

CSE601 - Giving a Presentation

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1 Introduction

Presentations are a way in which people share ideas with one another. There are many different kinds of presentations, each with varying degrees of detail used to inform about a topic. This paper will cover some important element to think about when preparing for any kind of presentation, along with some tips on how to save a presentation that an audience does not seem particularly engaged with.

2 Elements of an Effective Presentation

Four points to keep in mind to give an effective presentation are understanding the intended audience, preparing the content, delivering the presentation confidently, and controlling the environment in which the presenter is giving the presentation [2].

2.1 Understand the Audience

Before beginning to put together a presentation, a presenter must understand their audience. They can begin to do this by asking themselves three questions:

1. Who is the audience?
2. How much does the audience already know about the topic?
3. What does the audience want/need to get out of the presentation?

For a psychiatric medical researcher, a possible presentation topic could be the effects of drug A on controlling symptoms of bipolar II disorder versus current treatments. A possible audience for this presentation would be their colleagues. In this case, it can be assumed that the audience has a strong grasp of the typical symptoms of bipolar II disorder, along with how it differs from bipolar I disorder. What they want or need to get out of the presentation could be whether drug A is effective or worth looking more into as a treatment option.

2.2 Prepare the Content

After determining the intended audience for a presentation, a presenter can begin to prepare content. This typically is displayed via PowerPoint slides, but can also be incorporated into a poster. When creating slides, it's important to keep in mind what the audience is expected to get out of the presentation.

For example, a presentation given to a classroom by a professor is going to need more information on the slides for students to refer back to than a presentation given to a room of researchers. The researcher in the drug A example will want to include comparison graphs between drug usages and conclusions drawn from the data collected in any experiments preceding the presentation. This gives the audience what they need to know from the presentation, rather than covering material already in their domain of knowledge [1].

2.3 Deliver Confidently

When presenting the slides a presenter has prepared, they must be sure to do so in a confident manner. If the presenter seems unsure of themselves or uncomfortable to be the center of attention, the audience has reason to question if what they are being told is true or worth listening to [2]. Some ways for a presenter to build confidence in their presentation include:

- Practice, but don't memorize, the presentation
- Make slides both helpful for audience understanding and presenter direction
- Manage stress levels before and during presenting

Practicing a presentation lets a presenter figure out a good way to get their point across in a way that feels comfortable to them [2]. Memorization, however, leads to more mistakes. If a presenter forgets a piece of a presentation they previously memorized, more often than not they will struggle to remember what was after the piece they forgot about. This is a quick way to derail a presentation and cause unnecessary stress to the presenter.

Slides should be made in a way that helps the presenter stay on track, along with giving the audience something meaningful to look at. For example, a few short statements to remind the presenter on what to talk about next and a graph or original image for the audience to relate to those words.

Managing stress is something every presenter must try and see what works for them. Some ways that people manage stress when getting nervous include taking deep breaths and imagining themselves in a non-stressful situation [2].

2.4 Control the Environment

Not only does controlling the environment help with giving a successful presentation, but it also reduces the chance of technical mistakes and helps manage presenter stress.

One way to control some of the environment is, if given the chance, a presenter can practice their presentation in the room they will be giving the presentation in. This allows the presenter to learn how much they are able to walk around and how the technology for the stage is setup beforehand. Another way to have control is for the presenter to do their own setup or bring their own technology to plug in if possible [2]. This is up to the discretion of the presenter and the place at which they are presenting, but is an option to keep in mind.

3 When Losing the Audience

Sometimes, when giving a presentation, the audience may not be interested. It is commonly true that an audience sitting in on a presentation is doing so because they want to or are interested in the topic. However, there are still cases where a presentation may lose audience attention. Some ways to regain attention in the room include:

- Skipping through slides to show more interesting or interactive content
- Asking for opinions or thoughts from the audience before giving an answer
- Asking for questions or concerns before transitioning to a new subtopic

One way a presenter can avoid losing the audience is to begin their presentation by asking the audience for their expectations or wanted knowledge before beginning [1]. This does not work for every topic or situation, but is a tip for presenters to keep in mind.

4 Conclusion

Giving a presentation requires a lot of planning and preparation before stepping in front of an audience. There are many ways that a presentation can fail. However, the positives of getting information across to a large audience is more beneficial to the presenter and outweighs the possible failures. Using the points highlighted in this paper, a presenter will be able to avoid actions leading to failure and give a successful presentation.

References

- [1] SkillsYouNeed.com. Presentation skills.
- [2] Mind Tools Content Team. How good are your presentation skills?: Understanding your impact.