

## Better Public Speaking & Presentation

- Ensure Your Words Are Always Understood

Source: <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/PublicSpeaking.htm>

Think of the last really memorable talk or presentation that you attended. Now, was that easy to do, or did you really have to rack your brains to remember one? Sadly, too many presentations are easy to forget. And that's a big problem because the only reason the presenter gave the talk was to communicate something to you!

However, there are four basic things that you can do to ensure that your verbal messages are understood - and remembered - time and time again.

- Understand the purpose of the presentation
- Keep the message clear and concise
- Be prepared
- Be vivid when delivering the message

### Understand what you want to achieve:

Before you start working on your talk or presentation, it's vital that you really understand what you want to say, who you want to tell and why they might want to hear it. To do this, ask yourself: **Who? What? How? When? Where? Why?**

**Who** are you speaking to? What are their interests, presuppositions and values? What do they share in common with others; how are they unique?

**What** do you wish to communicate? One way of answering this question is to ask yourself about the 'success criteria'. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind?

**How** can you best convey your message? Language is important here, as are the nonverbal cues discussed earlier. Choose your words and your nonverbal cues with your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end. If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids.

**When?** Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. 'It's better to be silent than sing a bad tune.'

**Where?** What is the physical context of the communication in mind? You may have time to visit the room, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual aids.

**Why?** In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you – and tell them if necessary. What disposes them to listen? That implies that you know yourself why you are seeking to communicate – the value or worth or interest of what you are going to say.

### Keep it Simple:

When it comes to wording your message, less is more. You're giving your audience headlines. They don't need to and are usually not expecting to become experts on the subject as a result of hearing your talk.

If you're using slides, limit the content of each one to a few bullet points, or one statement or a very simple diagram.

Be Prepared:

Preparation is underrated. In fact, it is one of the most important factors in determining your communication successes. When possible, set meeting times and speaking and presentation times well in advance, thus allowing yourself the time you need to prepare your communications, mindful of the entire communication process ([source, encoding, channel, decoding, receiver, feedback and context](#)). By paying close attention to each of these stages and preparing accordingly, you ensure your communications will be more effective and better understood.

Of course, not all communications can be scheduled. In this case, preparation may mean having a good, thorough understanding of the office goings-on, enabling you to communicate with the knowledge you need to be effective, both through verbal and written communications.

### Unforgettable Delivery:

Your delivery of your speech or presentation will make or break it, no matter how well you've prepared and crafted your clear, concise message. Some useful tips for keeping your presentation vivid include:

- Use examples to bring your points to life
- Keep your body language up-beat - don't stay stuck behind a rostrum
- Don't talk too fast. Less is more here too. Pauses are effective.
- Use a variety of tones of voice
- Use visual aids.

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Source: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadpres.html>

### Introduction

Presentations and reports are ways of communicating ideas and information to a group. But unlike a report, a presentation carries the speaker's personality better and allows immediate interaction between all the participants. A good presentation has:



- **Content** - It contains information that people need. But unlike reports, which are read at the reader's own pace, presentations must account for how much information the audience can absorb in one sitting.
- **Structure** - It has a logical beginning, middle, and end. It must be sequenced and paced so that the audience can understand it. Where as reports have appendices and footnotes to guide the reader, the speaker must be careful not to lose the audience
- when wandering from the main point of the presentation.
- **Packaging** - It must be well prepared. A report can be reread and portions skipped over, but with a presentation, the audience is at the mercy of a presenter.
- **Human Element** - A good presentation will be remembered much more than a

good report because it has a person attached to it. But you still need to analyze if the audience's needs would not be better met if a report was sent instead.

### The Voice

The voice is probably the most valuable tool of the presenter. It carries most of the content that the audience takes away. One of the oddities of speech is that we can easily tell others what is wrong with their voice, e.g. too fast, too high, too soft, etc., but we have trouble listening to and changing our own voices.

There are four main terms used for defining vocal qualities:

- **Volume**: How loud the sound is. The goal is to be heard without shouting. Good speakers lower their voice to draw the audience in, and raise it to make a point.

- **Tone:** The characteristics of a sound. An airplane has a different sound than leaves being rustled by the wind. A voice that carries fear can frighten the audience, while a voice that carries laughter can get the audience to smile.
- **Pitch:** How high or low a note is. Pee Wee Herman has a high voice, Barbara Walters has a moderate voice, while James Earl Jones has a low voice.
- **Pace:** This is how long a sound lasts. Talking too fast causes the words and syllables to be short, while talking slowly lengthens them. Varying the pace helps to maintain the audience's interest.
- **Color:** Both projection and tone variance can be practiced by taking the line "This new policy is going to be exciting" and saying it first with surprise, then with irony, then with grief, and finally with anger. The key is to *over-act*. Remember Shakespeare's words "*All the world's a stage*" -- presentations are the opening night on Broadway!

There are two good methods for improving your voice:

1. Listen to it! Practice listening to your voice while at home, driving, walking, etc. Then when you are at work or with company, monitor your voice to see if you are using it how you want to.
2. To really listen to your voice, cup your right hand around your right ear and gently pull the ear forward. Next, cup your left hand around your mouth and direct the sound straight into your ear. This helps you to really hear your voice as others hear it...and it might be completely different from the voice you thought it was! Now practice moderating your voice.

## The Body

Your body communicates different impressions to the audience. People not only listen to you, they also watch you. Slouching tells them you are indifferent or you do not care...even though you might care a great deal! On the other hand, displaying good posture tells your audience that you know what you are doing and you care deeply about it. Also, a good posture helps you to speak more clearly and effectively.



Throughout your presentation, display:

- **Eye contact:** This helps to regulate the flow of communication. It signals interest in others and increases the speaker's credibility. Speakers who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth, and credibility.
- **Facial Expressions:** Smiling is a powerful cue that transmits happiness, friendliness, warmth, and liking. So, if you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likable, friendly, warm, and approachable. Smiling is often contagious and others will react favorably. They will be more comfortable around you and will want to listen to you more.
- **Gestures:** If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring and stiff. A lively speaking style captures attention, makes the material more interesting, and facilitates understanding.
- **Posture and body orientation:** You communicate numerous messages by the way you talk and move. Standing erect and leaning forward communicates that you are approachable, receptive, and friendly. Interpersonal closeness results when you and your audience face each other. Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided as it communicates disinterest.
- **Proximity:** Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance for interaction with others. You should look for signals of discomfort caused by invading other's space. Some of these are: rocking, leg swinging, tapping, and gaze aversion. Typically, in large rooms, space invasion is not a problem. In most instances there is too much distance. To counteract this, move around the room to increase interaction with your audience. Increasing the proximity enables you to make better eye contact and increases the opportunities for others to speak.

- **Voice.** One of the major criticisms of speakers is that they speak in a monotone voice. Listeners perceive this type of speaker as boring and dull. People report that they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to those who have not learned to modulate their voices.

## Active Listening

Good speakers not only inform their audience, they also listen to them. By listening, you know if they are understanding the information and if the information is important to them. **Active listening** is NOT the same as hearing! Hearing is the first part and consists of the perception of sound.

Listening, the second part, involves an attachment of meaning to the aural symbols that are perceived. Passive listening occurs when the receiver has little motivation to listen carefully. Active listening with a purpose is used to gain information, to determine how another person feels, and to understand others. Some good traits of effective listeners are:

- Spend more time listening than talking (but of course, as a presenter, you will be doing most of the talking).
- Do not finish the sentence of others.
- Do not answer questions with questions.
- Aware of biases. We all have them. We need to control them.
- Never daydream or become preoccupied with their own thoughts when others talk.
- Let the other speaker talk. Do not dominate the conversation.
- Plan responses after others have finished speaking...NOT while they are speaking. Their full concentration is on what others are saying, not on what they are going to respond with.
- Provide feedback but do not interrupt incessantly.
- Analyze by looking at all the relevant factors and asking open-ended questions. Walk the person through analysis (summarize).
- Keep the conversation on what the speaker says...NOT on what interest them.

Listening can be one of our most **powerful communication** tools! Be sure to use it!

Part of the listening process is getting feedback by changing and altering the message so the intention of the original communicator is understood by the second communicator. This is done by paraphrasing the words of the sender and restating the sender's feelings or ideas in your own words, rather than repeating their words. Your words should be saying, "This is what I understand your feelings to be, am I correct?" It not only includes verbal responses, but also nonverbal ones. Nodding your head or squeezing their hand to show agreement, dipping your eyebrows to show you don't quite understand the meaning of their last phrase, or sucking air in deeply and blowing out hard shows that you are also exasperated with the situation.

[Carl Roger](#) listed five main categories of feedback. They are listed in the order in which they occur most frequently in daily conversations (notice that we make judgments more often than we try to understand):

1. **Evaluative:** Makes a judgment about the worth, goodness, or appropriateness of the other person's statement.
2. **Interpretive:** Paraphrasing - attempt to explain what the other persons statement mean.
3. **Supportive:** Attempt to assist or bolster the other communicator
4. **Probing:** Attempt to gain additional information, continue the discussion, or clarify a point.
5. **Understanding:** Attempt to discover completely what the other communicator means by her statements.

## Nerves

The main enemy of a presenter is tension, which ruins the voice, posture, and spontaneity. The voice becomes higher as the throat tenses. Shoulders tighten up and limits flexibility while the legs start to shake and causes unsteadiness. The presentation becomes "canned" as the speaker locks in on the notes and starts to read directly from them.

First, **do not fight nerves, welcome them!** Then you can get on with the presentation instead of focusing in on being nervous. Actors recognize the value of nerves...they add to the value of the performance. This is because adrenaline starts to kick in. It's a left over from our ancestors' "fight or flight" syndrome. If you welcome nerves, then the presentation becomes a challenge and you become better. If you let your nerves take over, then you go into the flight mode by withdrawing from the audience. Again, welcome your nerves, recognize them, let them help you gain that needed edge! Do not go into the flight mode! When you feel tension or anxiety, remember that everyone gets them, but the winners use them to their advantage, while the losers get overwhelmed by them.

Tension can be reduced by performing some relaxation exercises. Listed below are a couple to get you started:

- Before the presentation: Lie on the floor. Your back should be flat on the floor. Pull your feet towards you so that your knees are up in the air. Relax. Close your eyes. Feel your back spreading out and supporting your weight. Feel your neck lengthening. Work your way through your body, relaxing one section at a time - your toes, feet, legs, torso, etc. When finished, stand up slowly and try to maintain the relaxed feeling in a standing position.
- If you cannot lie down: Stand with your feet about 6 inches apart, arms hanging by your sides, and fingers unclenched. Gently shake each part of your body, starting with your hands, then arms, shoulders, torso, and legs. Concentrate on shaking out the tension. Then slowly rotate your shoulders forwards and the backwards. Move on to your head. Rotate it slowly clockwise, and then counter-clockwise.
- Mental Visualization: Before the presentation, visualize the room, audience, and you giving the presentation. Mentally go over what you are going to do from the moment you start to the end of the presentation.
- During the presentation: Take a moment to yourself by getting a drink of water, take a deep breath, concentrate on relaxing the most tense part of your body, and then return to the presentation saying to yourself, **"I can do it!"**
- You do NOT need to get rid of anxiety and tension! Channel the energy into concentration and expressiveness.
- Know that anxiety and tension is not as noticeable to the audience as it is to you.
- Know that even the best presenters make mistakes. The key is to continue on after the mistake. If you pick up and continue, so will the audience. Winners continue! Losers stop!
- Never drink alcohol to reduce tension! It affects not only your coordination but also your awareness of coordination. You might not realize it, but your audience will!

## Questions

**Keep cool if a questioner disagrees with you. You are a professional! No matter how hard you try, not everyone in the world will agree with you!**

Although some people get a perverse pleasure from putting others on the spot, and some try to look good in front of the boss, most people ask questions from a genuine interest. Questions do not mean you did not explain the topic good enough, but that their interest is deeper than the average audience.



Always allow time at the end of the presentation for questions. After inviting questions, do not rush ahead if no one asks a question. Pause for about 6 seconds to allow the audience to gather their thoughts. When a question is asked, repeat the question to ensure that everyone heard it (and that you heard it correctly). When answering, direct your remarks to the entire audience. That way, you keep everyone focused, not just the questioner. To reinforce your presentation, try to relate the question back to the main points.

Make sure you listen to the question being asked. If you do not understand it, ask them to clarify. Pause to think about the question as the answer you give may be correct, but ignore the main issue. If you do not know the answer, be honest, do not waffle. Tell them you will get back to them...and make sure you do!

Answers that last 10 to 40 seconds work best. If they are too short, they seem abrupt; while longer answers appear too elaborate. Also, be sure to keep on track. Do not let off-the-wall questions sidetrack you into areas that are not relevant to the presentation.

If someone takes issue with something you said, try to find a way to agree with part of their argument. For example, "Yes, I understand your position..." or "I'm glad you raised that point, but..." The idea is to praise their point and agree with them. Audiences sometimes tend to think of "us versus you." You do not want to risk alienating them.

## Preparing the Presentation

*After a concert, a fan rushed up to famed violinist [Fritz Kreisler](#) and gushed, "I'd give up my whole life to play as beautifully as you do." Kreisler replied, "I did."*

### To fail to prepare is to prepare to fail.

Great presentations require some preplanning. First, read [Meetings](#) for an outline of preparing and conducting a meeting, such as acquiring a room, informing participants, etc. A presentation follows the same basic guidelines as preparing for a meeting.

The second step is to prepare the presentation. A good presentation starts out with introductions and an icebreaker such as a story, interesting statement or fact, joke, quotation, or an activity to get the group warmed up. The introduction also needs an objective, that is, the purpose or goal of the presentation. This not only tells you what you will talk about, but it also informs the audience of the purpose of the presentation.

Next, comes the body of the presentation. Do NOT write it out word for word. All you want is an outline. By jotting down the main points on a set of index cards, you not only have your outline, but also a memory jogger for the actual presentation. To prepare the presentation, ask yourself the following:

- What is the purpose of the presentation?
- Who will be attending?
- What does the audience already know about the subject?
- What is the audience's attitude towards me (e.g. hostile, friendly)?

A 45 minutes talk should have no more than about seven main points. This may not seem like very many, but if you are to leave the audience with a clear picture of what you have said, you cannot expect them to remember much more than that. There are several options for [structuring](#) the presentation:

- **Timeline:** Arranged in sequential order.
- **Climax:** The main points are delivered in order of increasing importance.
- **Problem/Solution:** A problem is presented, a solution is suggested, and benefits are then given.
- **Classification:** The important items are the major points.
- **Simple to complex:** Ideas are listed from the simplest to the most complex. Can also be done in reverse order.

You want to include some visual information that will help the audience understand your presentation. Develop charts, graphs, slides, handouts, etc.

After the body, comes the closing. This is where you ask for questions, provide a wrap-up (summary), and thank the participants for attending.

Notice that you told them what they are about to hear (the objective), told them (the body), and told them what they heard (the wrap up).

And finally, the important part - practice, practice, practice. The main purpose of creating an outline is to develop a coherent plan of what you want to talk about. You should know your presentation so well, that during the actual presentation, you should only have to briefly glance at your notes to ensure you are staying on track. This will also help you with your nerves by giving you the confidence that you can do it. Your practice session should include a "live" session by practicing in front of coworkers, family, or friends. They can be valuable at providing feedback and it gives you a chance to practice controlling your nerves. Another great feedback technique is to make a video or audio tape of your presentation and review it critically with a colleague.

## Habits

We all have a few habits, and some are more annoying than others. For example, if we say "uh," "you know," or put our hands in our pockets and jingle our keys too often during a presentation, it distracts from the message we are trying to get across.

The best way to break one of these distracting habits is with immediate feedback. This can be done with a small group of coworkers, family, or friends. Take turns giving small off-the-cuff talks about your favorite hobby, work project, first work assignment, etc. The talk should last about five minutes. During a speaker's first talk, the audience should listen and watch for annoying habits.

After the presentation, the audience should agree on the worst two or three habits that take the most away from the presentation. After agreement, each audience member should write these habits on a 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper (such as the word "Uh"). Use a magic marker and write in BIG letters.

The next time the person gives her or his talk, each audience member should wave the corresponding sign in the air whenever they hear or see the annoying habit. For most people, this method will break a habit by practicing at least once a day for one to two weeks.

## Tips and Techniques For Great Presentations

*Eleanor Roosevelt was a shy young girl who was terrified at the thought of speaking in public. But with each passing year, she grew in confidence and self-esteem. She once said, "No one can make you feel inferior, unless you agree with it."*

- If you have handouts, do not read straight from them. The audience does not know if they should read along with you or listen to you read.
- Do not put both hands in your pockets for long periods of time. This tends to make you look unprofessional. It is OK to put one hand in a pocket but ensure there is no loose change or keys to jingle around. This will distract the listeners.
- Do not wave a pointer around in the air like a wild knight branding a sword to slay a dragon. Use the pointer for what it is intended and then put it down, otherwise the audience will become fixated upon your "sword", instead upon you.
- Do not lean on the podium for long periods. The audience will begin to wonder when you are going to fall over.
- Speak to the audience...NOT to the visual aids, such as flip charts or overheads. Also, do not stand between the visual aid and the audience.
- Speak clearly and loudly enough for all to hear. Do not speak in a monotone voice. Use inflection to emphasize your main points.
- The disadvantages of presentations is that people cannot see the punctuation and this can lead to misunderstandings. An effective way of overcoming this problem is to pause at the time when there would normally be punctuation marks.
- Use colored backgrounds on overhead transparencies and slides (such as yellow) as the bright white light can be harsh on the eyes. This will quickly cause your audience to tire. If all of your transparencies or slides have clear backgrounds, then tape one blank yellow one on the overhead face. For slides, use a rubber band to hold a piece of colored cellophane over the projector lens.

- Learn the name of each participant as quickly as possible. Based upon the atmosphere you want to create, call them by their first names or by using Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.
- Tell them what name and title you prefer to be called.
- Listen intently to comments and opinions. By using a *lateral thinking technique* (adding to ideas rather than dismissing them), the audience will feel that their ideas, comments, and opinions are worthwhile.
- Circulate around the room as you speak. This movement creates a physical closeness to the audience.
- List and discuss your objectives at the beginning of the presentation. Let the audience know how your presentation fits in with their goals. Discuss some of the fears and apprehensions that both you and the audience might have. Tell them what they should expect of you and how you will contribute to their goals.
- Vary your techniques (lecture, discussion, debate, films, slides, reading, etc.)
- Get to the presentation before your audience arrives; be the last one to leave.
- Be prepared to use an alternate approach if the one you've chosen seems to bog down. You should be confident enough with your own material so that the audience's interests and concerns, not the presentation outline, determines the format. Use your background, experience, and knowledge to interrelate your subject matter.
- When writing on flip charts use no more than 7 lines of text per page and no more than 7 word per line (the 7 7 rule). Also, use bright and bold colors, and pictures as well as text.
- Consider the time of day and how long you have got for your talk. Time of day can affect the audience. After lunch is known as the graveyard section in training circles as audiences will feel more like a nap than listening to a talk.
- Most people find that if they practice in their head, the actual talk will take about 25 per cent longer. Using a flip chart or other visual aids also adds to the time. Remember - **it is better to finish slightly early than to overrun.**