of the others. All the synonyms apply here: self-assured, composed, dignified, in complete control. *Opposite:* clumsy.

26. Present: fully aware and engaged in the current situation. Focus on what’s happening, as it happens. *Opposite:* distracted.

27. Relaxed: being comfortable (not tense or anxious). Set a calm tone for your presentation. *Opposite:* uptight.

28. Understandable: easily understood—by your audience, which is the critical part. *Opposite:* incomprehensible.

So there they are. Twenty-eight qualities to embrace and embody; twenty-eight to eschew. Now it’s up to you. All it takes is practice and performance to master these skills. 🍌

—RICH MAGGIANI

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