

7. DELIVERING PRESENTATIONS ON TECHNICAL TOPICS (PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES IN ENGINEERING CONTEXTS)

This unit introduces language patterns, resources, suggestions and hints useful for engineering professionals in terms of:

- ✚ designing effective presentations on technical topics (be they product descriptions, update reports, equipment maintenance instructions, pitches, etc.);
- ✚ delivering effective presentations on technical topics deploying signpost language.

7.1 Designing effective presentations on technical topics

Typically shaped as descriptions of technology advances, new product features and enhanced performance, as reports on the project status and solutions to escalating technical problems or as information updates, instructions and sales pitches, technical presentations are either highly informative (providing unambiguous knowledge, instructions, numerical information) or argumentative and persuasive (enabling opinion formation or inoculation, e.g. acknowledging new technology superiority, buying state-of-the-art technical equipment, etc.).

The informational content, presentation style and jargon complexity need to be adapted to the audience's technical background since audience members may be highly technical professionals or non-technical customers and the ultimate goal is to deliver content that fills the audience's knowledge gap. This is mainly achieved by:

- ✓ resorting to accessible language and adequate explanations of specialised concepts and terms;
- ✓ shaping the complexity of the informational content delivered above the audience's knowledge level;
- ✓ being able to expand on the topic in question and provide guidance on retrieval of additional resources in case audience members demand that.

Clarity, precision, conciseness and coherence are core features of technical presentations, ensuring message plausibility and informativeness.

The bulk of information intended to be presented has to be organised considering audience peculiarities of which the most important are:

- audience's maximum attention is given at the beginning of the presentation, therefore it's vital to make an impactful start and win them on your side from the very beginning;
- the information retention percentage is significantly low, only 20% of the delivered information is retained while 80% is lost; this translates into squeezing key messages into the retained 20%;
- audience members long for guidance through presentation (i.e. they want to know whether they are at the beginning/end of the first/last section or

moving to conclusions); this can be effectively achieved by resorting to signpost language (discussed in section 7.2);

- images and visual information-based demonstrations speak better than words, consequently it's highly effective to back up ideas and arguments with visuals and specific realia (e.g. if you deliver a presentation on the enhanced performance of some storage equipment, synchronize your statements with slides displaying numerical information-based comparisons, adequate charts, video clips);
- adoption of a dynamic speaking tempo and deployment of adequate supporting visuals avoid audience's boredom.

Furthermore, it's essential to stick to a core content framework structured as follows:

<p>Introduction</p> <p>Introduce the topic of the presentation</p> <p>Announce the main points (message 1, message 2, message 3)</p>
<p>First section</p> <p>Main point 1 = message 1</p>
<p>Second section</p> <p>Main point 2 = message 2</p>
<p>Third section</p> <p>Main point 3 = message 3</p>
<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Reinforce/recap the main points (message 1, message 2, message 3)</p>

This core structure needs to be customised according to the content specificity. A sales pitch will be embedded with positively evaluative vocabulary highlighting technology superiority (*outstanding, state-of-the-art, cutting edge, fast-growing, leading, top-rated*), action verbs and nouns (*to administer, to design, to enhance, to examine, to facilitate, to implement, to provide, to reroute, administration, design, enhancement, examination, facilitation, implementation, provision, rerouting*) and projections of video demonstrations/comparisons/testimonials.

Notice below additional presentation strategies and related vocabulary items:

Strategy	Language items
<p>Getting the audience's attention:</p> <p>✓ ask a rhetorical question</p>	<p>Do we really want to miss this opportunity?</p> <p>Where do we go from here?</p> <p>So, how are we going to end this deadlock?</p>

<p>✓ tell a joke/story/anecdote</p> <p>✓ suggest an issue to think about</p> <p>✓ share interesting facts</p> <p>✓ quote internationally recognised professionals</p>	<p>So, what does this mean for the company? What conclusion can we draw from this? What's the reason for this drastic decrease?</p> <p>Let me start by telling you what happened to me when ... I remember what X said when I met him at a telecom conference in Berlin I was once trying to ... when suddenly I</p> <p>Imagine you had to What would be your first action? Suppose your hard disk failed and your data storage backup system had been disabled accidentally? How would recover data?</p> <p>According to recent surveys, more than half of smartphone users prefer ... Were you aware that has doubled since 2012? I have recently read in an It magazine that ... Most technical experts side with this view ...</p> <p>X predicted that ... X envisioned that ... X stated that ... At the last IT Congress held in New York, X demonstrated ... To quote a well-known expert, ... As X once stated, ...</p>
<p>Describing graphs/charts</p>	<p>action to increase, to go up, to rise, to decrease, to fall, to drop, to decline, to plummet, to slump, to reach a peak, to hit a low, to recover, to fluctuate, to stay the same, to level off, to be above/below, to stand at, to remain high;</p> <p>manner gradually, significantly, moderately, sharply, mildly, slightly, constantly, steadily;</p> <p>preposition verb + by + percentage The customers' complaints have decreased by 50% over the last 6 months. percentage + noun + in + topic There has been a 50% decrease in customers'</p>

	<p>complaints over the last 6 months.</p> <p>noun+ in + topic+ by</p> <p>There has been a decrease in customers' complaints by 50% over the last 6 months.</p>
Highlighting specific bits of information	<p>Let me highlight the following items.</p> <p>This leads us to the next important issue.</p> <p>We need to focus on</p> <p>I'd like to update you on the project status.</p> <p>I'd like to draw your attention to ...</p> <p>I wish to highlight/stress/point out/pinpoint ...</p> <p>Let's look more closely to ...</p>
Explaining causes and effects	<p>This is mainly due to the sudden change in ...</p> <p>The main reason is/seems/is presumably ...</p> <p>Our assumptions are ...</p> <p>X was caused by ...</p> <p>This was because ...</p> <p>As a result/as a consequence/consequently/hence/</p> <p>Most likely, this is the main cause ...</p> <p>This is very unlikely to have happened because of ...</p> <p>This resulted in a ...</p> <p>The prolongation of this situation resulted in/ led to/generated ...</p>
Dealing with questions	<p>You've raised an important point there. May I ask what your own view is?</p> <p>If I understood you correctly, you would like to know ...</p> <p>Could you be a little more specific?</p> <p>If I could just rephrase your question. You wish to know</p> <p>If you don't mind I'll come back to this point later ...</p> <p>Can we return to this issue a bit later?</p> <p>I'm afraid this is not my area, but I'm X from the ... department can provide more information on that topic.</p> <p>Feel free to ask any questions.</p> <p>Anyone like to comment on that?</p> <p>We only have few minutes left. Is there one last question?</p>