**Make eye contact with the audience**.

Eye contact draws them in. It also helps you determine when they are confused or have lost interest, and whether your pacing is too fast, too slow, or just right. Spread your attention throughout the audience instead of concentrating on any one person or group (even if they are the only ones who matter). If presenting at a conference, be sure to glance periodically at the session chair, who will signal you when you are running out of time.

**Stand and face the audience**.

Standing gives you more energy, the talk is more dynamic, and it is easier to maintain eye contact. Do not face the screen, which puts your back to the audience. This is off-putting, prevents you from getting feedback from the audience's body language, and can cause difficulty in hearing/understanding you. Do not look down at your computer, either, which shares many of the same problems. Don't stand in front of the screen. This prevents the audience from viewing your slides. Being animated is good, but do not pace. Pacing is very distracting, and it gives the impression that you are unprofessional or nervous.

**Laser pointer**

When giving a presentation, never point at your laptop screen, which the audience cannot see. Using a laser pointer is fine, but the laser pointer tends to shake, especially if you are nervous, and can be distracting. If you are tense, use your hand, because the talk is more dynamic if you stride to the screen and use your whole arm; the pointing is also harder for the audience to miss. You must touch the screen physically, or come within an inch of it (if possible). If you do not touch the screen, most people will just look at the shadow of your finger, which will not be the part of the slide that you are trying to indicate.

**Nerves**

If you find yourself suffering a nervous tic, such as saying "um" in the middle of every sentence, then practice more, including in front of audiences whom you do not know well. Consider videotaping yourself to see how you come across to others. This information can be a bit traumatic, but it is invaluable in helping you to improve.

If you get flustered, don't panic. One approach is to stop and regroup; taking a drink of water is an excellent way to cover this, so you should have water on hand even if you don't suffer from a dry throat.

**Questions**

Answering questions from the audience is tough! Even after you become very proficient at giving a talk, it will probably take you quite a bit longer to become good at answering questions. So, don't feel bad if that part does not go perfectly, but do work on improving it. If you film yourself giving a practice presentation, then when you watch the film back, think of questions an audience member might ask so you are prepared.

Just as you practice your talk, practice answering questions — both the ones that you can predict and also unpredictable ones. Giving practice talks to people who are willing to ask such questions can be very helpful.

When an audience member asks a question, it is a good idea to repeat the question, asking the questioner whether you have understood it, before answering the question. This has three benefits:

* You ensure that you have understood the question. When thinking under pressure, it can be far too easy to jump to conclusions, and it is terrible to answer a question different than the one that was asked. A related benefit is that you get to frame the question in your own words or from your own viewpoint.
* You give yourself a few moments to think about your answer.
* If the audience member does not have a microphone, the rest of the audience may not have been able to hear the question.