

# TIPS ON PRESENTING TO CAMERA

FROM SPORTS BROADCASTER CATHERINE WHITAKER



**Catherine Whitaker outlines the communication skills that help her present to a range of different audiences as a broadcaster. Catherine is a British sports reporter, presenter and commentator for radio and television. She has covered sporting events for BBC Radio 5 Live, IMG Media, Amazon Prime and Eurosport among others.**

- On-screen you should never be acting, just uplifting your natural self by 10%.
- Prepare thoroughly, but don't be wedded to your prep. Preparation is as much about giving yourself confidence as anything else.
- Avoid saying 'everyone' or 'all of you at home' etc., and instead use singular terms so the viewer feels you are talking specifically and exclusively to them.
- The viewer cannot relax if the presenter they are watching is tense. You might feel tense or nervous and that's fine, but the trick is never to show it. I always make sure my prep and rehearsals are finished half an hour before going on air so that the last 30 minutes can be nice and relaxed. Everyone's methods are different, but it's important that you learn how to hide your nerves.
- To nail the whole 'smiling at the camera' thing there are cheat codes because it is easy for it to look false or insincere. I sometimes imagine I'm talking to my dog. The presenter needs to feel like your friend, someone you're comfortable having in your living room with you.
- Posture is important but equally you need to not be so self-conscious about it as to end up looking uncomfortable or awkward. Yoga and pilates are great ways to help with posture.
- Be prepared to watch yourself back, particularly at the start of your career. It's the



- only way to establish if you have any bad habits like hand gestures or grumpy facial expressions when you are listening.
- Even if you have a guest, co-presenter, or interviewee, eye contact with the camera (i.e. your viewer) is essential. Sometimes this is a tricky balancing act but just a glance back at the camera here and there can be enough to make the viewer feel included.
  - Don't be afraid to tell producers and directors what you want or need. You are the one in the highest-pressure position - the person on whom it reflects if things go wrong. If you'd like more or less direction, clearer instruction, whatever, it's ok to say so.

- An autocue is a presenter's comfort blanket. Some use them more than others. I personally use it very little but find it useful for an opening link at the top of the show when nerves are most likely to be an issue. If you do end up relying on autocue, as some presenters do, make sure you always have a back-up as every presenter has had a scenario where the autocue fails.
- If you are given scripts that you haven't written yourself, don't be afraid to change them to put them in your own voice. It is essential that you sound sincere.
- When interviewing, the most important skill is listening. By all means prepare questions, but don't be wedded to them. Always listen to what your interviewee is saying and be prepared to follow up with a relevant question.
- Put your interviewee at ease. The chit chat before an interview may seem insignificant but it can often be the difference between a good interview and a bad interview.
- Multi-tasking and quick processing speed is essential. You will have several voices in your ear and will be constantly filtering instructions and information and having to conceal it all from the viewer.
- Get an earpiece that fits. A custom-made ear piece is an essential investment.



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