

Effective Presentations
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Introduction

While hard work and good ideas are essential to success, your ability to express those ideas and get others to join you is just as important. Much of this verbal expression will be one on one or in small groups but periodically (and for some of us often) you will be involved in more formal and public speaking in front of larger numbers.

If this thought makes you nervous you are not alone. Many speakers lack the skills and confidence to make effective presentations. We have all been victims of speakers (eg. teachers) who put us to sleep. Despite knowing how ineffective many speakers are, many of us have found that, despite the best intentions, we haven't fared much better. We knew the topic and the ideas were written down, but the presentation still didn't go well. Was it the way you delivered the speech? Was it because the audience didn't seem interested?

Podium Panic Everyone experiences stage fright, speech anxiety, or talking terror. Surveys show that fear of speaking in front of groups is one of the greatest fears people have. Some surveys find people actually claiming that the thought of giving a speech is more frightening than falling off a cliff, financial difficulties, snakes, and even death.

The following lists some techniques people use for coping with this fright:

- your audience understands your nervousness; they know what you are feeling and will forgive it; similarly they will forgive honest mistakes
- nervousness is usually invisible; most will not notice the small changes in your voice or occasional mistakes; most speakers who describe themselves as nervous appear confident and calm to the audience
- be yourself; let the real you come through; relax, practice some deep breathing techniques;
- begin in your comfort zone; practice with friends; share your fears with friends
- check out the room first; check out the space, the equipment, the lights
- concentrate on the message
- begin with a slow, well-prepared introduction; have a confident and clear conclusion
- most important: be prepared and practice

The problem of poor communication is complex and cannot be solved by a single book, a course, and certainly not by this

short guide. We will point out the critical elements and questions to think about. The approach presented here is predicated on the notion that there is a speechmaking process that involves a few basic steps and within each are particular strategic decisions.

FOUR BASIC STEPS:

1. formulate a strategy for the specific audience
2. develop a flexible, flowing structure
3. combined prepared material with an enhancing, not distracting, presentation style ; it is important to remember that how you present is as important as what you present.
4. supplement the presentation with confident, informed responses to questions and challenges

1. STRATEGY

- understand your purpose and role: It is critical to be clear about your purpose in the communication. This involves knowing your audience, the occasion, and the expectations of your audience. Knowing the audience will be a critical determinant in what information is presented and how it is presented.
- tailor your message to the audience - understand their needs, desires, knowledge level, attitude toward your topic
- be concrete, specific, practical, and relevant
- clarify your objectives - is it to motivate? ... inform? ... persuade? ... teach? - each calls for a different approach
- clarify what role you will be performing - coach? advocate? teach? be devil's advocate, watch dog, or messenger?
- develop a logically compelling case for your plan - how will it help resolve a pressing problem, advance a salient value, or help
- reach a common goal
- research your topic

In the classroom situation you may have to make a presentation about a topic about which you are not an expert. In the working world, you will likely know a lot about the topic. Nevertheless, you will likely have to research the topic through internal trade documents, trade journals, or special interest publications. You will also likely find computerized data bases useful as sources of information. Subscription data bases such as CompuServe, Dow Jones News/Retrieval, The Source, and BRS/After Dark are some examples. Obviously the World Wide Web is a growing source of information.

Librarians will assist you in your search. For those services that base charges on time on-line, it is important to be very well prepared for your search.

2. STRUCTURE

Once you know what you want to say, you need to consolidate the materials into a meaningful message. You can't assume that the information will speak for itself. Your audience is capable of hearing your information in very different ways based on your organization and presentation.

The audience needs to have these basic questions answered.

- Why should I pay attention to you when I can think about more interesting things?
- Now that I am listening, why should I care about this issue?
- I agree with the significance of the topic, but how are you justifying your ideas?
- So, now that I am convinced, what do you want from me?

The following lists some points to think about when organizing your ideas.

- begin by placing your topic in context; you might want to provide an outline or a road map
- provide the intended, expected benefits, organization of the presentation, and ground rules -
- organize the body of the presentation logically - make it easy to follow - go from the simple to the complex
- when appropriate, plan ways to encourage audience participation
- maintain credibility: discuss the pros and cons
- conclude on a "high note" - include an overall summary and proposed actions or options
- incorporate visual aids effectively (see box below) - don't let mechanics of presentation interfere with your message
- prepare for contingencies - - practice your presentation and prepare for contingencies - rehearse
- think about what might happen and prepare - what if the overhead bulb blows out;... what if the audience is more prepared than you expected ... what if there is an unexpected question - - if a disruption is particularly obtrusive, you might relieve the tension with a joke or humorous comment

3. STYLE

Effective presenters recognize that communication is both intellectual and emotional. Organizing your ideas is part of the task. The other is to gain and maintain attention. The following lists some basic techniques to maintain attention: -

- convey "controlled enthusiasm" for your subject - the audience will forgive a lot if the speaker is enthusiastic - pay attention to

- posture, tone; don't lean
- your audience will mirror your attitude - radiate confidence without preaching
- don't confuse enthusiasm with loudness; try to convey a range of emotions from concern, anticipation, excitement, dismay
- where appropriate, candidly discuss pros and cons; explain advantages first; present risks or challenges;

Are You Distracting the Audience and Drawing Attention away from your Message?

When we want the audience to focus on what we have to say rather than on us, it is important to think about anything that might detract from our message. This can be a sensitive issue since some of these factors are personal or "part of who we are."

Regional accents or colloquialisms: If we are in an audience of people who share our "accent" no one will notice. However, if we are in a more general audience, our accent may make the audience focus on this rather than our message. This is not to say that you should abandon your ethnic or regional identity and individuality; however, you need to be aware of the impact of accents on audience. This can be done positively as the Kennedys have done; but more often these mannerisms tend to detract negatively. We don't have to all talk alike but we need to know how we are perceived.

physical mannerisms: speakers who pace, pound the podium, jingle change in their pockets, or do other things can focus attention on themselves rather than the subject; sometimes this can be done for affect, but more often it is inadvertent and distracting.

voice tone: Professional speakers generally emphasize the lower registers of their voices (both men and women) and avoid dramatic variations in the pitches of their voices. Occasionally this "rule" can be broken for affect. clothing and jewelry: same as under regional accents

Keeping your audience's interest

- provide variety and relief if possible; novelty and uniqueness will increase the impact
- alternative moving and standing still, speaking and listening, doing and thinking; use physical space and body movement to enhance your message
- try to add stories, anecdotes, testimonials, analogies, demonstrations
- use humor appropriately - make it in good taste
- presentations are movies not snapshots; prepare the space for movement
- try to position yourself to enhance rapport with the audience
- eye contact is your primary tool for establishing audience involvement; look at your audience in random rotating

order

- use gestures naturally; do what is natural to you: some gestures are wrong - jingling change in a pocket, toying with notes, shifting from one foot to the other; any repeated gesture

Once you obtain attention, you must retain it. Audiences members drift in and out, without giving complete attention all the time. You need to help the audience refocus periodically. The following are some examples:

- I will give the three basic reasons why change is needed
- Transitions such as now that we have analyzed the problem, we need to look at the possible solutions.
- Conclusions: the discussion so far leads to this final thought...
- Straightforward Conclusion: ...if you enact this program, three basic benefits will result...

4. SUPPLEMENT: QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

USE OF QUESTIONS

- ask "friendly" questions - don't use questions to embarrass or badger; avoid known "sore spots"
- avoid asking risky questions - that is, questions that may imply lack of knowledge or intelligence
- make the interchange a mutually satisfying experience; give respondents time to think and phrase their answer; help people save face by summarizing what they have said so far and asking if anyone else has something to add
- don't let respondent wander or attempt to take control of the presentation; a polite "thank you, that's what I was looking for" can get you back on track
- if extensive audience discussion is desired, avoid isolated one-on-one dialogues with specific individuals
- when challenged, be candid and firm but avoid over responding
- maintain control of the session
- be firm and assertive without being aggressive or defensive
- don't let interruptions disrupt your composure
- avoid circumstances that require an apology
- anticipate questions and prepare responses; rehearse answers to difficult questions
- if necessary, offer to obtain additional information and follow up
- use questions to strengthen your main arguments-answer questions candidly but positively link objections to attractive features
- avoid rhetorical questions - ask interesting questions that

are thought provoking but not too difficult to answer

- ask some open ended question with no right or wrong answers - encourage sharing experiences, feelings, opinions
- put "you" elements into questions - make them relevant to the audience's personal experience
- prepare key questions prior to the presentation; it is difficult to think of good questions on your feet

Guideline for Answering Questions

Anticipate Questions: think of the ten most likely questions and plan out your answer

Understand the Question: paraphrase it if necessary; repeat it if needed

Plan the Answer: particularly if you anticipated the question

Do Not Digress

Be Honest: if you can't answer the question, say so

Reinterpret Loaded Questions: if attacked try to show the similarity to other situations

Control Interchanges: if a questioner becomes a heckler try to enlist the audience; if a questioner digresses, try to remind the audience of the goal of the presentation

Use the Last Question to Summarize

Conclusion: A Checklist for your Presentation

You owe your audience and yourself a good presentation, but creating an effective presentation takes planning and practice, so some final pointers

- **Start preparing early; don't wait until the last few days to prepare.** Prepare it early, let it rest a little bit and come back to it. Practice your entire presentation-including your slides. If you can practice it before a group of colleagues or friends
- **Think about Your Audience:** who are they and why are they here; what are their interests; what do they know; what do they want to know; what is a worthwhile investment in their time
- Be clear about your **purpose:** are you **informing** or **persuading**; tell them what you are going to do, tell them, tell them what you told them; what do you want the audience to know, feel, or believe afterwards
- **Use an Effective Introduction:** orient the audience; explain why it is important; set the tone; establish a relationship between the speaker and the audience; establish credibility; avoid weak introductions such as apologies, jokes, rhetorical questions
- **Organize your presentation clearly and simply:** Prioritize topics and allocate time accordingly; stick to only 3-5 main points; have a well thought pattern

(examples are problem/solution, chronological, cause and effect, topical); use transitions to move smoothly from one point to the next.

- **Use supporting materials to flesh out main points:** Use examples, statistics, expert opinions, anecdotes.
- **Compose for the Ear, not for the Eye:** use simple words, simple sentences, markers, repetition, images, personal language ("You" and "I")
- **Create an Effective Conclusion:** summarize, set final image, provide closure; don't trail off, don't use trite phrases; don't just present data or summarized results and leave the audience to draw its own conclusions; you have had much more time to work with your information than your audience; share your insight and understanding and tell them what you've concluded from your work
- **Sound spontaneous, conversational, enthusiastic:** use key phrases in your notes so you don't have to read, use the overhead instead of notes; vary volume, don't be afraid of silence, don't use fillers like "um" ... Practice, Practice, Practice
- **Use Body Language Effectively:** relaxed gestures, eye contact; don't play with a pen or pointer; don't block visual aids
- **Use Visual Aids to Enhance the Message:** you will probably need to use overhead transparencies in your presentation but to be effective, they must be designed and used properly; use visuals to reinforce and clarify, not overwhelm; keep visual aids uncluttered; use titles to guide the audience; if you use tapes or disks, make sure the equipment is compatible.
- **Analyze the Environment:** check out size of room, placement of chairs, time of day, temperature, distractions; check out AV equipment ahead of time; have a spare bulb.
- **Cope with Stage Fright by Remembering:** it's normal; it can be helpful, everyone feels it

Engleberg (1994) proposes a 7 P approach to the principles of public speaking. You might find these helpful.

- **Purpose:-** Why are you speaking? What do you want audience members to know, think, believe, or do as a result of your presentation
- **People:** Who is your audience? How do the characteristics, skills, opinions, and behaviors of your audience affect your purpose
- **Place:** Why are you speaking to this group now and in this place? How can you plan and adapt to the logistics of this place. How can you use visual aids to help you achieve your purpose
- **Preparation** Where and how can you find good ideas and information for your speech? How much and what

kind of supporting materials do you need.

- **Planning :** Is there a natural order to the ideas and information you will use? What are the most effective ways to organize your speech in order to adapt it to the purpose, people, place, etc.
- **Personality:** How do you become associated with your message in a positive way? What can you do to demonstrate your competence, charisma, and character to the audience?
- **Performance:** What form of delivery is best suited to the purpose of your speech. What delivery techniques will make your presentation more effective. How should you practice?

Further Reading

Antonoff, Michael, "Presentations that Persuade", Personal Computing, 27 July 1990, 60-68.

Benjamin, James and Raymie E. McKerrow, Business and Professional Communication , Harper Collins, New York, 1994.

Engleberg, Isa N. The Principles of Public Presentation , Harper Collins, New York, 1994.

Osborn, M. and S. Osborn, Public Speaking, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1988.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

An Outline for your Presentation

INTRODUCTION

What? - overview of presentation (use visual aids if necessary)

Why? - purpose of presentation - why subject is important

How? - format you will use; what can the audience expect to see & learn

Who? - if more than one person, provide introductions and indicate roles - don't

expect audience to memorize these

BODY

The following list suggests alternative formats for presenting information: multiple formats can be used within a single presentation: -

rhetorical - questions and answers

logical progression - indicate steps e.g. A then B then C

time series - order information from beginning to end, earlier to later, and so on

compare and contrast - use same structure to compare different events, individuals or situations

problems and solutions; don't present problems without

working toward some recommended action

simple to complex - use successive building blocks to communicate complex processes or concepts

deductive reasoning - moving from general principles or values to specific applications or examples

inductive reasoning - from specific applications/examples to reach general principles or conclusions

CONCLUSION

review, highlight and emphasize - key points, benefits, recommendations

draw conclusions - where are we? ... what does all of this mean? ... what's the next step?

USING VISUAL AIDS EFFECTIVELY.

PURPOSE: both quality and number of visual aids should enhance, not distract from message - display or distribute an outline to help audience follow long or group presentations - use variety to increase interest; remember the value of pictures, graphs, symbols and objects

APPEARANCE : never use a transparency of a typewritten page - use a plain font (e.g. Swiss or Helvetica) of substantial size (18 point or more) - if you use color, don't use more than three colors - ask yourself - Can the audience quickly and easily grasp what they see? - Are they spending time reading and not listening?

FORMAT-TEXT: make one and only one key point per visual unless the audience is very familiar with the subject; organize material into natural categories and contrasts - before vs. after, problem and solution, advantages vs. disadvantages, beginning to end; costs vs. benefits - include no more than three or four points under one heading - don't use whole sentences or paragraphs - use bulleted words or short phrases only, except for quotes

FORMAT-GRAPHS : no more than three curves on a line chart or graph; don't use a page full of numbers; translate complicated numbers into representative pie charts or bar graphs; use diagrams or models to present complex concepts; use multiple charts illustrating different stages or parts of the full model; start with simple framework and build components successively into the full model or process

PROPERLY DESIGNED TRANSPARENCIES

use high quality lettering at least 3/16" high; avoid hand-written slides and low resolution dot matrix print

limit the number of overheads used; allow at least 1-2 minutes

per overhead

a well designed diagram or chart can often make your point more quickly and clearly than words

avoid visual clutter-don't over use fancy graphics that might distract the audience

have a good reason for showing each and every overhead

Be Careful:

don't block the audience's vision; limit the time your back is to the audience

make sure you know how to operate the equipment; practice it ahead of time; have backup cords, bulbs, adapters, etc; prepare for the worst

make sure you know the lighting requirements for your equipment; know where the switches are and what settings are needed; bring a small penlight in case the room has to be darkened and you need to see notes or equipment

PRESENTING OVERSEAS

An American woman making a presentation to a group of German male colleagues began in a casual, lighthearted style. Several of the men snorted, stood up and headed for the door, declaring her presentation a waste of time. She spoke loudly and sharply, telling them to sit down and be quiet. They did, and she switched to an assertive, formal tone without any of her "fun" techniques. The Germans paid attention.
International Herald Tribune, May 20, 1997

This anecdote illustrates that doing business internally requires concise, to the point yet diplomatic communication due to the lack of time to build relationships and sell ideas. International executives have to discipline themselves to listen completely and ask questions; this is particularly important when not everyone in the room has the same native language. A particular problem for many is the "niceness" problem; these occur when nice people are shocked to see how aggressive top-level communications and team communications can be in some places, and when they can't cope with aggressive peers.

Another problem is conciseness. Many of us are trained to give an introduction, body, and conclusion and the more you say the better. In some places there is no patience for this slow, gradual building. In this case, you need to make the point first, prove it concisely and make recommendations.