Tips to Keep Your Audience Engaged

Few things in the world are scarier than public speaking and making presentations to large groups. To help you hone your presenting skills, we've put together some tips to keep in mind - that will hopefully help you get over your fears - and keep your audience listening.

General Suggestions

- Scale your visuals for presentation in a large conference room that seats 300-500 people. Generally this means that font sizes should be no smaller than 24 points. One way to simulate how your slides will appear to the people who are sitting in the back of the room is to step back about 12 feet from a 12-inch laptop display or about 15 feet from a 14-15 inch monitor on which your slides are displayed.

- If you are using slides, prepare notes that complement your slides - do not just read what is shown on the slides. The audience can read slides silently faster than you can read them aloud.

- If you do not get the audience's attention early in the presentation, people might leave and go to another session. Your opening should be concise and your purpose clearly stated.

- Use a closing slide to summarize your main points.

- Wherever possible, use screen captures rather than trying to do a live demo.

- Use a mixture of slides that show text, flow charts, and output. Images such as screen captures can be used to show a product's application in the workplace.

- "SAS" rhymes with "glass", "pass", "mass". Please do not refer to SAS products or to the company as "S" "A" "S" that is, pronouncing each letter. "SAS" is one syllable and is no longer considered an acronym.

- Divide ideas into groups of three to five items. People can more easily grasp information in small segments.

- Only use graphics that are relevant to your topic and help convey your message. Don't add clip art just to make slides "interesting."

- Keep the graphics minimal and the colors muted for readability.

- Limit the text in your visuals to the main concepts.

- Post supplemental information such as source code, macros, and printouts that might not be effective when shown in slides online.

Practice Your Presentation

- Practice your presentation aloud, speaking slowly and clearly. Remember that how you say it is just as important as what you say.

- Ask others to listen and give you feedback about the volume, clarity, and speed of your presentation.

- Do not read your paper or slides. Use an outline of your major concepts to follow when making your presentation.

- Use simple English to help your audience grasp your message more easily. Remember that this is an international audience. For many attendees, English might be a second language.

- Conclude your presentation by repeating your opening theme and main ideas. Answer any questions that you might have raised in your opening, and repeat any basic thoughts that you want your audience to remember.

- Use a pointer when you want the audience to focus on something in particular on a slide.

- Time your presentation. Be sure not to use more time than is allotted for your presentation. Allow at least one minute of your time for being introduced and a few minutes for questions.

- Optional: Practice your presentation in the Speaker Rehearsal room at the conference (its location will be shown in your conference program).

- Optional: If you have not used one before, practice with the microphone on so you will be comfortable using one. Microphones will be available in the Speaker Rehearsal rooms.

Deliver Your Presentation

- Be sure you know exactly when and where your presentation will be given.

- Arrive at the correct location at least 15-20 minutes before your presentation.

- Let the room host know you are there. The room host will help you by operating the projector and taking care of the lighting.

- Be sure that everything that you need is in place and working.

- Stand at the podium if possible. This gives the audience a clear view of both the screen and you.

- Be aware of the time (the room host will help you do this via flash cards that will show how much time remains). The room host will stop your presentation when the allotted time is used.

- You will not be allowed to continue beyond your allotted time.

- Do not turn around to read your slides to the audience. If you turn around, it might seem that you're not sure what's on the slide. Also, turning your back to the audience decreases the group's ability to hear you.

- When your presentation is finished, thank your audience for their attention and ask if there are any questions (while you are still at the podium).

- Allow about five minutes for the audience to ask questions. It's very common for speakers to get questions from their audiences. You should consider it a compliment that your listeners want to learn more about your ideas.

- Repeat each question. This benefits the entire audience, and verifies what the question is. It also gives you a few more seconds to prepare an answer.

- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and offer to get the answer to the questioner after the presentation.

- If you can, stay (at the back of the room) a few extra minutes after your presentation to be accessible for more questions and to get contact information from people you promised to reply to. Please be courteous of the next presenter and if any conversations or questions continue when the next presentation starts, please continue the conversation outside the presentation room so as to not disturb the presenter or audience.