

On a big stage, dress like you mean it.

What do we mean by that? Consider these ten tips to take your presentation wardrobe from forgettable...to formidable.

1. *Embrace the fact it matters.* An audience begins forming its net impression the moment it lays eyes on you—before you say a word. How you dress plays a key part. Your attire can either amplify your communication or diminish it. Initially, an audience subconsciously “acquires” you as a presenter, promoting you from “stranger” to “member” of the larger group as you begin your presentation. But that’s not enough. As a presenter, you want to rise from group “member” to “leader.” Being a leader also means looking like one.
2. *Dress up from your audience.* The dress “code” differs for every big presentation. In general, your sartorial success depends on dressing *up one level* from your audience. If they’re casual, you’re business casual. If they’re business casual, you’re executive professional. Dressing a bit more seriously than your audience again sets you apart as the focus in the room—and the leader on the stage.
3. *Capitalize on color.* Coco Chanel said, “The best color in the whole world is the one that looks good on you.” Wear a color you feel great wearing. Stick with bold solids that ensure you stand out in a large meeting space or auditorium. Generally, stay away from intricate patterns, complex designs, and esoteric fashions. Keep it classy, stylish, and powerful.
4. *Put fit first.* Presenting to a large audience is nerve-wracking enough. Don't make it harder on yourself by wearing those pants you should have altered or that skirt that needs hemming. Make sure your clothes serve your net impression through the way they fit and flatter. Structured is generally better than unstructured. Well-tailored, well-cut garments will make you look stronger to the audience. They also make it easier to securely wear wireless microphones, IFB (earpiece) devices, and other audiovisual equipment.
5. *Accessorize for advantage.* With jewelry, less is more. An attractive watch, a substantial necklace, or a coordinating bracelet is fine—as long as none of it *distracts* from you, the presenter. If you think for a moment the audience will spend more time looking at your statement earrings than they will at you, take them off. Wear something smaller, more classic, and more conservative.

6. *Choose your shoes wisely.* When it comes to wardrobe, the right shoes are a lifesaver. Quality, classic, stylish shoes are the perfect complement to a well-chosen outfit. Comfortable shoes are the key to walking the big stage with purpose and ease. And functional shoes mean you'll minimize on-stage hazards. No risky stilettos here. No tripping on a rogue cable or wire. No losing your balance on a step or piece of carpet. Quality. Comfort. Function. The right shoes make a difference.
7. *Just breathe.* Effectively presenting before a large audience requires copious energy, focus, and vocal variety. It demands flourishes in delivery that can only be supported by consistent, deep breathing. And it generates nervous anxiety only diminished by the same. So, loosen your belt a notch. Make sure the cut of your suit, shirt, blouse, skirt, or pants allows for diaphragmatic inhalation. And wear comfortable undergarments. Don't let fashion trump physiology. Make deep breathing easier, and make your presentation better.
8. *Be true to yourself.* Again, in the words of Coco Chanel, "Elegance is refusal." Refuse to be anyone but yourself when it comes to what you wear. Style is a personal choice. It should reflect you, your role, and what you hope to accomplish with your presentation. Authenticity leads to credibility leads to a net impression of leadership and strength.
9. *Get technical.* Discuss staging with the professionals. Learn about the lighting, the visual effects, and the props. Know the plan for your presentation—where you'll walk, sit, stand, etc. Then, you can understand how the production impacts your wardrobe choice, if at all. Bottom line: Consult with the technical experts if you have any concerns.
10. *Have a backup plan.* On the day of your big stage presentation, bring a backup wardrobe choice, including accessories, shoes—the works. It's also good to have a travel sewing kit, an instant spot remover, and any other "wardrobe 911" article you think you might need. You'll be prepared, relaxed, and ready to hit the stage looking your best.