Presentation DRY RUN

Practice by Conducting Dry Runs

If your presentation is pretty low stakes, such as a weekly check-in with your team, you might not need to do more than think about it before you deliver it. But if there’s a lot riding on your business presentation or if you are especially anxious about delivering it, then a dry run is the way to go. The differences between a dry run and a rehearsal all have to do with the purpose of the presentation. In an Orderly Conversation, you anticipate–

Engaging with your audience, which means that in the moment, you are aware of how they’re receiving the information you’re delivering and what they might need beyond what you’ve prepared.

Responding to their need for elaboration, clarification, and getting questions answered.

Changing up what you say depending on how you decide to meet listeners’ needs.

It should be pretty obvious that rehearsal, as I defined it above, doesn’t accommodate an Orderly Conversation all that well. Dry runs do.

A dry run is really just delivering your presentation as though you have an audience, imagining how they’re receiving what you say, and anticipating questions or areas of confusion they might have. The key difference between rehearsal and a dry run is that in a rehearsal if you mess up, you go back and redo it until it’s perfect. In a dry run, if you mess up or misspeak, you adjust and move on. You don’t start over, aiming for perfection. In the real presentation situation, you won’t be able to stop and go back, so what’s the good of practicing like that?

# Three Phases of the Dry Run Presentation

## ADJUSTING SLIDE CONTENT

Often, you don’t know that your slides need fixing until you start to run through them. Revising slide content can involve anything from a major rearrangement of topics to adjusting how much you have on each slide to replacing words to avoid getting tongue-tied.

If you discover you need to do a major overhaul of your slides, it may be best to stop, make the correction, and then start a new run-through. Practicing with slides you know don’t work isn’t a great use of time.

If changes are minor, keep a notepad handy, make a note on what needs changing, and keep going. If you’re recording yourself (and you should), you can just state the correction out loud as a reminder of what you want to change. When you watch the recording, you can make the edit.

# Anticipating questions and reactions.

This phase may also involve some adjustments to your slides, but now you’re focused on your audience. Since you’ve already done your audience analysis, you know who they are and what they need, and you were focused on those issues as you created your deck. However, sometimes at the dry run stage, you realize that further adjustments are necessary to make it easy for them to follow and benefit from your presentation. This is also where you should start to imagine what questions your listeners will have and think about how you might answer them. Again, this isn’t about preparing an answer; it’s about being prepared to answer with all the necessary relevant information at hand.

# Getting a feel for the flow

Once your slides have been edited to serve you and your listeners, it’s time to get comfortable with the whole process of delivering your presentation. This is where you connect with your slides, think about when and how you want to manage your audience’s focus, and most importantly, work on timing. The timing issue is why these run-throughs can’t stop and restart. Clicking the slide too soon, tripping over a word, or having a blank moment are all eventualities that might happen in the real presentation. Correct, adjust, and keep going. This is also the phase where you absolutely want to record yourself. As Greg says, “It’s never comfortable watching and listening to yourself, but there’s a lot to learn.”

At this point, if you want to bring in other stakeholders to watch a run-through before the actual presentation, you’re all ready to do so.