Presentations Skills

Guidelines for Preparation and Delivery of Oral Presentations

Key Principles:

Focus on the Audience

- Keep it simple and easy to follow.
- People lose attention quickly, so make it engaging.
- Adjust the content based on the audience's knowledge.

Guideline 1: Know Your Audience

- Learn who you're speaking to:
  - Talk to others who've addressed the same group.
  - Focus on decision-makers who may not have technical knowledge.
- Avoid overly complex explanations.

Guideline 2: Use the Preacher's Rule

Three Steps:

1. **Introduction:** Tell them what you'll talk about.
   - Example: "Today, I'll discuss a plan to reduce workplace accidents by focusing on safety, costs, and morale."
2. **Body:** Explain your points in order.
   - Example: "The second benefit is lower insurance costs."
3. **Conclusion:** Recap and suggest actions.
   - Example: "If this plan is adopted, accidents will likely drop within six months."

Guideline 3: Keep It Simple

- Focus on just 2–3 key points to make it easy to remember.
- Example: "We'll look at safety improvements, cost savings, and employee morale."

Guideline 4: Use Notes

Don't memorize or read word-for-word. Use notes to guide you:

1. **Index Cards:** Easy to hold but require flipping.
2. **Paper Sheets:** Show the full outline but keep you at the lectern.

3. **Slide Notes:** Match your slides but involve turning pages.

Guideline 5: Practice

Practice Methods:

1. **Mirror Practice:** Helps build confidence.

2. **Audio Recording:** Identifies filler words like "um" or "uh."

3. **Video Recording:** Shows posture, gestures, and eye contact.

4. **Live Audience:** Simulates real feedback.

Guideline 6: Speak with Energy

- Show enthusiasm for your topic.

- Slightly exaggerate your tone and gestures to keep attention.

Guideline 7: Avoid Filler Words

- Words like "uh," "you know," or "like" are distracting.

- **Tips:**

  - Pause instead of using fillers.

  - Record yourself to identify bad habits.

  - Ask someone to help you practice.

Guideline 8: Use Questions to Engage

- Ask rhetorical questions to make the audience think:

  - Example: "What if your car could predict battery failure?"

- Use them to introduce, transition, or end your points.

Guideline 9: Make Eye Contact

- Look at the audience to keep them engaged:

  - Small groups: Look at everyone.

  - Large groups: Focus on sections of the audience.

Guideline 10: Use Gestures and Good Posture

- **Tips:**

  - Use hand movements to emphasize key ideas.

  - Stand straight and avoid leaning or fidgeting.

  - Step out from behind the lectern occasionally.

Presentational Aids
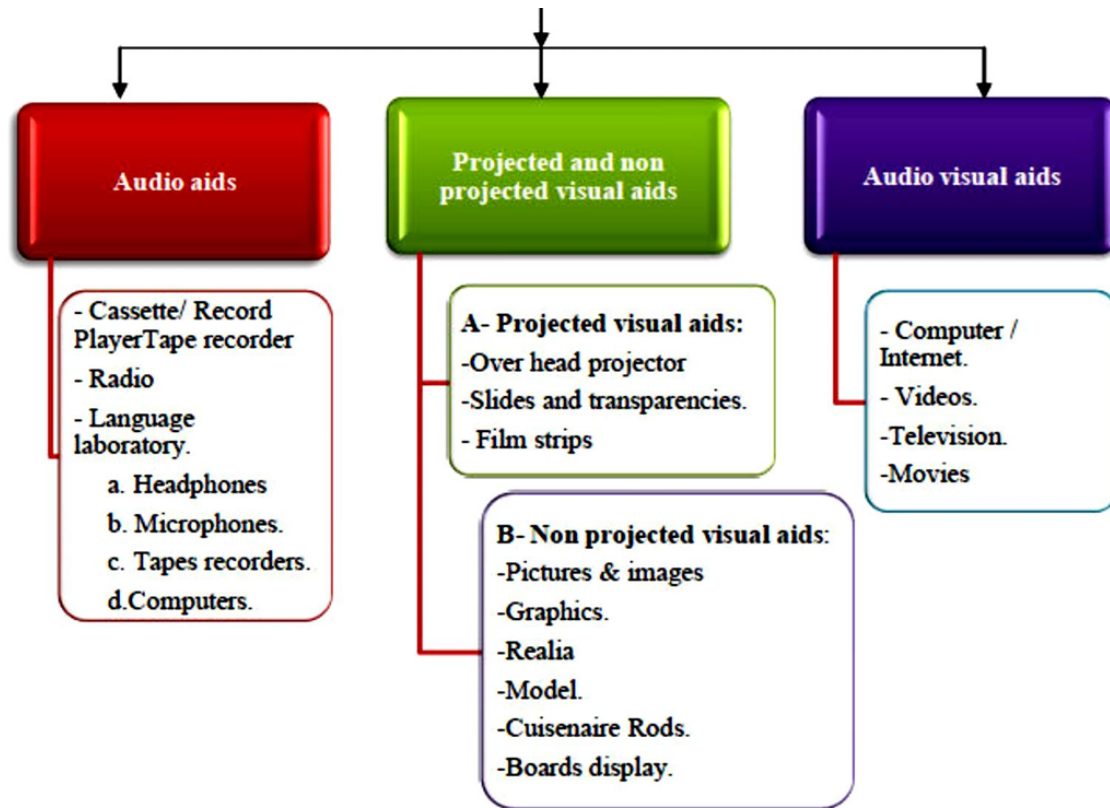
Guidelines for Presentation Graphics

Graphics are a crucial part of presentations, helping clarify and enhance communication. Good visuals should complement the speaker and maintain the audience's focus.

1. Discover Listener Preferences

- Identify audience preferences for graphics:
  - Simple options like flip charts or advanced visuals like animations or videos.
- Check the presentation setting:
  - Room layout, lighting, available technology, and seating arrangements.

2. Match Graphics to Content

- Integrate graphics during content preparation to ensure a seamless presentation.
- Use visuals that emphasize and support key points.

3. Keep the Message Simple

- Follow design principles for clarity:

- Focus on one idea per slide.

  - Use 60-70% white space on each slide.

  - Choose large, sans-serif fonts (14–18 pt for text, 48 pt for titles).

- Avoid overloading slides with text or unnecessary elements.

- Use Text Sparingly:
  - No more than 5 bullet points per slide
  - Use READABLE fonts
  - Use color for emphasis
  - Use contrasting background and text
  - Check for spelling and grammatical errors
  - Never use all capitals; harder to read

4. Consider Alternatives to Bulleted Lists

- Use full-sentence headings to improve understanding.

- Combine text with visuals where appropriate for better engagement.

5. Use Colors Carefully

- Guidelines for effective color usage:

  - Use colors to highlight differences (e.g., graph bars).

  - Ensure good contrast (avoid light colors like yellow on white).

  - Limit graphics to 3–4 colors for simplicity.

6. Learn the Tools Available

- Customize presentation templates:

  - Adjust color schemes, fonts, and layouts.

  - Add organization logos and presentation details.

- Ensure all files (slides, media) are stored in the same folder for seamless use.

7. Leave Graphics Up Long Enough

- Display visuals only when discussing their content.

- Remove graphics when moving to a new topic to avoid distractions.

8. Avoid Handouts

Distribute handouts only:

  - If visuals cannot be displayed otherwise.

  - Upon audience request.

  - After the presentation to maintain focus.

9. Maintain Eye Contact While Using Graphics

- Avoid staring at visuals; maintain audience engagement by alternating between visuals and eye contact.
- Use the nearest hand to point at graphics to stay oriented toward the audience.

10. Include Graphics in Practice Sessions

- Test all visuals beforehand to ensure clarity, color accuracy, and proper sizing.
- Practice timing to synchronize visuals with your speech.
- Never use low-quality graphics—replace them if necessary.

11. Plan for Technology Failures

Prepare for equipment issues:

- Contact the equipment provider in advance.
- Bring backup tools like extension cords, markers, and printouts.
- Have a plan for using alternative visuals like handouts if needed.

Overcoming Nervousness in Presentations

Why Do We Fear Presentations?

- Public speaking often ranks as a top fear, even above sickness or death.
- Nervousness arises from the structured and formal nature of presentations.
- A degree of nervousness can enhance performance by adding energy and enthusiasm.

Strategies to Stay Calm:

1. **Know Your Speech**

   Master your material to feel confident, especially during the critical opening moments.

2. **Prepare Physically**

   - Avoid caffeine or alcohol before presenting.
   - Eat a light, balanced meal a few hours prior.
   - Practice deep-breathing exercises to control nerves.
   - Engage in light exercise on the presentation day.

3. **Visualize Success**

   Picture yourself confidently delivering a smooth and impactful presentation.

4. **Arrange the Room**

   Adjust seating, lighting, and equipment to suit your preferences and ease discomfort.

5. **Have Water Handy**

   Prevent dry throat or thirst by keeping a glass of water nearby.

6. **Break the Ice with Casual Banter**

   Chat with audience members before the presentation to ease nerves and establish rapport.

7. **Embrace Your Expertise**

   Remind yourself that you're the authority on the topic and the audience is eager to learn from you.

8. **Avoid Mentioning Nervousness**

   Never admit anxiety—it's rarely visible, and focusing on it may undermine your confidence.

9. **Pace Yourself**

   Speak deliberately to avoid rushing. Use cues like "Slow down!" in your notes if necessary.

10. **Join Speaking Organizations**

Engage with groups like Toastmasters International to refine speaking skills and build long-term confidence.