

Presentation Skills and Paralanguage

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to understand the:

- ✍ Concept of presentation and its use.
- ✍ Factors affecting presentation.
- ✍ Steps for preparing a presentation.
- ✍ Nuances of delivery.
- ✍ Constituents of paralanguage.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively either orally or in writing is highly valued and demanded in any given profession. Having knowledge is important in a profession, but to give life to those ideas is crucial to long-term success in career. The occasion to present your ideas could come either in a meeting or solo presentation.

As a professional or business person, you are expected to communicate orally with customers, colleagues, associates, superiors, employees, and others. Besides speaking with individuals face to face or by telephone, you will at times also be asked to address various groups of people. In other words, to make a speech.

Whether you are speaking to a group of ten colleagues around a conference table, or 30 students in a class, or a thousand in an auditorium, or a wider television audience, the ability to speak effectively is important in all situations.

FEATURES OF PRESENTATION

The process of communication is highly complex and involves the interrelationship of a number of basic components. These components present the basic features of any presentation and are required to be considered while communicating, specially in oral presentation or speaking. These features are discussed here.

- The public communication or speaking originates from a source, which is generally an idea, occasion, event, object or any given situation.
- The speaker can be affected by a number of factors such as personality, perception, skill, a speaker's choice of topic and style of composing the presentation.
- The audience can be affected by the level of knowledge, language skills, background and attitude towards the speaker.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING PRESENTATIONS

Structuring presentations requires the making of a solid foundation. In order to prepare an effective speech, it is useful for you to understand how to analyze yourself, your audience, the setting and the purpose of your speaking. Any communication requires the analysis of three elements:

1. *Participants:* Speaker, persons engaged in the event and the audience.
2. *Setting:* Time, location, emotional climate or environment of the speech.
3. *Purpose:* What the communicator is trying to achieve.

In presentation each of these elements affects the topic selected, the language used, the types of supporting materials chosen (such as examples and illustrations), and the supplementary aids used to reinforce and clarify ideas.

Analysis of Participants

Participants in presentation are of three kinds—the speaker, the people involved in the event and the members of audience.

Speaker

The analysis of speaker is done on the basis of personal inventory, appearance and perception of the speaker.

Personal inventory: If you are a speaker and are given total freedom to choose a topic, which topic would you choose and why? You would consider what is called personal speaking inventory, i.e. your life's expressions and interest. You would consider areas such as your hobbies and special skills, your work, places you have travelled, things you know how to do (sports, machinery you can operate, cooking skills), jobs you have held, and your experience (accidents, special events). In addition to this, funny things that have happened to you; books and magazines you have read; movies; TV channels; commercials you have seen; and products and services you have used or bought can also serve as inventory. Apart from this,

interesting people you have met; your social, cultural and political views; people you advice; your education; class topic you were interested in; and your ethical and religious background can be referred. As you can see, we all possess a rich inventory from where one idea can be born to share. One does not need to be the greatest authority on a given subject to be a good presenter. The presentation of ideas is a skill acquired through planning and practice. Even if your knowledge is not sufficient in an area, it can be supplemented through researching and interviewing.

Appearance: Have you seen how politicians appear in spotless, clean *kurta pajamas* or *dhoti kurtas* in their speeches? The appearance of a speaker in presentation, whether it is formal or informal, has a great impact. Take time out to reflect on the attire you choose. In other words, dress for the occasion. If you are giving a formal presentation in a company or a business meeting or any other professional setting, dress in formals. If the occasion is informal, e.g. a birthday party or any other social occasion, dress accordingly depending on where you are and what your audience comprises. No matter where you are and whom you are addressing, be neat and clean in your appearance. No one would be interested in your overnight hangover or how you worked late in the office. Poor appearance has no excuse. Hence, choose attire that does not appear gaudy, loud and poor.

Speaker's perception: A speaker's perception is the way a person views the world. If you are the speaker, the first question to ask yourself is where you stand on prayer in school, the environment, racial intolerance and smoking in public places. Will you protest against them? Can you speak about them?

Freedom of speech and expression should not be confused with concept of freedom of thought. The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech to every citizen under Article 19, and there have been landmark cases in the Supreme Court that have affirmed the nation's policy of allowing free process and freedom of speech and expression to every citizen.

In India, citizens are free to criticize politicians, bureaucracy and the policies of the government.

However, many events in the last few years have excluded certain categories of speech from protection. These include defamation, invasion of privacy, fraudulent misinterpretation, obscenity, advocacy lawless behaviour, fighting words and caste-specific words.

Apart from this, you as a speaker must remain free from perceptual bias. It is important to understand that different people process information differently and approach problems differently. It is here that conflicts and misunderstandings occur. It is important to recognize that different individuals may select different solutions to a problem because they use different reasoning processes.

Persons engaged in the event

The success of large events such as, shareholders general annual meeting, political and social gathering, fund-raising campaigns, and press conferences depends on the skill of the people engaged managing the event. They are the ones who manage the show in the background while the speaker adorns the stage, confident that everything is going to be working during the entire duration of the speech or

presentation. These are the light men, sound specialists, spot boys, technicians, electricians and other ground staff. They are to be selected based on their experience and skill and should be informed of the duration, time and type of arrangement required on and off the stage so that the speaker is effective and is visible to a large audience. In office area also, they are responsible for setting up of apparatus and computer, and preparing the location (Conference hall) for presentations.

Audience

Individual listeners who make up a speaker's audience play a critical role in the communication process and should always be the centre of focus for the speaker. They come to a speech event with a variety of individual objectives, but in general focus on themselves and their needs and wants. In order to gain their attention, focus on a basic human question, "What is in it for me?" One individual might listen for information, another might focus on argument and still another might just listen out of curiosity. They will all listen actively but only until it serves some purpose of their own.

Apart from this, when people are together in groups, they exhibit group dynamics. There can be influence of individuals on one another leading to shift in public views on one or the other side, resulting in polarization of the audience. The audience analysis, hence, has to be done on the basis of number of characteristics as discussed below.

Demographic characteristics: Demographic analysis allows you to profile the features that distinguish your intended group of listeners. This assists in choosing a topic, language to be used and types of aids which the audience will be able to grasp and find interesting. During this analysis, you look for uniqueness and differences among different groups of audience. Other areas analyzed are religion, culture, ethnic uniqueness and occupation.

Psychographic characteristics: (Attitude such as positive or negative predispositions towards the speaker, the speech and the occasion.) The analysis of psychographics enables you to determine whether the listeners accept your point of view or are hostile to it, and the reasons for their attitude. The areas that help in evaluating the audience are political affiliation, and social and economic levels.

Intellectual level: An evaluation of the audience's intellectual level, educational background and training in a particular area can help you select a topic. People can feel threatened if you talk of something that is beyond their understanding. Hence, choose the level of language and its technical difficulty in the presentation according to the audience.

Listening style: Listening style is individual to a person. No two people have the same ability. Then there are some areas a person might learn easily and others where he might not. Public speakers who want to help the audience understand and act on the message presented before them must adapt to their various learning styles.

Analysis of Setting

Setting comprises a number of rhetorographic factors which are place, time limit, time of day and emotional climate or environment for the speech.

Place

The effect of a place is obvious; a lecture on a chemical experiment will be more suited for a chemistry lab than in an auditorium or a banquet hall. A presentation of new ad design might be better in a darkened closed conference hall than a football field.

Factors such as room size, temperature, lighting, arrangement of furniture, physical comfort, discomfort of audience, and crowd in the room, all have a bearing on the tone and manner of the presentation. For example large rooms are fitted with special sound system with acoustics so that there is no echo. Smaller rooms and conference halls, which accommodate 10-12 people, do not have such requirement.

Time

Time limit and time of day both are equally important. Sometimes time limit may be decided on the basis of the topic concerned, TV or radio coverage and personal schedule of the speaker. Whichever of these might be the reason, time limit is nevertheless an important criterion for setting the boundaries for the presentation.

Emotional climate

The environment or the overriding psychological state of the participants also has an effect. The speaker needs to be sensitive to the emotional state of the listener. Addressing an emotionally charged group of workers would require great skill and patience.

TYPES OF PRESENTATION

The types of talks and speeches given throughout the country in public are numerous. Presentation types can be defined on the basis of