

Tips for an Effective Presentation

Setting the Stage

You begin “speaking” to your audience long before you utter your first words.

- **Be appropriately groomed and dressed**, with an alert, confident posture. Let your appearance assure the audience that you are competent.
- **Be a good host.** Arrive before your audience in time to ready equipment, prepare props and check everything.
- **Meet and greet.** Be ready to make as many acquaintances as possible when the audience first arrives. This helps you make last minute changes to make sure your talk is relevant to your audience.
- **Come prepared.** You should know your content well so that you can concentrate on your delivery and respond to your audience.

Your Beginning

- **The first thirty seconds are critical in establishing rapport.** You need to project warmth, confidence and competence. You should practice your welcome and introduction so that it flows easily.
- **Don't put barriers between you and your audience.** Don't stand behind a podium or table. Meet the audience standing upright with a smile and eye to eye contact. Be casual but not sloppy.
- **Don't sit down or stand with your hands in your pockets.** You shouldn't be too formal, though – with hands behind you, wooden posture and gloomy expression.

Notes

- **Don't write out your presentation content.** At most have an outline on a notecard to keep you on track. If you need a cue to get back on track, simply pause look at your notecard and carry on. Make this act seem natural.
- **Don't memorize your talks/content.** It will prevent a fresh spontaneous delivery. Keep the main points in mind and you will easily remember the examples to illustrate them.

Voice

- **Talk spontaneously and with simple directness.** Talk with the same conversational inflections that you would use with a group of friends.
- **Your voice is an instrument.** You have pitch, rate and volume. Orchestrate your talk with a contrast of high and low notes. Use the full range of your voice. Emphasize some parts of your talk with slow, deliberate pace. Breeze through other parts lightly.

“All the great speakers were bad speakers at first.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

- **Don't talk continuously.** Moments of silence can be used to set off main points of your talk. Pauses are like speed bumps on a road; they alert your audience that something important is coming.

The Words You Use

Well-chosen words create vivid images. The time you spend choosing words will be appreciated by your audience.

- **Be specific.**
- **Avoid fillers.**
- **Creative effective imagery** by using active verbs; specific, concrete nouns; familiar people and places; and personal language.

Body Language

- **Communicate through facial expressions.** Some experts claim that fifty-five percent of understanding from messages is from facial expressions, not words. Make friendly eye contact with everyone.
- **Communicate through posture.**
- **Avoid distracting mannerisms.** Guard against weight shifting, body rocking, table leaning, arm swinging, hand hiding, clothes fidgeting, foot scuffling
- **Communicate through gestures.** Punctuate and describe points in the program with your hands. Use natural, unexaggerated gestures. Be tasteful and understated.
- **Walk with purpose.**

Props

Props attract an audience's attention and add dimension to your presentation. Props heighten curiosity, and people pay attention to things they are curious about. People also respond to familiar objects when they are used in innovative ways. Keep these tips in mind when using props:

- **Mounted specimens are effective**
- **Colorful items draw attention**
- **Props are effective when they involve different senses**
- **People are drawn to historical artifacts**

Questioning

Questions can be used if they serve several purposes. They stimulate interest. They help organize the program. They encourage creative thinking. They emphasize important points. They offer visitors a chance to share thoughts and feelings.

- **Focus Questions** are the most basic kind of questions and involve specific information. They often begin with "who, what, or where."

Five Tips for Public Speaking

1. Remember that your audience does not want you to fail. They are rooting for you to do well!
2. Be yourself! Speak in your own voice, whatever that is. The audience will know if your style is insincere, and they would much rather hear your own voice, which allows your passion to show through.
3. Do not apologize (unless it's truly appropriate). It will make the audience uncomfortable, will make you more nervous, and is almost never necessary.
4. Being passionate is better than being an expert. A lot of people are afraid to speak on a subject in front of a crowd because they are afraid that they don't know enough. As long as you are interested in and passionate about the subject you are presenting, you absolutely do not need to be an expert.
5. Don't be afraid to say that you don't know the answer to a tough question. Get comfortable saying "I don't know, but that's a great question!"

- **Process Questions** have a wider scope of possible responses than focus questions. Process questions ask people to integrate information rather than just remembering or describing.
- **Evaluative Questions** usually deal with matters of value, choice or judgment of the participants. They offer group members a chance to express their feelings. Not all questions require a verbal response from visitors. Rhetorical questions are asked when you don't expect visitors to answer aloud.

Wait Time

Educational researchers have indicated that providing a wait time of three or more seconds after asking a question gives audience members a better chance of recalling information and has a positive effect on the quality of responses, and therefore, on learning.

8 Tips for Questioning

1. Direct most questions to the entire audience rather than a single individual. This indicates to the group that everyone is expected to think.
2. Ask only one question at a time.
3. Allow time for an answer. This is called "wait-time." Research has shown the longer the questioner allows for an answer, the better the answer will be. Never answer your own questions. If no one offers a response, leave it open to be answered later or rephrase the question.
4. Do not start a question with "does anyone know..." or "Can anyone tell me..." Such phrases express doubt that the question can be answered.
5. Pace questions to the ability of the group.
6. Develop ideas and concepts through a series of questions. Build from focus questions to process questions to evaluative questions. This challenges your group to higher levels of thinking.
7. Accept answers to questions gracefully, even if the answers are wrong. Never make someone feel foolish for participating in the program.
8. Finally, avoid questions that require a simple yes or no.

Structuring Your Presentation

Step 1: POW

Capture the group's attention with a provocative introduction.

An introduction does two things. It promises your listeners a rewarding experience and it introduces your talk theme.

You can be startling or humorous, a rhetorical question or an apt quotation. Your goal is provocation. You need to grab your audience with your first words.

Step 2: Bridge

Answer the questions, "Why was that said?" and "What does it mean to me?"

Bridges connect the introduction to the body of the talk and to the interests of the audience. Bridges would answer the question, "OK, you have my attention, but what's your purpose? Why should I care?"

Step 3: Body

Illustrate the main message of your program with examples.

Listeners enjoy personalized "for instances."

Your theme serves as the skeleton to which you attach your ideas. The body is made up of facts and for instances that flesh out your theme. Without a theme the body of your talk will be flabby and shapeless with little appeal to your audience.

With your main points outlined, you now must decide how to illustrate them. To be effective, every main idea presented should be illustrated in some way. Use visual aids, such as props, slides or other audio visual devices. Create mental images through metaphor and analogy, guided imagery or storytelling. Involve the audience physically. Make sure you breathe life into cold dead abstraction.

Step 4: Conclusion

Conclude your presentation by summarizing or giving a call to action.

Answer the question, "So What?"

Your conclusion should tell the listener you are done. It can be a call to action or can summarize your main points. It might be a thought provoking quote or a dramatic ending for emotional impact.

"A book may give
you excellent
suggestions on
how best to
conduct yourself
in the water,
but sooner or
later you must
get wet
To plunge [in]
is the only way."

—Dale Carnegie
The Art of Public Speaking

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