

Presentation Skills

A mastery of presentation skills will help to communicate your ideas the audience.

Body Language

In addressing issues of body language there isn't 'a way to do it' – be yourself. **But** we can increase our impact by tackling:

**Anything that distracts from our message, or
Anything that detracts from our confidence.**

Key areas to watch are:

- Waving paper notes around or playing with them
- Very quiet voice
- Talking too fast or too slowly.
- Cadence of voice – e.g. dropping at end of sentences
- Awkwardness with arms and hands. Stiffly folded arms can look very defensive. Wringing the hands looks very nervous. If you naturally talk with your arms and hands you have an advantage in looking more interesting and enthusiastic, but it's helpful to experiment with what feels comfortable.
- Too little eye contact with the audience or staring at one person.
- Verbal ticks – overmuch err...ing, umming, 'you know', etc.
- Physical ticks – too much pen clicking, jingling change in the pocket; fiddling with ties etc (the possibilities are endless!).

Don't get too anxious about verbal and physical ticks. Ums and errs are parts of natural, conversational speech. The trick is to target sounds and that have become irritating or distracting for the audience.

- Uncertain or 'nervy' movements – e.g. improvising strange contortions of the legs and arms.

A 'critically supportive friend' is invaluable for constructive criticism. Seeing a video of yourself presenting can also be very helpful (if a little terrifying).

MAJOR TIP: If you act confidently, you'll feel more confident.

Planning

When preparing a presentation there are some very important questions to ask ourselves before we start on the material itself:

- **Who is the audience** - compile as much information as possible about the nature of the audience you expect to meet.
- **How long** are you supposed to speak for?
- **What is the style** - are you supposed to be 'selling'; inspiring the troops; campaigning for change; informing; entertaining etc?
- **What is (are) your purpose(s)** – are you clear about both your public and private objectives in doing this talk?
- **The Material**
 1. Skeleton outline – rough out the topics, key points etc you should cover
 2. Decide what should be said, shown, given out or treated in any other way
 3. Put flesh on bones. You're now in a position to fill out the material (fitting it into a structure - see the next section)

**MAJOR TIP: Talk your talk to an imaginary audience as you develop it.
Develop your presentation AS a presentation from the start,
something designed to be heard and seen, rather than read**

Structure

A simple basic way to plan a presentation is to think in terms of:
a beginning, middle and end. Each of these sections has certain characteristics.

Beginning:

Title – keep it brief if possible and arouse interest
Introduce yourself if necessary and possibly outline your objective
Introduce your subject
Give an overview of the presentation (this starts the ‘sign-posting’ process)
Make an impact!

Middle:

This is for the logical development of your material.
Use headings and sub headings.
Illustrate your points and give *examples* of what you mean when you can.

Remember the life cycle of an audience and build in doze breakers!

All audiences are much more engaged with the beginning and end of presentations than they are with the middle so add something to break up the pattern of the talk e.g. telling a personal story; giving an exercise; unveiling some apparatus (possibilities are endless).

End:

Summary of your message
‘Take home message’
Thanks / acknowledgements

Adding Interest, Energy and Colour:

Some key ways for adding interest are:

- Humour. Use your own style of humour – if you’re not a joke teller **don’t do it**. Plenty of humour can be built into quotes, slides and images.
- Make it meaningful to the audience. Anything that connects to the audience (or at least some members of it) – appealing to their interests or anxieties is inherently interesting. Don’t forget that an audience of specialists is also always an audience of human beings!
- Enthusiasm
- Metaphors and analogies can provide a useful way of talking about complex issues. *‘The Physics of Star Trek’ (Book Title)*
- Keep it sharp...cut out the unnecessary
- Use the dramatic and a sense of wonder – use body language and voice
- Be descriptive – use the senses. Equipment, moments of failure and success, people can all be described in terms of the senses.
- Learn to tell stories – use the power of suspense.
- Clear uncluttered structure
- Use vivid and memorable images: moving, colour, graphic, comic, unusual

A Rehearsal Checklist

- An important presentation (only you can judge how important it is) requires a proper rehearsal.
- A rehearsal is not reading through the notes.
- A rehearsal is a presentation done for real: out loud; using all the body language and voice tone; using the 'choreography' (the physical movement) of the talk – but without the audience.
- If possible do the rehearsal in the actual venue.
- Focus on your goals (your purpose). What do you want them to do after they've heard your presentation?
- Check out any equipment you may be using. Don't skip putting on the slides etc in the rehearsal.
- Check the timing of the presentation and put the timings in your notes.
- Think about the needs of the Audience (will they be able to see you, hear you, see a screen (if you are using one).
- Remember the 'choreography' of the talk. How will you get from your seat to the podium or platform? Where will you stand during the different sections of the talk? What will do with your notes?

MAJOR TIP: 'The Devil is in the details'. The more you attend to the details of your rehearsal, the more effective your presentation.

A note on notes:

- Let your notes develop from you talking the talk to yourself (or better, to an imaginary audience). They should be in spoken English not written English style.
- Use a large print
- Number the pages
- Break up the page with **bold** type and spaces and different size fonts to make it easier to distinguish sections.
- Use symbols to help you see what's coming up next (eg to highlight an illustration or to indicate an overhead or slide)
- Include timings on your notes (to be firmed up at the rehearsal)
- Include any 'stage – instructions' to yourself about where to stand or things to avoid at different points of the talk.
- Discard a page when you've finished with it.
- Make a duplicate copy and put it somewhere other than your main copy (eg a coat pocket or in the car) just in case you lose the original en route to the podium. It happens!

MAJOR TIP: Learn to make your notes very user friendly. They should help you up - not nail you down!

Audio / Visual Aids

- Audio Visual aids are there to aid and abet your material and NOT the other way around.
- If you use audio sources, make sure that the sound player will be loud and clear enough for the venue. Similarly double check video, computer and overhead slide equipment, so that you have all the bits you need; you know how it works and everyone can see and hear.
- Don't hide behind your slides. Get out there and talk to your audience.
- Don't use slides as notes because your notes should hold much more detail - eg 'stage directions' to yourself such as where to stand etc, timing,
- Use as many communication aids as you like, but check them for relevance.
- Keep them simple
- Make sure they're clear
- If you want people to take away lots of information consider giving them handouts.
- When possible enhance your slides with colour, graphics, pictures or movement (eg as is possible in PowerPoint).

Preparing PowerPoint presentations

Make your presentation:-

Big Font size 18 is minimum, use bigger for main points or title.

Simple Don't use too many colours or too many fonts.
Avoid wordiness; write in point form using key words or phrases with 6-7 lines/slide.
Don't make the slide too detailed.

Clear Avoid backgrounds that are distracting or difficult to read.
Make colours contrasting and complementary, use light on dark or dark on light.
Consider the colour blind and avoid red/green combinations
Check if animated text is effective or a distraction.
Don't use all capitals it's difficult to read.

REMEMBER: Content is the most important part of your presentation