

PRESENTATION SKILLS TIPS

Presentation Skills Summary

<p>CONTENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Should be relevant to the audience ■ Main points should be expressed 3 times ■ Know what you know - Present what you know [don't try to bullshit your way through a topic] <p>AUDIENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Size [different presentation to a large than a small audience – better to have a full small room than a mostly empty large room] ■ Experience [What experience does the audience have with the topic] ■ Interest in the topic ■ Needs ■ Gender balance [content and delivery may change in a mixed gender audience] ■ Age range ■ Culture/religion [are there any cultural or religious factors that may influence the content or delivery] <p>VENUE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Location [geographic] ■ Access [physical - to the facility and to the room – it is better for the entrance of the room to be at the back] ■ Lighting [adequate for all to see you] ■ The stage “set” [remove distractions – any materials from previous sessions should be removed] ■ Size of the room ■ Seating ■ Temperature [cool is better than warm] 	<p>DELIVERY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Eye contact [make frequent eye contact with the audience – pick two or three people seated in different places and look at them] ■ Timing [time of day/time in relation to other topics/timing of specific remarks - silence can be powerful] ■ Duration [try not to be over 20 minutes] ■ Pace ■ KISS [Keep It Short and Simple] ■ Voice [volume, tone modulation] ■ Humour [is you are not sure that what is funny to you will be funny others –don't try to be funny] ■ Language [avoid jargon] ■ Gestures [some are better than none – too many detract] <p>VISUAL AIDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ KISS [Keep It Short and Simple] ■ Should support and not detract from the presentation ■ SAVI – Sure All View It ■ Card and chart ■ OHT ■ Flipcharts ■ PowerPoint [don't be cute] <p>CHOREOGRAPHY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ OHT [difficult dance partner – when not is use remove it from the stage or fold down the mirror] ■ Flip chart stands [Right handed-stage left/left handed-stage right] ■ PowerPoint [very difficult dance partner - must be stationery and you have to deal with electronic spaghetti - several cords] ■ A Co-presenter [Clarify roles and responsibilities – follow plan!]
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Things to Think About

Oral Communication is different from Written Communication -- Listeners have one chance to hear your talk and can't "re-read" when they get confused. In many situations, they have or will hear several talks on the same day. Being clear is particularly important if the audience can't ask questions during the talk. There are two well-know ways to communicate your points effectively. Focus on getting one to three key points across. Think about how much you remember from a talk last week. Second, repeat key insights: tell them what you're going to tell them [Forecast], tell them, and tell them what you told them [Summary].

Think about your Audience -- Most audiences should be addressed in layers: some are experts in your sub-area, some are experts in the general area, and others know little or nothing. Who is most important to you? Can you still leave others with something? For example, pitch the body to experts, but make the forecast and summary accessible to all.

Think about your Rhetorical Goals -- For conference or training talks, for example, two rhetorical goals will be enough: leave your audience with a clear picture of the gist of your contribution, and make them want to read your paper. Your presentation should not replace your paper, but rather whet the audience appetite for it. Thus, it is commonly useful to allude to information in the paper that can't be covered adequately in the presentation.

Preparation -- Prepare the structure of your talk carefully and logically, just as you would for a written report. Think about:

- the objectives of the talk
- the main points you want to make

... and make a list of these two things as your starting point.

Write out the presentation in rough, just like a first draft of a written report. Review the draft. You will find things that are irrelevant or superfluous - delete them. Check the story is consistent and flows smoothly. If there are things you cannot easily express, possibly because of doubt about your understanding, it is better to leave them unsaid.

Never read from a script. It is also unwise to have the talk written out in detail as a prompt sheet - the chances are you will not locate the thing you want to say amongst all the other text. You should know most of what you want to say - if you don't then you should not be giving the talk! So prepare **cue cards**, which have key words and phrases [and possibly sketches] on them. Postcards are ideal for this. **Don't forget to number the cards** in case you drop them.

Remember to mark on your cards the visual aids that go with them so that the right OHP or slide is shown at the right time.

Rehearse your presentation - to yourself at first and then in front of some colleagues. The initial rehearsal should consider how the words and the sequence of visual aids go together. How will you make effective use of your visual aids?

Making the Presentation

Greet the audience and tell them who you are. Good presentations then follow this formula:

- tell the audience what you are going to tell them;
- then tell them; and
- at the end tell them what you have told them.

Keep to the time allowed. If you can, keep it short. It's better to under-run than over-run. As a rule of thumb, allow 2 minutes for each *general* overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide you use, but longer for any that you want to use for developing specific points. The audience will get bored with something on the screen for more than 5 minutes, especially if you are not actively talking about it. So switch the display off, or replace the slide with some form of 'wallpaper' such as an image related to your talk.

Stick to the plan for the presentation, don't be tempted to digress - you will eat up time and could end up in a dead-end with no escape!

Unless explicitly told not to, leave time for discussion - 5 minutes is sufficient to allow clarification of points. The session chairman may extend this if the questioning becomes interesting.

At the end of your presentation ask if there are any questions - avoid being terse when you do this as the audience may find it intimidating [i.e. it may come across as *any questions?* - *if there are, it shows you were not paying attention*]. If questions are slow in coming, you can start things off by asking a question of the audience - so have one prepared.

Delivery

- Speak clearly. Don't shout or whisper - judge the acoustics of the room.
- Don't rush, or talk deliberately slowly. Be natural - although not conversational.
- Deliberately pause at key points - this has the effect of emphasising the importance of a particular point you are making.
- Avoid jokes - always disastrous unless you are a natural expert.
- To make the presentation interesting, change your delivery, but not to obviously, e.g.: speed, pitch of voice.
- Use your hands to emphasise points but don't indulge in too much hand waving. People can over time, develop irritating habits. Ask colleagues occasionally what they think of your style.
- Look at the audience as much as possible, but don't fix on one individual - it can be intimidating. Pitch your presentation towards the back of the audience, especially in larger rooms.
- Don't face the display screen behind you and talk to it. Other annoying habits include:
 - Standing in a position where you obscure the screen. In fact, positively check for anyone in the audience who may be disadvantaged and try to accommodate them.
 - Muttering over a transparency on the OHP projector plate and not realising that you are blocking the projection of the image. It is preferable to point to the screen rather than the foil on the OHP [apart from the fact that you will probably dazzle yourself with the brightness of the projector].
 - Avoid moving about too much. Pacing up and down can unnerve the audience, although some animation is desirable.
 - Keep an eye on the **audience's** body language. Know when to stop and also when to cut out a piece of the presentation.

Visual Aids

Visual aids significantly improve the interest of a presentation. However, they must be relevant to what you want to say. A careless design or use of a slide can simply get in the way of the presentation. What you use depends on the type of talk you are giving.

Here are some possibilities:

- Overhead projection transparencies [OHPs]
- 35mm slides
- Computer projection [applications such as PowerPoint, Excel, etc.]
- Video
- Real objects - either handled from the speaker's bench or passed around
- Flip-chart or blackboard, possibly used as a 'scratch-pad' to expand on a point

Keep it simple though - a complex set of hardware can result in confusion for speaker and audience. Make sure you know in advance how to operate equipment and also when you want particular displays to appear. Edit your slides as carefully as your talk - if a slide is superfluous then leave it out. If you need to use a slide twice, duplicate it. Slides and OHPs should contain the minimum information necessary. To do otherwise risks making the slide unreadable or will divert your audience's attention so that they spend time reading the slide rather than listening to you.

Try to limit words per slide to a maximum of 10. Use a reasonable size font and a typeface, which will enlarge well. Typically use a minimum 18pt Times Roman on OHPs, and preferably larger. A guideline is: if you can read the OHP from a distance of 2 metres [without projection] then it's probably OK.

Avoid using a diagram prepared for a technical report in your talk. It will be too detailed and difficult to read. Pages from the web can also be difficult to read.

Use colour on your slides but avoid orange and yellow which do not show up very well when projected. For text only, white or yellow on blue is pleasant to look at and easy to read. Books on presentation techniques often have quite detailed advice on the design of slides. If possible consult an expert such as the Audio Visual Centre.

Avoid adding to OHPs with a pen during the talk - it's messy and the audience will be fascinated by your shaking hand! On this point, this is another good reason for pointing to the screen when explaining a slide rather than pointing to the OHP transparency.

Room lighting should be considered. Too much light near the screen will make it difficult to see the detail. On the other hand, a completely darkened room can send the audience to sleep. Try to avoid having to keep switching lights on and off, but if you do have to do this, know where the light switches are and how to use them.

Finally ... Enjoy yourself. The audience will be on your side and want to hear what you have to say!

PRESENTATION SKILLS PRACTISE TIPS

Practising these exercises will make your next presentation more natural.

Posture -- Practise standing in the correct posture [feet, knees, hips, shoulders all in a straight line with your arms at your sides] while standing on lifts, standing in queues, waiting at the cash machine, on a coffee break, etc.

Movement -- Practise movement on your feet at home. Cut faces out of magazines and tape or pin them to chairs and sofas. Speaking to one "person" at a time, look first, walk over and stand still for 3 or 4 sentences while speaking, then look at someone else, and repeat the process.

Gestures -- Start practising the use of gestures for description and/or emphasis by first becoming more aware of your own natural gestures. Do you gesture while on the telephone? Do you gesture while talking to a friend, colleague, or family member? By increasing your awareness of what you do with your arms and hands in every day conversations, you will then be able to transfer these gestures into all speaking situations.

Facial Animation -- Appropriate facial expressions usually coincide with gestures. If you tend to look overly serious during presentations, using more gestures will help liven things up. Also practise making a variety of facial gestures while speaking in a mirror or driving in the car.

Voice - For Volume and Variety -- For sufficient volume become more aware of breathing deeply from your diaphragm. Lie on the floor with a book placed just above your belt or waist. Yawn several times. This is what breathing from the diaphragm should feel like. Breathe in slowly to the count of 10 watching your stomach expand and then exhale slowly expelling all the air.

For vocal variety practice try reading children's books aloud. Your voice will naturally animate with the story. Record your voice and listen to it resonate in your head for higher vocal tones, in your throat for the mid-range and deep in your chest for lower vocal tones. Using more gestures will also help to naturally animate your voice.

Pause and Pace -- To help eliminate clutter words and use the right, controlled pace, try playing back your voice mail messages before sending them to the recipient and evaluate yourself. Listen for short sentences that end without clutter and "over-connectors" such as: and, but, and so, and rate your pace. Or, arrange to pay a colleague, partner or child every time they hear you use your pet clutter word!

Eye Contact -- Place three to four small Post-It Notes randomly around your workspace. These will be your "eye targets." Whenever you're on the phone, speak one short sentence while looking at the first Post-It Note. After finishing the sentence, pause. Then move on to the next Post-it Note and repeat. This will help you to maintain eye contact with one person at a time while completing a thought or sentence, and eliminate clutter words.