

PREPARING FOR PRESENTATIONS

Everyone dreads public speaking. It doesn't come naturally to most of us – it's a skill we have to learn. Like many things in life, practice makes perfect and the more we do it, the more assured we become.

Overcoming fear

Public speaking generates fear – usually that we will:

- Fail to educate, persuade or motivate, depending on our goal.
- Look and/or sound stupid or boring.
- Forget what we want to say or a point we want to make.

You can help yourself to overcome fear by:

- Enrolling on a presentation skills course and retaking the course every year to brush up your skills.
- Preparing well – plan what you want to say and prepare your slides or handouts. Knowing that your visual presentation aids are professional will give you more confidence.
- Rehearsing, rehearsing, and rehearsing before each presentation.
- Using relaxation techniques. For example, to calm your nerves try breathing slowly in through your nose and slowly out through your mouth ten times.

Your presentation – an overview

There are many occasions when you may be invited to make a presentation, perhaps to colleagues, at a conference, to a potential client or even for a job interview. After your presentation, your audience or client will have a “feeling” about you and your organisation, and they will believe that the skills and personality they have seen and heard will be what they will get if they work with you. As the presenter, you want to make sure that the feeling you instil is one of enthusiasm, credibility and confidence.

This means that your presentation must show your knowledge, or your ability to perform the task, to do so on time and, if relevant, within budget. In other words, what your audience is asking itself is “will this person make the project/process easier for me/give me the knowledge I need?”

How your audience listens and perceives

You will almost certainly spend most of your preparation time planning what you want to say. But your words are not what the audience will remember. People best remember what they see and hear in a presentation. 50% of your message is communicated visually, 40% by your delivery and physical presence, and only 10% by your words. And if there are no visual aids, they will remember even less. Visual aids can be used to emphasise, persuade or illustrate your point.

Audiences judge presenters by several criteria:

- Level of education
- Social status
- Energy level
- Likeability
- Demeanour
- General appearance, and even –
- Desirability as a best friend or mate.

However, they rate these criteria primarily through the presenter's voice and body language. Words and visuals play only a small part in their decision-making process. Your audience will be responsive if you “feel right.”

The medium is the message

Your message must be crafted for the audience. People fall into four categories when it comes to how they receive information:

- **Intuitors** see the big, long-range picture.
- **Thinkers** are analytical and need things presented to them in a logical, sequential order.
- **Feelers** understand through their emotional reactions, relying on their feelings more than on the facts of a presentation.
- **Sensors** are action-oriented, ready to make it happen, often without considering all factors.



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As it is unlikely that you will know each audience member's personality type in advance, it is a good idea to vary your message to suit the majority by incorporating all four styles into your presentation.

Mirror your audience

Rapport leads to trust, which is why people tend to hire the person who makes them "feel" most comfortable. One of the simplest yet most powerful ways to "fit" with an audience is to mirror their behaviour. Tone of voice, body language, sitting forward, sitting back, jacket on, jacket off, are some of the ways to do this. Ultimately, we are creating comfort between them and ourselves.

Rehearsal, rehearse, rehearse

Practice makes perfect. Rehearse your presentation before a group of people. If no one is available, rehearse before a video camera. If you do not have a video camera, rehearse before a mirror. Remember to judge your presentation from your audience's perspective, not your own subjective opinion. We are usually harder on ourselves than other people are!

Your visuals – do's and don'ts

To keep the audience's interest, visuals are important. However, you must strike a balance so that the visuals do not take over from your presentation. The basic rules for visuals are:

- **Rule of 6** – no more than 6 bullets per slide and no more than 6 words per bullet (keep each bullet on one line).
- **Avoid bells and whistles** – clip art and lots of animation are distracting and can ruin your timing and delivery.
- **Avoid white backgrounds.**
They can cause headaches during a lengthy presentation.
- **Avoid serif fonts** such as Times New Roman. Good sans serif fonts for visuals include: **Ariel** and **Univers**.

- **Test the slides.** Try to recreate the lighting, room set up, etc. that you will experience during the actual presentation. Check what equipment will be available in the presentation room, such as a laptop or overhead projector.

Successful delivery

Don't read from your bullet points as this gives the impression that you think the audience is unsophisticated.

Always face the audience.

Avoid pointers or laser pointers as they distract from your presentation.

Use your hands! Do not stand with your hands behind your back or clasped together in front. When you want the audience to look at a slide, gesture toward the screen. When you want them to look at you, gesture towards yourself. You will be able to manipulate the audience into looking at you when you are not gesturing at a slide, which means you will be keeping their attention.

Smile: Look as if you're happy to be there!

Volume: Speak up. A soft, hesitant monotone will not make an impressive presentation. Use volume to build the audience's confidence in you, and to convey your conviction, belief and knowledge.

Speed: Speak slowly. Use pauses and vary your volume and voice inflection to keep your audience's attention. If you talk too quickly, you are more likely to forget the next point in your presentation.

Chat to your audience: Do not memorise your presentation. Write it and present it as if you are having a conversation with your audience.

For advice on presentation content and delivery skills contact Rosemary Gillespie on (02) 9314 7506.

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