

PLANNING YOUR PRESENTATION

BASIC TIPS FOR ORGANIZATION

RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC. Read about it, talk about it, think about it, and investigate it. The more you understand a topic, the more fluently you can present it.

CONSTRUCT AN IDEA BANK. Jot down ideas and facts as they come to mind. Look for a natural structure suggested by your material.

CLEARLY STATE YOUR OBJECTIVE. Your objective may be to persuade or to inform your audience. Be specific about what you want them to know or do.

DEVELOP MAIN CONCEPTS. These concepts should be ideas, stated in sentence format, that will lead your audience toward your objective.

COLLECT SPECIFICS ABOUT YOUR SUBJECT. Examples, definitions, facts, and anecdotes can liven up your presentation. They are also easy to expand upon without relying too much on your notes or your script.

CHOOSE RELEVANT INFORMATION. From your specifics, select the strongest examples to make your case for your audience. Don't add irrelevant details that they will find distracting.

ALWAYS USE CLEAR, DIRECT LANGUAGE. Abstract ideas are difficult for a reader to follow; they are almost impossible for a listening audience to keep track of. If you must deal with abstractions, always follow them with specific, concrete examples and illustrations.

BE CAREFUL ABOUT YOUR USE OF HUMOR. Use humor only when it is related to the topic you are discussing. Every speech does not need to begin with an opening joke. Also, remember that something that strikes you as funny may be offensive to someone else.

USING VISUAL AIDS

The flip chart, the overhead projector, and the slide projector are the most common forms of visual aids used by presenters. Following are tips for using each of them.

FLIP CHART

You can use either a blank flip chart for writing key words during your presentation or a flip chart which you have prepared in advance.

1. When writing on the flip chart, do not try to simultaneously address your audience. Your voice will be muffled, your audience distracted, and your accuracy diminished.

Sometimes you will find yourself writing what you are saying rather than what you intended to present.

2. Use different colored markers for effect. Use black, brown, or blue for main text; red, pink, or orange for heading or underlining. (The latter colors are most commonly affected by color-blindness.)
3. Write large enough for the people in the back row to see.
4. If you find yourself writing too much and saying too little, consider using a prepared chart or a transparency.
5. If you are going to be speaking for any length of time, an hour or more, try not to use dry erase markers on the flip chart, especially if there is not an open window. The solvent used in these markers can be overwhelming if you breathe it in for any length of time, which you will do if it is absorbed by the paper. (Scented markers are a nice touch, not only for the presenter but for the audience, if they are to use them for filling out tent cards or for writing on newsprint.)
6. If you are using a prepared flip chart, consider writing "cheat notes" in very light pencil on the newsprint to remind yourself of important information you want to convey at that particular point in the presentation. Your audience will not be able to see your notes, but you will.
7. Leave a blank page between each prepared page so that a distracting image will not remain in view of the audience. If you are writing on the flip chart, turn the page to a blank one when you are finished discussing what you have written.

GENERAL TIPS

Whatever form of visual aids you use, you will find that they are a helpful crutch for you as well as your audience. A well-planned set of transparencies can actually act as an outline for you. Handling visual aids also gives you something to do with both your hands and your feet. You can walk to the flip chart and back to the overhead. You can write on the newsprint to give yourself a pause. Changing transparencies will occupy your hands and give you a relief from holding them stiffly in front of, behind, or beside you.

1. The longer your presentation, the more variety of visual aids you need. It keeps the audience attentive when you move from flip chart to transparency.
2. If you are using a pointer, make sure it is in the hand nearest the image to which you are pointing. Put it in your left hand when pointing to the left and vice versa.
3. Resist the temptation to "talk" to your visual aids. One major problem with presenters is that they tend to talk to the screen. Keep looking at the audience, glancing back only to make sure that the image is focused correctly and is projected correctly.
4. Prepare for emergencies. Carry extra overhead bulbs, extension cords, markers, transparencies, and tape with you. Store them in your car with your jack.

TIPS FOR PLATFORM TECHNIQUES

REHEARSE. Rehearsal does not just happen in your head. You must stand in front of someone—even your dog or cat—and say your speech out loud. You should also practice handling your visual aids and note cards.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY. In general, dress for your audience, but avoid anything flashy or distracting, such as earrings or rings that cast prisms of light across the room, ties that scream for attention, or watch bands or bracelets that will bang thunderously on the podium. **NEVER** wear clothes you haven't worn before or know you are comfortable with. A presentation is not the time to try out a new suit or even a new hairstyle.

KEEP POSTURE STRAIGHT BUT NOT STIFF Don't be afraid to move around or to gesture at appropriate places. Just don't fidget or play with rubber bands or paper clips.

PAUSE BEFORE YOU BEGIN. Take your time to look around the room. Relax. Get comfortable with where you are.

MAINTAIN GOOD EYE CONTACT. Always look directly at the audience. Start out with a friendly face or two and then expand your scope.

UNVEIL VISUALS AS YOU GO ALONG. Reveal ideas as you are presenting them and then place them out of sight. The audience can't focus on what you are saying if you are in the middle of a clutter.

SIT DOWN WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED. Hold eye contact for a few seconds and then leave the podium. Avoid saying "thank you" and try to find a strong ending which will leave the audience with your main thought.

THE REASON IS BECAUSE This phrase is redundant and wordy: "The reason I was late was because I missed the bus." Simply say "I was late because I missed the bus."

CONTINUAL/CONTINUOUS "Continual" means frequently repeated. "Continuous" means without interruption.

REVERT BACK/REFER BACK The word "back" is redundant. Simply refer to or revert to something.

CONTINUE ON To continue means to go on. Therefore, the word "continue" contains the word "on."

AIN'T/AREN'T Although listed in most dictionaries, the word "ain't" is usually considered nonstandard, slang, or dialect.

TIPS FOR VOCAL TECHNIQUES

EMPHASIZE SOME WORDS. Experiment during your rehearsal. Give variety to the loudness or softness of your voice. A whisper can sometimes be more effective than a shout.

VARY YOUR RATE OF SPEECH. Some ideas need to be expressed very quickly, others slowly. Give yourself a place for pauses which will allow the audience to digest what you have said.

ENUNCIATE CLEARLY. The enunciation you use in everyday speech needs to be exaggerated when you are on the platform.

MAKE SURE YOU CAN BE HEARD EASILY. Your normal conversational pitch may not be loud enough to carry to the back of the room. Some people with soft conversational voices sometimes feel they have to "shout" before they can be heard. Ask a friend to sit at the back and raise your pitch until he or she can comfortably hear you.

IMPEDIMENTS TO GOOD SPEECH

In order to deliver effective presentations, you need to be careful about your usage of the English language. Be careful about the following word pairs:

WOULD OF/SHOULD OF/HAD Be careful when using the word "have" not to make it sound like "of." Say "would have" and "could have." Never say "If I had of known...." The expression is "If I had known...."

FEWER/LESS "Fewer" is used before plural nouns: fewer people, fewer calories, fewer tables. "Less" is used before singular nouns: less money, less fat, less sand.

SEE WHERE Use the word "that" rather than "where" after the following verbs: see, read, notice, etc.

ASK/AXE An axe is something one uses to chop wood. One asks questions.

MOST UNIQUE "Unique" is an absolute adjective. As such, it can not be compared. It means "one of a kind."

BETWEEN YOU AND I The correct expression is always "between you and me" because the pronoun is the object of a preposition.

NEITHER/OR "Neither" must be followed by "nor;" "either" by "or."

BETWEEN/AMONG "Between" is used to express a relationship between two objects. "Among" expresses a relationship among three or more.

TRY AND If only one action is intended, the correct expression is "try to." For example, notice the difference between "He tried to fail" and "He tried and failed."

REGARDS TO The correct expression is "in regard to."

ANXIOUS/EAGER One is anxious only if one feels uneasy or concerned. "Eager" implies anticipation.

MYSELF/ME Do not substitute "myself" for "me" in compound subjects or objects: "Mr. Watkins and myself attended the meeting." Or: He gave the report to Mr. Watkins and myself." Use it only reflexively: "I will do the job myself."

IMPLY/INFER "Imply" means to signal or to hint at a meaning. "Infer" means to deduce something from the signal or the hint.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF REPETITION. Get into the habit of summarizing your main concepts as you conclude them. Summarize them again at the end of your presentation.

USE NOTE CARDS IF POSSIBLE. They are less obvious than a written script and allow you more eye contact. If you are using note cards, number them.

MARK YOUR SCRIPT. If you are more comfortable with a written presentation, mark your script with places for appropriate pauses and underline words you want to emphasize. Mark places where you want to look up at the audience. Leave large margins and mark them with your main ideas.

DECIDE WHETHER TO WEAR YOUR GLASSES OR NOT. If you wear reading glasses, you may have a choice. Taking them on and off is distracting. If you decide not to wear your glasses, write your note cards or your script with your glasses off. That way, you'll be sure you can see them clearly.

DON'T TALK TOO LONG. Always give them a few minutes less than they expect. NEVER give them more. Once you say "in conclusion," get ready to run.

DON'T MENTION SMALL MISTAKES. Everyone fumbles a word or puts a transparency on backwards. Don't apologize. If you can make a joke out of it, do so and go on.

TALK TO YOUR AUDIENCE. Don't read or preach. Even if you are using a written script, practice until you sound as if you are talking rather than reading.

MAKE AN EFFORT TO INVOLVE THE AUDIENCE. If possible, give them a handout which will require them to do something: fill in blanks, take a self-assessment __ inventory, and complete an exercise. This technique will not only vary your presentation but also give you a moment during which you can re-group your thoughts.

KEEP A CLIP FILE. If you speak often, you might want to keep a file of humorous or interesting tidbits or cartoons related to your subjects. Anecdotes can often enliven main points. Cartoons made into transparencies can be a nice breather for both you and your audience.

DEVELOPING SELF CONFIDENCE

1. Don't try to memorize a speech. Under stress, your memory can often fail you. You can memorize the main points you want to make and then talk about them in your own way. But if you memorize a presentation, it often sounds pat and dull.
2. If you can avoid it, don't write and out read your speech. Make notes and number your note cards. Write in letters that you can see clearly, without glasses, and possibly in poor lighting. If you must write out your speech, mark your main ideas in large letters in the margin and mark places in your text where you want to look up at your audience.
3. Don't rely on tranquilizers or stimulants to help you through the occasion. Not only can they be habit-forming, but they can also negatively affect your performance.
4. Be as natural as you can. Regard yourself as the expert whom your audience is lucky to hear. Try to keep your voice conversational. Talk with the same inflections you would use if you were talking to friends.
5. If you realize you forgot to make an important point, don't make a big issue of it. Simply say, "Oh, by the way, I meant to mention that...." No audience expects you to be infallible. They do expect you to be human.
6. Before you begin to speak, find a few friendly faces in the audience. Concentrate on them at the beginning, but don't become fixated on them. Let your gaze wander naturally across the audience. Try to view the audience members as your friends.
7. Learn to recognize and avoid any personal mannerisms: repeated phrases-like, you know, okay; throat clearing; tapping on the podium; hand waving; pacing.
8. Use humor only if it comes naturally to you. Even if it does, never laugh at your own jokes. If they are not funny, the audience should not know they were supposed to be. If they are funny, they will be more effective if you let others do the laughing.
9. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Use a tape recorder or a video camera. Actually say the words out loud. Use your visual aids before you actually give a presentation.