Mastering oral presentations

Learning Hub
Academic Language & Learning

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

- Have you ever been this audience? ☺

- What makes a boring presentation?

(Philips, 2014)

Objectives

(Ventura, n.d.)

- Prepare presentations with clear objectives and structure

- Understand the language and style of academic presentation

- Apply engaging presentation techniques

- Be aware of different question handling techniques

Overview

- Audience

- Story message

- Visual message

- Physical message

- Question handling techniques

AUDIENCE

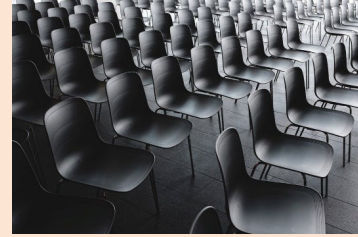**Purpose**

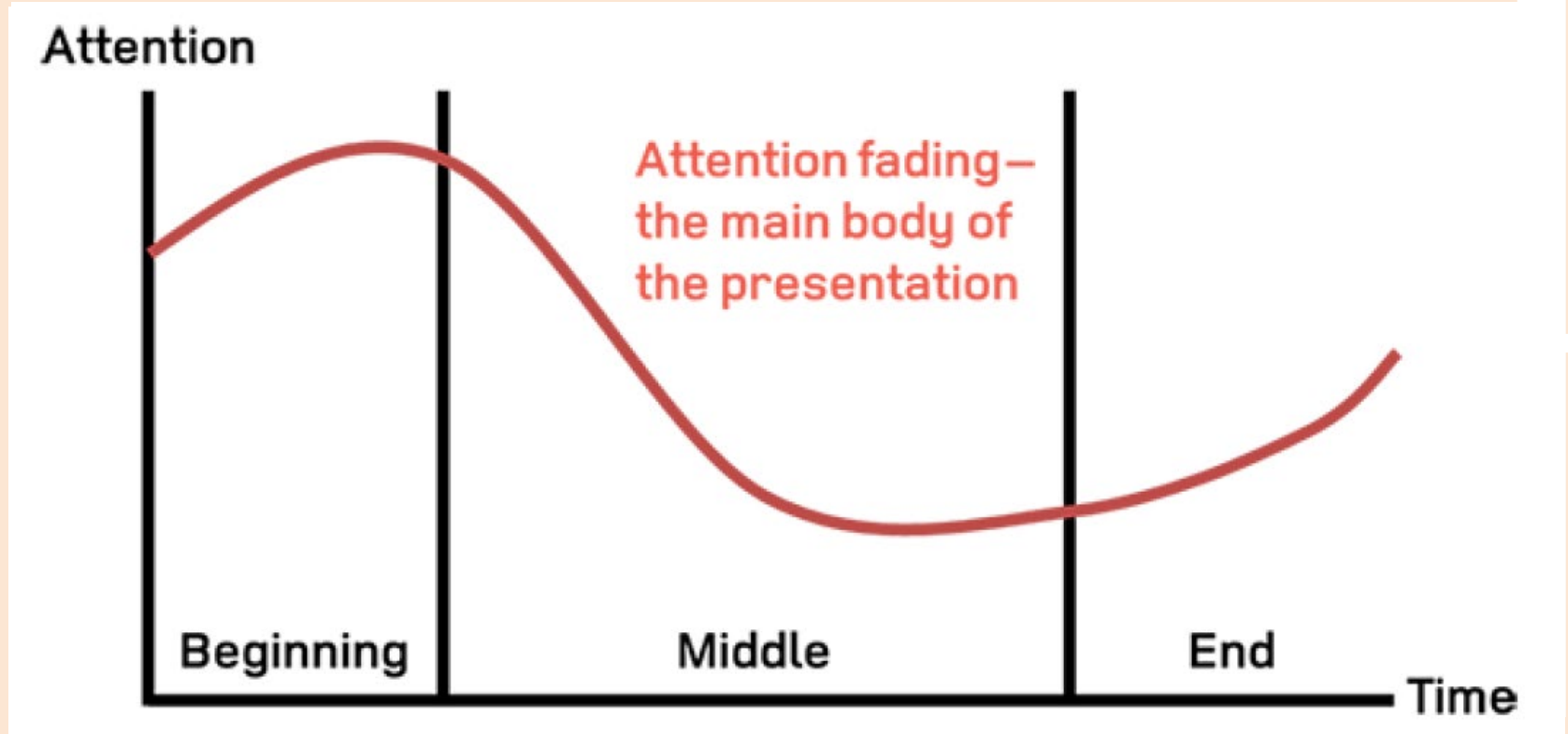- Why do you give this presentation?
- What outcome do you want to achieve?

Audience

- Who is your audience?
- What do they expect from your presentation?
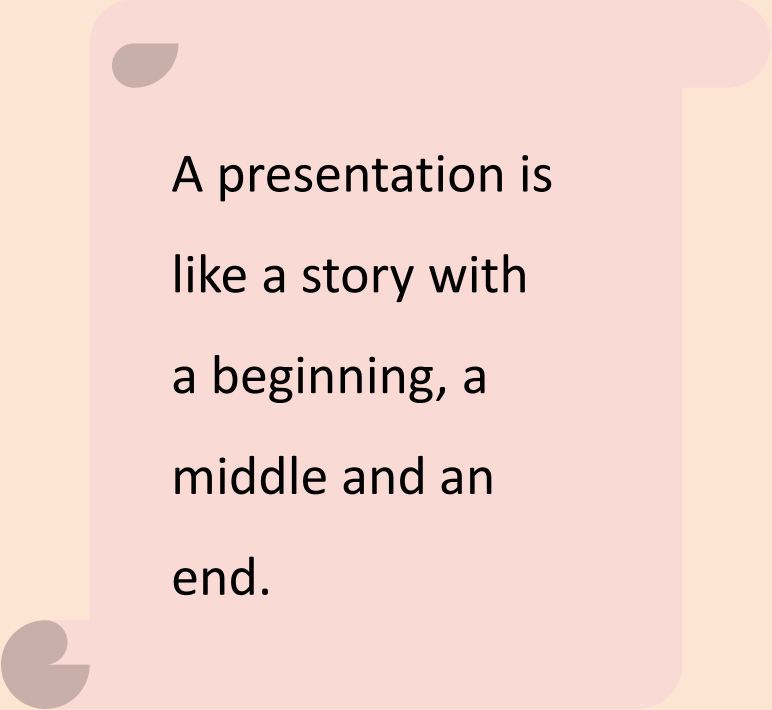
Audience's attention span

Figure 1.
Attention span

Attention

Attention fading—
the main body of
the presentation

Beginning   Middle   End   Time

Note. William (2008)

STORY MESSAGE

The story message

A presentation is like a story with a beginning, a middle and an end.

INFO5993/4990 ASSIGNMENT: Content

Motivation and context

Research question(s)

Critical literature review

Research method

Research plan (tasks and timetable)

Using AI Tools Responsibly

- You **may use AI tools** in this assignment, but:

- Submit the **AI Usage Report** with your work.

- Ensure the work is **primarily your own**.

- Use tools **ethically** under relevant university policies.

- No collusion, dishonesty, or copyright breaches.

AI in Education resource

https://canvas.sydney.edu.au/courses/51655

Begin the presentation with a 'hook' by:

- o Giving the audience a problem to think about

- o Stating a remarkable fact

- o Sharing a story or personal anecdote

Remember: your hook must be closely related to your research topic.

Begin the presentation with a 'hook' by:

○ Giving the audience a problem to think about

'Have you ever wondered how we can teach machines to recognise human emotions just by analysing text or speech?'

Can you guess the student's research topic from this hook?

Begin the presentation with a 'hook' by:

o   Stating a remarkable fact

'Did you know that quantum computers can solve certain problems in seconds that would take classical computers millions of years?'

Can you guess the student's research topic from this hook?

Begin the presentation with a 'hook' by:

○ Sharing a story or personal anecdote

"Back in the 1970s, a young programmer named Grace Hopper was debugging an early computer when she discovered something odd—a moth had been trapped inside the machine, causing it to malfunction. This was one of the first 'computer bugs' ever documented. It made me wonder: how do we prevent bugs in today's software systems, and how far has debugging come since then?"

Can you guess the student's research topic from this hook?

Signposting language – engage the audience

Beginning

- So, first of all
- I would like to begin by
- Let me start with

Moving on

- Now, moving on to
- Let's turn to
- This leads me to

Reiterating

- So, that's the general picture for….
- Let's just recap

Conclusion

- In conclusion
- To summarise
- Finally

Language and style

Imagine that the sentence below is part of a presentation speech.

The main advantages of these techniques are a minimum or absent sample pre-treatment and a quick response; in fact due to the relative difficulty in the interpretation of the obtained mass spectra, the use of multivariate analysis by principal component analysis, and complete-linkage cluster analysis of mass spectral data, that is to say the relative abundance of peaks, was used as a tool for rapid comparison, differentiation, and classification of the samples.

- *What problems do you think you would have if you had to say it aloud?*

- *What problems would the audience have in understanding it?*

Compare the two versions below.

Which one is easier for the presenter to say and for the audience to understand?

First version

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Second version

There are two main advantages to these techniques. First, the sample needs very little or no pre-treatment. Second, you get a quick response. Mass spectra are really hard to interpret. So we decided to use two types of analysis: principal component and complete-linkage cluster. We did the analysis on the relative abundance of peaks. All this meant that we could compare, differentiate, and classify the samples.

Revised version

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Solution:
- split the sentence up into short chunks
- use more verbs
- use the active form
- use personal pronouns
- use signposting language (first, second, etc)

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Level of formality

In English, there are essentially three levels of formality:

1. Formal
2. Neutral/ relatively informal
3. Very informal

Which level of formality do you think most audiences prefer?

Choose the right level of formality

1. Formal
2. **Neutral/ relatively informal** √
3. Very informal

This informality is achieved by:

• personal *pronouns* (e.g., I, we, you)

• *active forms* rather than passive forms (e.g., ***I found*** rather than ***It was found***)

• *verbs* instead of nouns where possible

• *concrete or specific* nouns (e.g., cars) rather than technical or abstract nouns (e.g.,
vehicular transportation)

• *short simple sentences* rather than long complex ones

Three minute thesis (3MT) competition

You are going to watch a 3MT presentation ""Efficient typing with a brain computer interface"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ-yb5NdE64

After watching the presentation, discuss the questions below:

1. What style of language did the presenter adopt in his presentation?

2. Did the presenter have a clear story message with a beginning, a middle and an end?

Did the presenter?

Use a question as a hook to introduce the topic of the presentation?	
Introduce the research objective?	
Give an overview of the research approach/ methods?	
Share the results?	
Highlight the research significance?	

Did the presenter?

Use a question as a hook to introduce the topic of the presentation?	✅
Introduce the research objective?	✅
Give an overview of the research approach/ methods?	✅
Share the results?	✅
Highlight the research significance?	✅

Pose a question as a hook to introduce the topic of the presentation?

"How can we use technology to help people with locked-in syndrome communicate?"

Introduce the research objective?

Introduce the goal of the thesis, which is to design and build a special typing system that allows people with locked-in syndrome to communicate using only their brain waves.

Give an overview of the research approach/ methods?

Users wear an electrode cap that tracks brain waves. By focusing on a letter on the screen, the system detects a brain wave spike when the desired letter is recognized. Language models enhance typing efficiency by predicting common letters and word patterns.

Share the results?

The presenter shares findings that language models improve the typing speed and accuracy for users with locked-in syndrome.

Highlight the research significance/contribution?

The significance is highlighted by expressing the hope that the research will help people with locked-in syndrome regain some level of communication, even if it's as simple as saying hello. This underscores the personal and emotional impact of the research.

VISUAL MESSAGE

Visual message

"Simplicity is the ultimate

sophistication" (Da Vinci, n.d.).
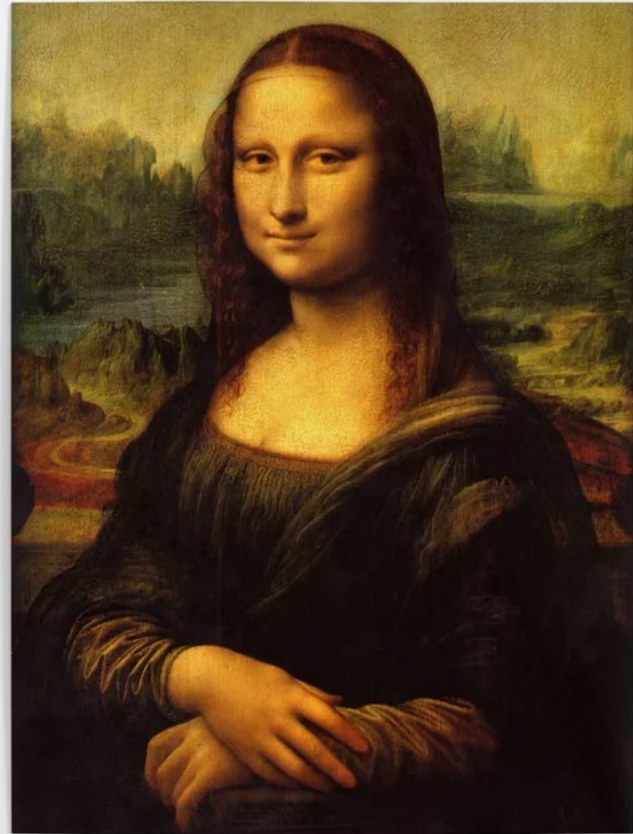
(Shepherd, 2017)

Designing presentation slides

- Simple, contrasting background and text colours

- No elaborate designs and colour schemes

Which of the following two slides is more effective?

Age structure - service age groups, 2016

Total persons

Central Coast Council area   Greater Sydney

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (Usual residence data). Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.
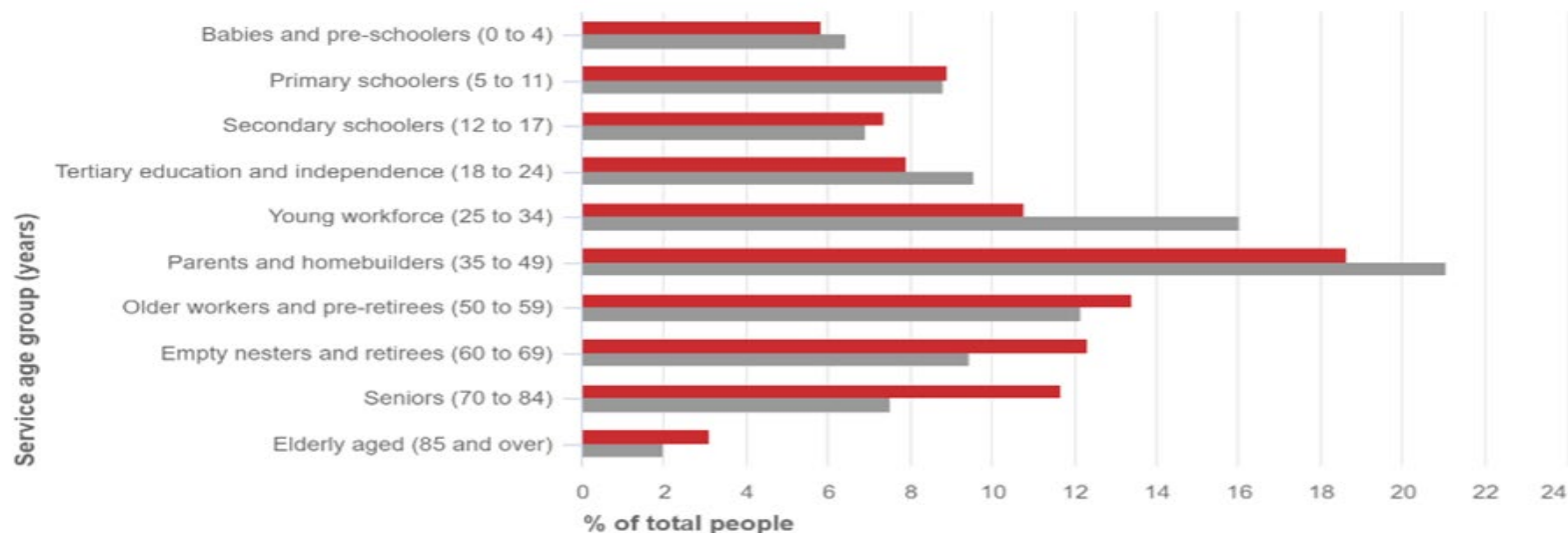
Local Demographics – Central Coast age structure
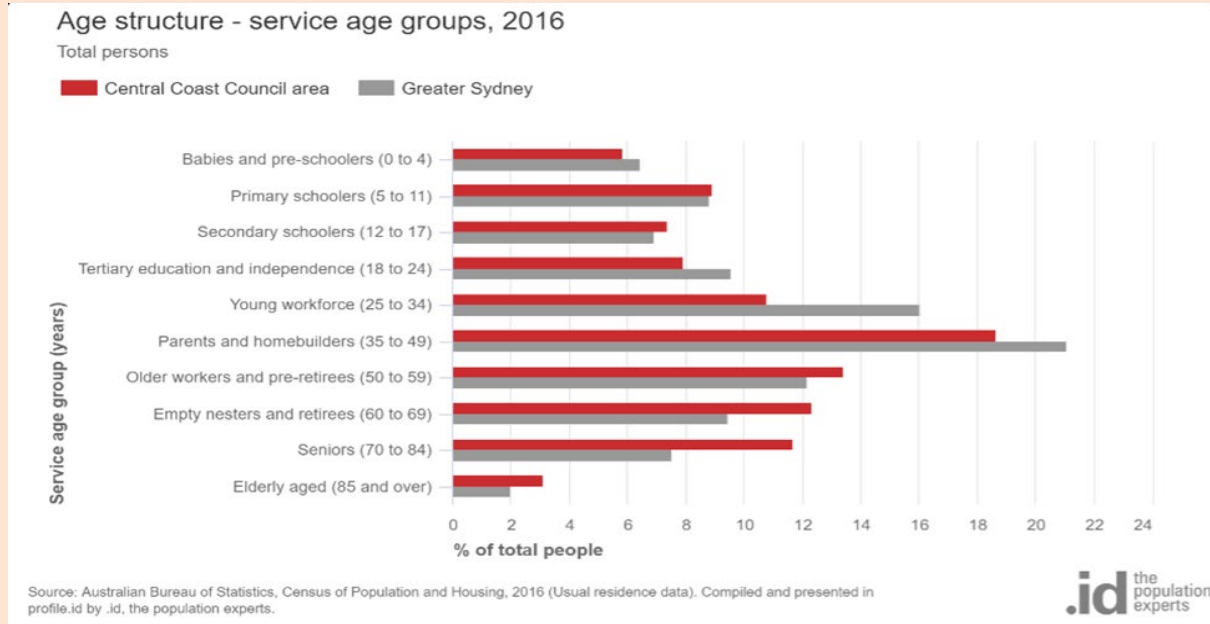
Figure 1. Central Coast age structure (Central Coast Council, n.d.)

Designing presentation slides

Layout

- Use consistent font and size
- Do not overcrowd
- Use parallel grammar

Designing presentation slides

Layout

- Use consistent font and size
- Do not overcrowd
- Use parallel grammar
- Creating effective presentation slides is important

Which of the following two slides is more effective?

What it takes to be a successful business leader?

❑ Lead with competence – Say, plan and do.

❑ Showing up every day - Ready to perform.

❑ Continue - To learn, grow and improve, professionally and personally.

❑ Setting a high benchmark – Follow through with excellence.

❑ Be better than average – Don't settle for good enough.

❑ Inspire others – Have goals that are well defined; implement changes seamlessly.

❑ Engage – Share knowledge and enthusiasm.

❑ They are a team player - Believing teamwork divides the task and multiples the effect, minimizes weakness.

What does it take to be a successful business leader?

Hard work +

Dedication +

Consistency = Success

Which of these two slides is more effective?

Attendance at East and North Parks

Name/Month	Jan.	Apr.	July	Oct.
East Park	72	51	75	74
North Park	11	5	210	148

Attendance at East and North Parks
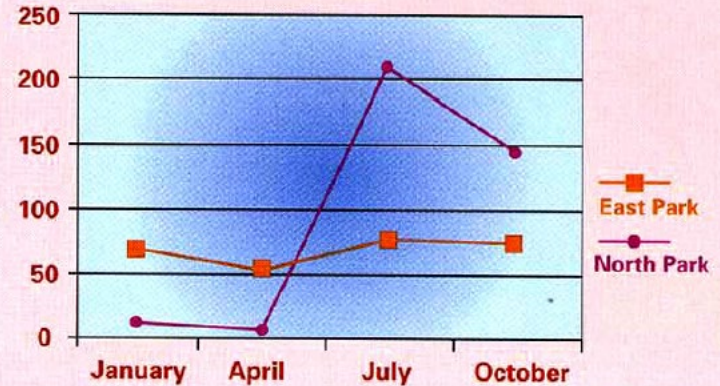
Which of these two slides is more effective?

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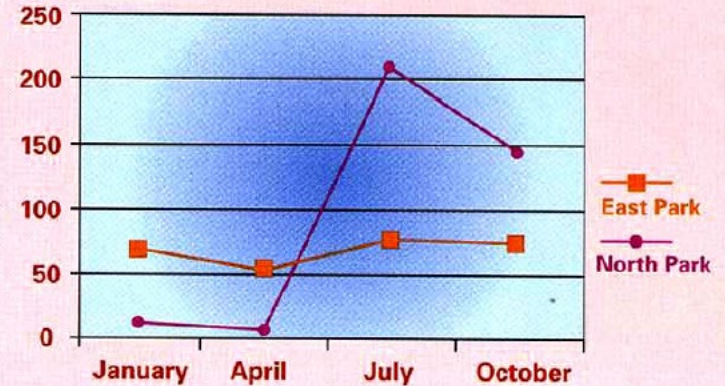
Which of these two slides is more effective?

New offices opened in Asia this year

Function	City	Country	New
Regional Head Office	Hong Kong	China	
Information Technology	Sapporo	Japan	
Regional Head Office	Tokyo	Japan	
Regional Head Office	Osaka	Japan	★
Asian Headquarters	Seoul	Korea	
Research & Development	Pusan	Korea	★
Logistics	Singapore	Singapore	
Regional Head Office	Manila	Philippines	★

Which of these two slides is more effective?

Further resources for PowerPoint design

Designing for accessibility

https://github.com/UKHomeOffice/posters/blob/master/accessibility/dos-donts/posters_en-UK/accessibility-posters-set.pdf

Contrast and colour checker

https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/

Design tips for PowerPoint

https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/oral-presentations/audiovisual-aids.html

PHYSICAL MESSAGE

The physical message

- Facial expressions & eye contact

- Posture

- Gestures

- Use of space

- Voice

Match the posture and eye contact problems with the descriptive labels in the Word Box
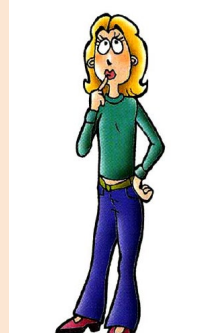
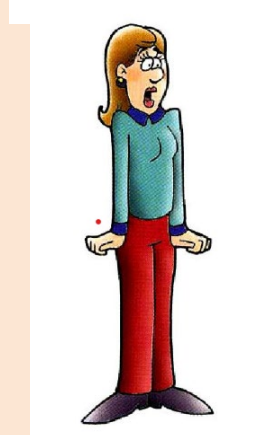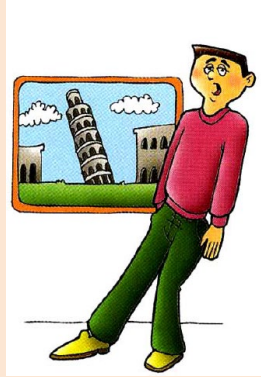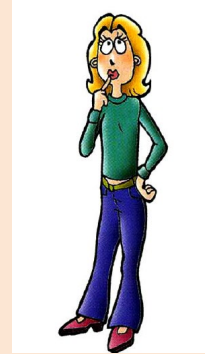| A. The pendulum | B. The surfer | C. The Leaning Tower of Pisa | D. The hula dancer |
| E. The bird watcher | F. The stargazer | G. Washing your hands | H. The soldier |

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

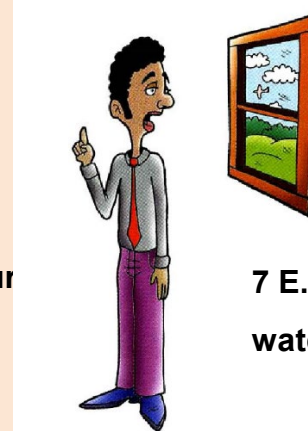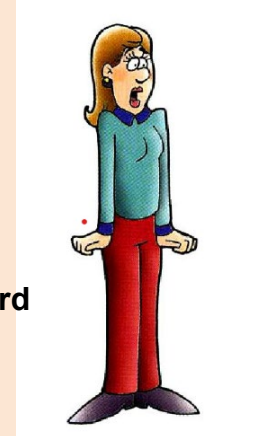1 A. The pendulum

2 C. The Leaning Tower of Pisa

3 F. The stargazer

4 B. The surfer

5 D. The hula dancer

6 G. Washing your hands

7 E. The bird watcher

8 H. The soldier

QUESTION HANDLING TECHNIQUES

1. Anticipate Questions

- Think like your audience: What might be unclear or controversial?

- List 5–7 possible questions

- Group them into clarification, challenge, or extension questions

2. Prepare Clear Answers

• Draft responses for each question

• Practice saying them aloud so they sound natural

• Use bridging phrases: "That's a great question…" or "I don't have the full answer, but…"

3. Practice with Peers

- Rehearse with a classmate and let them ask spontaneous questions

- Keep responses brief

- Get feedback on clarity and confidence

4. During the Q&A

- Listen fully before responding - don't interrupt

- Pause and breathe; repeat or rephrase the question for clarity

- Stay on topic, answer concisely, and thank the questioner

- If unsure, be honest: "That's something I'd like to explore further"

5. Manage Nerves

- Remember: classmates' questions are usually supportive

- Keep your tone conversational, not lecture-style

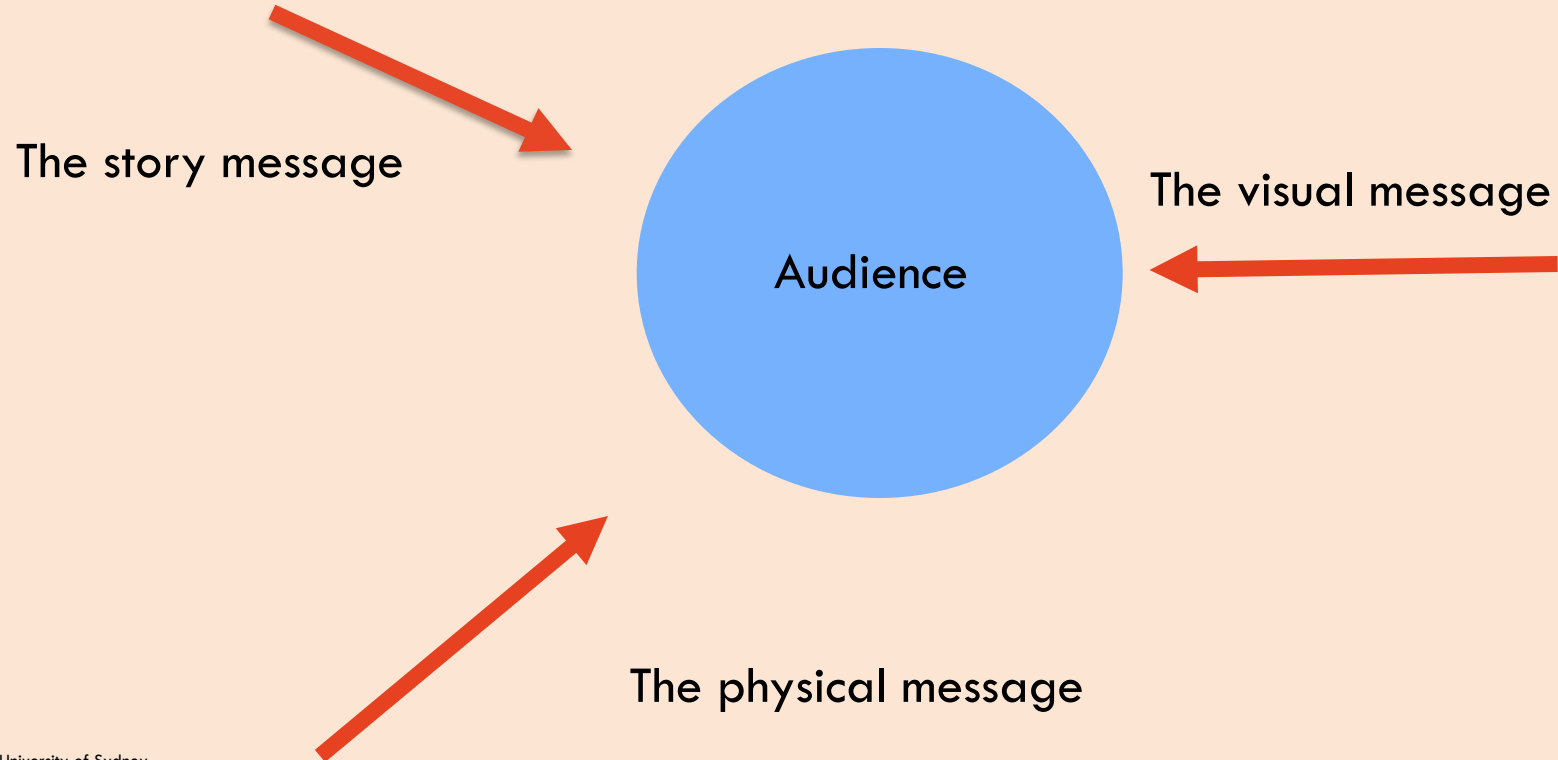- Smile, make eye contact, and show appreciation

Reflection

What are your key takeaways

from the workshop today?

Figure: Reflection

Note. Hoefler. (n.d.).

The story message

The visual message

Audience

The physical message

We welcome your feedback…

https://sydney.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3EHezIPP5602ZUi

References

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