

TED Gurus' Guide to Presenting Your Projects

by [Brittany Taylor](#)



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From science fairs to school finals, you have presentations in your future. Want to knock them out of the park? Two TED pros are showing you how.

Tip #1: Forget about it

Gil Weinberg, the founding director of the Georgia Tech Center for Music Technology, took the stage at TEDYouth 2014. He talks to students all the time in his day job, so nerves weren't a problem pre-TED. Still, he says, "I prepare as hard as I can up until an hour before the presentation. Then, for the last hour, I find something else to do, something else to think about."

(Psst! Want to know more about Weinberg's field? [Click here](#) to see how what music has to do with technology.)

Tip #2: Control your body language

For [Wordnik](#) founder and CEO Erin McKean, who shared the stage with Weinberg at TEDYouth2014, nerves are second nature. She battles them with lots of preparation—and then makes sure no one can guess how anxious she is by monitoring her moves. "When people are nervous on stage," McKean says, "they tend to cross their arms in front of themselves, which makes them look (and feel) even more nervous. It's always better to keep your arms spread out—gesture! point! pretend you're giving the audience a hug!"

Tip #3: Think about your audience

Have you ever sat in an auditorium and listened to someone drone on and on about something you didn't care about? Yep, so have we. To avoid creating that feeling, McKean says that you need to respect your audience. "Think about your talk from their point of view," she tells us. "I like to keep in mind the acronym Jerry Weissman, author of *The Power Presenter*, uses: WIIFY—"what's in it for you?" If you can't answer the WIIFY question for the audience, you should go back and revise your speech. And," she adds, "it's okay for the WIIFY to be 'I will be entertained for 16 minutes.'"

Tip #4: Find an angle

We don't always get to choose our topics, especially for school assignments or group projects. McKean acknowledges that this sort of presentation can make giving an entertaining speech more difficult. Still, she says, there is *always* something worth sharing—you just have to find it.

"Dig deeper," McKean says. "Is the assigned subject dull? I bet there are interesting people working in it. Find them, and talk about their lives. If you have to talk about a person you don't find interesting, talk about the reaction to the work they did. Did other people love it? Hate it? Controversy is always interesting. Have to talk about a time period you find a snooze? Well, what did people back then do for fun? Find something that makes you excited, then use that as the basis for your talk. Can't find *anything*? Talk about why you dislike your subject."

Tip #5: And whatever you do, don't...

Weinberg speaks from personal experience when he urges you, first, not to compromise on your visuals. Opt for images, GIFs, or videos that will elicit a reaction from your audience, whether it's shock, awe, laughter, disgust, or something totally different.

Second, he says, don't include text in your slides. "That's why *you're* there," he reminds us, "to speak!"

Third? Ax bad jokes. "Make sure they work on your friends and family before bringing them to stage," Weinberg says. If you have trouble landing one, cut it fast.

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