

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR AN UNRESPONSIVE AUDIENCE

Hello, welcome. If we find you here, that is probably because you need a little help. Firstly, take a deep breath. Everything is going to be okay. So, you have got a class on your hand that just does not seem to want to engage. Do not worry, this is not your fault by any means at all. The students may have had a long day, and they may just be tired. Or on the contrary, they might just have too much energy in them. In fact, it is quite a common issue. Hence this document!

Now let us go through a couple easy steps to figure out how to get them back on track.

1. Start with something shocking

If you are still at the start of the presentation and feeling a little nervous, fear not, because the best solution is still very much in front of you. As both you and we know, when someone says something unexpected, people look. There have been entire presidential campaigns based on this sheer fact. Let us demonstrate. Let us say your presentation is based on AI and Human Rights. You could start with the legal definition of Artificial Intelligence, but that is not likely to gain you too much attention. What do you do instead? Perhaps start off with a robot uprising. Talk about whether this will happen. Voila, now you have keen listeners, perhaps some slightly scared about their future, but we will dispel that quickly.

2. Body language

Body language is crucial for a presenter. If you seem shy and closed off, people lose interest very quickly. We have a couple solutions on how to fix this. Firstly, move around a little. We do not recommend you run around the room, but move just about enough as you speak to capture attention from those around. Secondly, broad shoulders and straight posture. These are signs you ooze confidence, and nothing is as captivating as confidence. Thirdly, make a little eye contact every once in a while. Not intensely, might we add, as that could become slightly uncomfortable for both parties very quickly. Just a passing glance would suffice, at different students occupying different regions of the room.

3. Believe in yourself

So, you are slightly doubting yourself. Well, do not. ELSA4Schools is an International Project, one with quite a few layers of management and oversight. We select volunteers based on their skills and talent. If you have got this far, that is because all of us believe in you.

4. Share a story

Human beings like a little storytelling. Think about high school. The most popular kid was almost always the one with the best stories. And here we are, back again. But this time, you have done a lot more living, and so have a lot more stories to tell. And it is an impressionable audience. This is your podium, engage them with an interesting story or two related to the topic. If we were to use AI and Human Rights, for example, talk about that time your Siri misunderstood what you were saying and did something embarrassing. Everyone has one of those, right? No? Oh. This suggestion must, however, be used extremely carefully. Be careful not to share too many personal details about yourself, as this could violate some of our policies.

5. Ask them to share a story

The only thing people find more interesting than watching other people talk, is talking themselves. Take advantage of this, ask the audience if they have stories to share. There will probably be someone whose Siri did something embarrassing in public. Come on, please tell us there is we are starting to feel a little weird.

6. Use a little humour

Stand-up comedy is really a career. Humans like you and me stand up on a stage and say a few jokes, and get paid millions by thousands of onlookers. If that is not a sign humour catches attention, we do not know what is. So, why not give it a go yourself? Add a little humour to your presentation, see if that helps you gain back the audience. Again, do be careful about this, make sure nothing you say is offensive in the slightest. Also carefully select your jokes, as nothing dispels attention like cracking an unfunny joke no one laughs at. Take it from us.

7. Show a little passion

Seem passionate about what you are talking about. Modulate your voice and tone, as monotones get a little boring very quickly. Add a little emotion to what you say, as this makes people relate with you. And of course, people listen to what you have to say when they relate with you. We do not mean overdramatise, of course, this isn't a Marvel movie (We are sorry, but someone had to say it). But ensure that the audience feel the passion in your voice. Going back to AI and Human Rights, the slide regarding privacy and AI for example. Sympathise with the individuals whose privacy is lost, and make the audience sympathise with you.

8. Engage with the audience

Consistently ask the audience questions. This helps keep the audience on their toes. Do not make it too hard of course, keep in mind that your audience is rather young. To increase interaction further, ask them for shows of hands. Returning yet again to AI and Human Rights, ask them how many of them have seen a robot, for example.

9. Repeat words when you talk

If you are making an important point, repeat certain functional words while you talk to grab some attention. This adds emphasis to your point, and makes it sound like what you are talking about is extremely important.

10. Give them time to talk to each other

This might seem a little counterintuitive, but it makes sense we promise. If you feel like you are losing attention, give the students a topic from the presentation to discuss for one or two minutes. This way, those amongst the audience who have comments to make can get it out of the way. Further, it gives you an opportunity to recalibrate and start again. The AI and Human Rights presentation specifically features a certain juncture where the crowd is urged to discuss the consequences of an AI driven car malfunctioning and causing an accident. You do not always have to make the conversation this dark, but as law students we know that it often is.

11. Use the ELSA Spirit

The presence of the volunteer designated with the role of ELSA Spirit is of exceptional importance. The primary function of this role is to refresh the audience and gain their attention. If you feel like your audience is starting to slip away, ask your ELSA Spirit to jump right in and propose a quick refreshing activity. Maybe asking the audience to stand up and dance with you to Baby Shark would do the trick. That seems pretty entertaining.

12. Relate with them

This is a common technique that often pays massive dividends. Think back to your childhood. How many times has your dad started a conversation with ‘When I was your age.....?’ Quite a few, we are willing to bet. These almost inevitably ended in a dad joke, and we probably knew that going in, but we paid attention anyway. Why did we do that, we hear you ask. It is because of the first line. You want to know what people were doing when they were in your position. Use this.

Do not crack dad jokes (please do not), but talk to your audience about what you were doing when you were in their position.

13. Ask a member of the audience to come up on stage with you

This may be in the form of a demonstration, or to share a story. Either way, talking to the entire audience is an enticing proposition. Indeed, most people sat on those chairs want to be up there with you. So, let them do that once or twice. Again, allow us to demonstrate. We are going back to the AI and Human Rights presentation, because of course we are. Perhaps ask a member of the audience to come up on the podium and act like a robot in a scenario you have created. Or maybe ask them to play the role of Siri so they can do something embarrassing.

14. Make references to past speakers in the presentation

You can use this to piggyback off their part of the presentation, for example. Maybe there is a connection between what you are talking about, and what they talked about. Make this connection known. If perhaps there are segments of the audience who were attentive to their section of the presentation but are not uninterested, this little throwback will wake them up again. This is because human beings like closure. If they do not listen to the connection you made, they will leave knowing that even the knowledge they gained is incomplete, which makes the energy and effort they poured into the previous presenter futile. They will hence not miss out on the opportunity to listen to this thought, at the very least so that there is not a gap in their knowledge. Once this is successful, use the above mentioned tricks to ensure you maintain their attention.

15. Ask for help

If none of the above guidance helps, do not be afraid to reach out for help. The ELSA4Schools sessions are prepared in a manner that facilitates plenty of support. You have the ELSA Spirit, your co-volunteers, the Project Trainer, and the assigned school teacher. Analyse the situation, and make a decision regarding who is most likely to help improve the situation. If none of the above mentioned options work, you may even just ask the audience to pay attention yourself.

AND FINALLY

16. Try to have fun

If you seem like you are having fun, the audience will automatically be interested. So always try and enjoy yourself. It is a vicious cycle like that, if you have fun, they will start responding to you,

which will help you have fun. Even if you are having a bit of a miserable day, try and seem like you are enjoying yourself, as this could well be a self-fulfilling prophecy! This is your project, have fun with it!