

**HOOK**training

# **HOOK**

## **YOUR AUDIENCE**

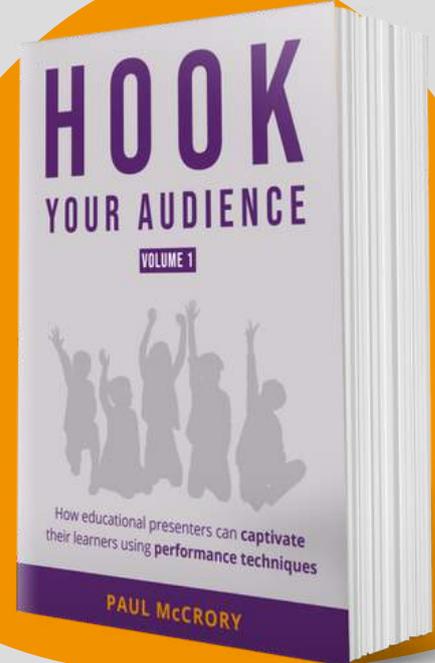
**VOLUME 1**

**GLOSSARY**

**HookYourAudienceBook.com**

# How do you present when nobody *has* to listen to you?

*Hook Your Audience* is a toolkit of performance techniques to emotionally engage child and family audiences in interactive, educational presentations.



Language matters. Without a language to identify the engagement techniques, we cannot properly reflect on how we each present. And without a common vocabulary, we cannot have meaningful discussions with other educators. This glossary collects together the key terms used in the toolkit for your convenience.

The main purpose of the book is to encourage informal educators to reflect more deeply on exactly *how* they engage their audiences, so please share this resource with as many of your colleagues as possible.

**Paul McCrory** runs *HOOK training ltd*, a company devoted to helping educators in visitor attractions or outreach organisations engage their learners. His approach combines interactive performance techniques and psychology. He has spent over 20 years working as an informal science educator and trainer in the UK, Ireland and internationally. The most interesting thing about Paul is that he has a PhD in being interesting.

If you want to find out more or get in touch, please visit [hooktraining.com](http://hooktraining.com)

# Glossary

**Affective outcomes:** changes in the emotions, attitudes or motivation of the learner. (See also Cognitive outcomes.)

**Alpha audience member:** one of the highest-status and most confident spectators in the eyes of their peers. You'll notice that people will look at them to help them judge how they should respond, especially when they are uncertain at the start of the presentation.

**Applause pose:** adopting and holding particular poses in order to initiate clapping.

**Arm language:** in this toolkit, the nonverbal clues that audience members give you when they raise their arm to answer a question or to volunteer, e.g. the height they raise their arm and the energy with which they wave it around.

**Audience barometers:** the term used in this toolkit for those spectators who are the most expressive and can give you clues about what the rest of your audience may be feeling at any one moment.

**Bad laugh:** stand-up comedy term to describe when an audience laughs out of nervousness or relief that they aren't the person being subjected to your put downs nor being placed in a demeaning position. (See also Put down.)

**Backleading:** the process, in interactive theatre, where you secretly guide the audience to do something which progresses the routine, e.g. to make a specific call out so that you can trigger the subroutine around that idea.

**Bits of business** or **bits**: interactive or humorous subroutines which help to engage the audience, but which are not usually essential to the main purpose of the routine.

**Bombing**: stand-up term for when your act is going down really badly.

**Bridge**: a backleading technique where you take any reply from a spectator and, through a chain of leading questions, guide them to the response you were aiming for, or re-direct their answer to where you want to go.

**Call and response**: an interactive performance technique where you ask the audience a question or prime them with the start of a statement and they answer the question or finish the statement in unison. Often these exchanges are repeated throughout the presentation as you train the audience to respond together.

**Call back**: a performance term for referring back to an earlier incident in the presentation to generate an easy laugh from this moment of shared recognition amongst the audience. (See also Re-incorporation.)

**Call out**: — when a spectator says something to the presenter, without their explicit permission. This can be spontaneous or elicited because of a hook you have used to prompt it.

— when you briefly acknowledge a mistake you have made, a distraction in the room or misbehaviour from a spectator, so that the incident doesn't continue to draw attention away from your presentation.

**Characterisation**: a storytelling and humour hook where you portray a few small elements of a character in the story, without impersonating them fully, e.g. a gesture, their posture or their voice.

**Child commentary**: the verbal or nonverbal acknowledgements you share with the adults in the audience when a child behaves in a charming and unexpected way. Adults adore watching "children being children".

**Child storytellers:** young children who try to relate a long, often seemingly irrelevant, story during the presentation.

**Cognitive outcomes:** changes in the knowledge, understanding or skills of the learner. (See also Affective outcomes.)

**Comedy chasm:** this is what stand-ups call the large gap between themselves and their audience in some venues. This distance can destroy their act.

**Comedy continuum:** the term used in this toolkit for the broad relationship across many types of humour, where the more overt a humour hook is, the harder it is to make the audience laugh.

**Corpsing:** in the theatre, this is when a performer suffers from the overpowering urge to laugh uncontrollably in response to a bizarre situation onstage and they break away from their script. Audiences love watching spontaneous moments of joy like this. (See also Faux corpsing.)

**Covert humour:** in this toolkit, any hook that makes the audience laugh when they weren't necessarily expecting to, i.e. incidental humour which seems to arise naturally from the situations and interactions onstage. Even someone who feels they are not naturally funny can make their audience smile and laugh easily with this type of comedy.

**Crowd work:** this is what stand-ups call the apparently spontaneous conversations they have with audience members in the front row when they appear to interview them during a set.

**Curse of experience:** in this toolkit, how repeatedly delivering the same presentation, inevitably, makes you less able to experience the emotions and thoughts you had when you started presenting it. (See also Privilege of experience.)

**Curse of knowledge:** the more familiar you are with an idea, the harder it becomes for you to put yourself in the position of someone who doesn't share your knowledge when you come to explain it to them. This unseen cognitive bias is one of the main reasons explaining is a much more difficult act than most people think.

**Dead time:** any part of the presentation where the pace has slowed because you are waiting for something else to happen, e.g. for a volunteer to walk to the stage; when the school bell goes and you can't talk over it.

**Degrees of ignorance model:** in this toolkit, there are four different types of ignorance to consider when we are unable to answer a question from a learner. We tend to feel guilty and embarrassed about some forms of ignorance more than others, e.g. gaps in our knowledge when we think we should know the answer.

**Deliberation:** the amount of time and effort you have invested in crafting every detail of a presentation.

**Deliberation bonus:** in this toolkit, the extent to which you can exceed the audience's expectations about the deliberation of most presentations in informal education, by using the tools in this book and thinking about everything you do onstage.

**Display rules:** the intensity and types of emotional expressions which children learn are socially acceptable, in different situations, as they mature to adulthood.

**Elicitation cue:** a verbal or nonverbal signal which you give the audience in order to prompt them to make a particular call out or behave in a certain manner. (See also Backleading.)

**Emotional beacons:** the term used in this toolkit for spectators who pick up your emotions more easily than others, who are also highly expressive, so that their emotions start to influence the people sitting around them.

**Emotional contagion:** the phenomenon in social psychology where people tend to synchronise with the nonverbal language of those around them and, therefore, start to feel the same emotions as them.

**Endow:** an advanced technique from stand-up to describe how you pick up on an attitude or a trait from someone you interact with and through your language and tone you subsequently encourage them to play up to this role.

**Engagement hooks toolkit:** the approach used in this book to engage audiences by using hooks placed throughout the presentation to provoke and hold their involuntary attention. Most of these hooks create an emotional response to grab the learner.

**Engineered content:** in this toolkit, prepared elements which look as if they have been prompted by the audience or the environment, but which you elicit as a core part of the routine. (See also Backleading and Incorporation.)

**External hook:** in this toolkit, stimuli which are situationally interesting to all of your audience, but which come from outside the topic being presented.

**Faux corpsing:** a theatrical technique where the performer pretends to be overpowered by the urge to laugh uncontrollably at an unexpected situation — even though they have usually engineered this incident to happen. (See also Corpsing.)

**Find the game:** a term used in interactive performances, to describe how the audience are always looking for patterns and bits of business so that they can interact and play with you.

**Fixed content:** in this toolkit, content which is delivered in more-or-less the same way each time.

**Fourth wall:** the invisible separation that actors in traditional theatre create between the action on the stage and the watching audience.

# Explore the resources supporting the book

## TOOLS



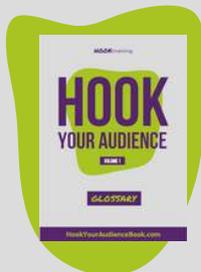
A list of each of the tools in the engagement toolkit, for easy reference.

## SUMMARY



The key ideas from each chapter organised in one resource.

## GLOSSARY



A compilation of the performance and psychological terms used in the toolkit.

## OUTLINE



An outline of each section — hook by hook — to present an overview of each tool.

## QUOTES



To give a flavour of the content, these quotes seemed to resonate with my beta readers.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS



A selection of books I recommend for further reading, with links to stores where they are available.

**Four levels of competency model:** a framework developed by a trainer, Noel Burch, in the 1970s to represent the sequence of stages which learners pass through when mastering any complex skill.

**Game:** any bit of business where you are trying to prompt the audience or a volunteer into interacting with you in a playful way. (See also Find the game.)

**Golden volunteer:** a helper who says and does exactly the right thing, at the right time. They will relate well to your personality and play off you to engage the audience. These rare volunteers can be the highlight of any interactive presentation.

**Grinding it out:** a performance term for professionally completing your show as best you can, despite the circumstances not being well-suited to creating the experience you would normally want for the audience.

**Groaner:** a joke which is extremely corny or weak. With some audiences, a joke can be so bad, it's almost good, because it provokes the audience to unite in acknowledging how bad it is.

**Happy accident:** any incident in which an unexpected event led to a recovery or response that was so strong, the routine becomes more impactful with the accident included. Presenters will then try to recreate the same happy accident the next time.

**Hook:** the term used in this toolkit for any stimulus that uses the universal, situational interests of learners to provoke their involuntary attention (e.g. novelty, fascinating facts, suspenseful delays, explosions).

**Hook antennae:** the professional judgement which educators acquire over time so that they can successfully predict which hooks will be most interesting to a particular audience.

**Humour hysteria:** in this toolkit, this effect is when young audiences whip themselves up into uncontrolled, maniacal laughter. Once this type of contagious mass response starts, it can be extremely hard to stop it.

**Iceberg presentation model:** the concept used in this toolkit to describe how the unseen work and consideration you invest in developing and delivering a presentation makes a difference to the quality of the presentation which the audience can sense.

**Illusion of responsiveness:** in this toolkit, where a hook appears to be spontaneous or triggered by the audience, when, in reality, you are using the illusion of the first time or an engineered response to keep the benefits of being deliberate about what you do.

**Illusion of spontaneity:** how a presenter makes their delivery appear improvised, when it is in fact fixed, engineered or recalled content.

**Illusion of the first time:** common theatrical term to describe the art of making the action onstage appear to the audience as if it is happening for the first time.

**Illusion of transparency:** the cognitive bias that makes us believe that our thoughts and emotions are much more obvious to others than they actually are.

**Imposter syndrome:** the common psychological experience of believing that you are not as competent or knowledgeable as others think you are and that you will be exposed as a "fraud" at any moment.

**Improvised cast:** an advanced technique from interactive theatre and stand-up comedy, where you use endowment and re-incorporation with particular spectators to subtly create roles for them to play up through the performance as you interact with them and they call out.

**Improvised content:** in this toolkit, truly spontaneous actions and replies, which you make in the moment.

**Incorporation:** the term used in this toolkit to describe the key skill of being able to instantly adapt an engineered or recalled subroutine in small ways so it feels grounded in the surrounding action onstage and the responses of the audience.

**Incorporation radar:** in this toolkit, the act of scanning everything that happens onstage or in the audience for situational details which you can bring into your engineered or recalled subroutines so they appear responsive.

**Individual interests:** those narrow, but enduring, interests which are specific to a person (e.g. baking, aircraft, golf).

**Informal education:** experiences which happen outside of formal classes in school or university, where people choose to take part in activities which include some educational purpose, e.g. museum, science centre, school outreach.

**Informal educator:** educators who work in settings where informal education occurs, e.g. visitor attractions or outreach organisations.

**Inside-out acting** or **internal acting:** a method of acting where you recall, in detail, an occasion when you felt the emotions you want to produce now. Memory of the event can trigger these emotions internally, so that your body automatically reveals the external display cues you experienced at the time. (See also Outside-in acting.)

**Interactive presentations:** the presentation model assumed in this book, which hits the sweet spot between tightly-scripted, crafted theatre and fully-responsive, less deliberate presentations.

**Internal hook:** in this toolkit, stimuli from within the topic being presented which are situationally interesting to all of your audience (e.g. fascinating facts; the surprise from a counter-intuitive science demo).

**Jeopardy:** storytelling term for what is at stake for a character at a moment of conflict in a story — this is what makes audiences care about the outcome. In the context of putting our volunteers in jeopardy, this means creating an apparent risk to their physical being, their property or their dignity.

**Look, but don't see:** a classic technique used by children's magicians, where you allow the audience to spot your mistake or the danger you are in before you appear to notice it.

**Mark:** in the theatre, this is the ideal position of a volunteer or a prop on stage, indicated by a small piece of tape or, sometimes, by a footprint mat.

**Modelling:** displaying your emotions clearly as a presenter so that they will infect the audience and guide them as to how they should respond.

**Mugging:** a humour hook used frequently in children's entertainment, where you adopt an extreme facial expression and hold it for an extended time. It often involves double-takes, long pauses and repetition of expressions.

**Near misses:** instructive incidents in your presentation where something nearly goes wrong. By analysing what caused these, you can try to reduce the likelihood of such issues recurring.

**Offer:** — in traditional improvisation, an offer is any suggestion made by your partner to advance the scene in some way. Normally, you would accept any offer without questioning it.

— in this toolkit, an offer is any unanticipated event from your audience, volunteers or the environment. In this context, you don't have to accept every offer.

**Omega audience member:** in this toolkit, this is a spectator who has low status according to the rest of the audience. They may even be unpopular with their peers or bullied.

**Outside-in acting** or **external acting:** a method of acting where you recall the physical characteristics expressed when you experience an emotion and then replicate these through your body and voice as accurately as possible. (See also Inside-out acting.)

**Overt humour:** in this toolkit, any hook that makes the audience laugh when they are expecting to, i.e. humour which is clearly intentional. This type of humour is challenging to deliver on demand with every audience — it takes a lot of work and innate ability. (See also Covert humour.)

**Performed self:** the theory originated by Erving Goffman, a sociologist, that we each adapt how we appear in different social roles in order to show ourselves in the best light and to achieve our purpose in that situation.

**Phoning it in:** term used in stand-up comedy to describe a comedian who appears to be delivering their set on autopilot, without being present and attentive to their audience.

**Physicalisation:** a storytelling and humour hook, where you act out a small action of the narrative you are relating, to help the audience form a sharper mental image.

**Play bow:** in animal behaviour, this is the subtle set of nonverbal signals that one animal uses to show another that they are ready to play. As an interactive presenter, you also need a series of cues to show the audience you want them to play and interact with you.

**Play bubble:** in this toolkit, this is the protective cocoon which you build around your stage and audience, so that everyone feels safe to interact and play without being judged or mocked.

**Postdictable:** a concept from psychology for outcomes which are satisfying because they are consistent with the clues given beforehand, even though it was hard to predict this outcome based only on those clues.

**Pratfall:** a technique in physical comedy where the performer deliberately falls, usually onto their bottom. It can also mean any intentional performance mistake.

**Presentation flab:** hooks and bits of business which you slowly add to a presentation as it evolves, which are enjoyable to perform, but which start to overpower the purpose, clarity and pace of your presentation.

**Presenter world:** in this toolkit, this is a term which describes the alternative, ego-centric world which many of us seem to step into when we stand up to present and when we leave the reality experienced by our audiences.

# Please support these ideas

## SHARE

Let your colleagues know about the book and resources using shareable images #hookyouraudience

## DISCUSS

Explore an idea from the book that you feel strongly about in an online group. Include your own experience with that hook.

## ENDORSE

Provide a testimonial explaining how the book has helped you reflect on the ways you engage your learners in presentations

## REVIEW

Write a review of the book on amazon or for any online or print publication for informal educators

## IMPROVE

They say your first book will be the worst one you ever write. I'd appreciate any feedback which can help me improve the book. Including any typos.

## CONTRIBUTE

I'm compiling a collection of stories and examples of hooks from readers for *HOOK wisdom*, a future free resource to complement this book.

If you're finding the toolkit helpful and you would like to support it, please feel free to buy me a metaphorical hot chocolate. No marshmallows, thanks.

**Presenter-in-trouble:** based on the "magician-in-trouble" technique, in this toolkit, the term covers any empowerment hook where the presenter deliberately fails. Audiences of children enjoy feeling superior to an adult, for once.

**Presenting character** or **persona:** the impression that the audience has of you as a person. It includes your personality traits; your attitude to your audience and your content; and your individual worldview and values.

**Privilege of experience:** in this toolkit, the benefits of being able to base your presentation on the experience of having delivered it many times before. This includes learning from the reactions, call outs and questions of all of those audiences. (See also Curse of experience.)

**Pulling focus:** when any distraction onstage or in the room diverts the attention of a significant proportion of the audience away from where you want it to be at that moment.

**Put down:** a line used by an insecure performer in order to insult and demean a volunteer or spectator who they think may be challenging their authority. They can also be used in a misguided attempt to appear funny. (See also Bad laugh.)

**Question tap:** the term used in this toolkit for the flow of questions which the audience ask during different stages of the presentation. You can regulate how many questions they try to ask both verbally and nonverbally.

**Recalled content:** in this toolkit, these are crafted, prepared responses to the various unexpected incidents that recur in live presentations, which you exploit as a bonus to the performance rather than as a core element.

**Re-incorporation:** a common technique from improv, where you repeat or refer to an earlier line or situation in the presentation. (See also Call back.)

**Re-incorporation radar:** the skill of being alert for any unusual incidents in a performance, so that you can re-incorporate them later on at a relevant time.

**Responsiveness:** how much the presentation appears to change, from moment to moment, based on contributions or feedback from the audience or because of changes in the environment.

**Riff:** a term used in stand-up, where they go off-script and improvise live on stage. It can be triggered either from interaction with the audience or by the comedian.

**Rivers and lakes model:** a common model of linear narratives in computer games (also known as the string of pearls method). This model can also apply to interactive presentations — the rivers represent the tightly scripted paths, where the audience have little influence; and the lakes show the looser sections when the audience think they are in control.

**Rough edges:** deliberately inserting verbal and nonverbal uncertainties and mistakes into your delivery to create the impression of spontaneity and maintain the illusion of the first time.

**Routine:** the self-contained modular units, that consist of an activity or activities, which make up a presentation or performance, e.g. a demonstration, a story.

**Rule of three:** a common technique used to create humour, where you list two related items which start to develop a pattern, only to break this pattern with a third item which disrupts it in an unexpected way.

**Running gag:** a physical action or bit of business which is repeated at intervals throughout the show.

**Saver:** a stock line or action that the performer uses to try to recover after an accidental or deliberate mistake.

**Save the cat:** a screenwriting term for an early incident in a film where the inner character of the hero is revealed through how they cope with a challenge, e.g. rescuing a threatened feline.

**Script:** the words and actions that you deliver each time you perform an established presentation. In interactive presentations, though, this script may have evolved slowly over time; be internal rather than written down; and be interactive rather than rigid.

**Self-disclosure:** when educators selectively reveal personal information about themselves to illustrate the concept they are explaining or to be more relatable for their learners.

**Shaming line:** an often overused performance technique where you criticise the level of a particular audience response in order to provoke a louder and more energetic reply.

**Silent script:** the mental script which some experienced performers use, during nonverbal displays, to help motivate their actions and to make them appear more convincing and interesting.

**Situational interests:** features of the environment or situation which are short-term, but which are universally interesting to everyone (e.g. eating, emotions, other people).

**Social proof:** the psychological phenomenon where, in unfamiliar social situations, people look to others for signs of how to behave and tend to imitate them.

**Spontaneity spectrum:** a model of interactive presenting central to this toolkit in which all content is imagined to fall into one of four levels of spontaneity — fixed content; engineered content; recalled content; and improvised content.

**Spotlight effect:** the well-established psychological phenomenon where you think that people notice you, or something about you, much more than they actually do.

**Stage orphan:** a performance term for a volunteer who appears to have been abandoned during a routine, when they don't have any meaningful role or when you haven't interacted with them for a long time.

**Stooge:** a theatrical term for someone who you persuade, before the show, to secretly help you in a particular way during the performance.

**Subroutines:** in this toolkit, these are the small, self-contained units which make up a performing routine. Although they may look spontaneous, they are actually carefully crafted and rehearsed.

**Thermometer routine:** an opening routine that contains several highly-visible hooks, which you deliver in exactly the same way in each presentation. The response of the audience can therefore give you an indication of their receptivity and how ready they are to interact with you.

**Thin slicing:** the unconscious ability of experts to instantly find patterns and reach judgements about complex situations, based on witnessing only a narrow slice of that situation.

**Topper line** or **tag:** a line which comedians deliver just after the first laugh has peaked, so that they can surf on top of this subsiding response to create an even bigger laugh.

**Trope:** a convention or device in a particular medium that recurs so often, it becomes a cliché known outside that medium.

**Trust bank:** a measure used in this toolkit of how much the audience trusts you. This grows and gets depleted at different times during the presentation in response to your actions and how the audience perceive them.

**Variable:** in this toolkit, taking a term or example used in a reply from a spectator and incorporating it throughout an existing engineered subroutine to give it the impression of being responsive.

**Wait time:** the time that you give the audience to think about your question and compose a reply in their heads, before you step in with a prompt or rephrase your enquiry.

**Zombie presenter:** in this toolkit, this is the common condition where the presenter exhibits an emotional disconnection from their audience and, typically, is not expressive enough onstage. It can have multiple causes.



# **NEXT ...**

**Find out more  
about the book**

**Discover more  
supporting  
resources**

**Please support  
these ideas**

**If you're finding the toolkit helpful and you  
would like to support it, please feel free to  
buy me a metaphorical hot chocolate.  
No marshmallows, thanks.**