
P A R T

VI

**DELIVERING THE
PRESENTATION**



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HOW TO DELIVER YOUR PRESENTATION

You must communicate your enthusiasm to the audience if you want them to be enthusiastic about the ideas you present.

Standing stiffly, with little animation in your body, and speaking in a monotone voice without good eye contact is a sure way to deliver a speech that is a dud. We communicate with much more than words. Your nonverbal actions carry your feelings. If these channels get cut off because of anxiety, your interaction and rapport with the audience will suffer.

A great benefit of providing an interactive and animated presentation style is that your nervous energy will flow in a positive form and not stay in your body. Seek a natural, conversational style, relate to people in the audience in a direct and personable manner. Even in the most formal situations this is a necessity.

You must learn to be aware of not only what you are saying but also how you are saying it! Learn to be your own coach while you are up in front of the audience, checking the items outlined in this section.



DELIVERING THE PRESENTATION

Deliver Your Presentation in the Following Sequence

1. Introduction
2. Preview sentence (Tell them what you're going to tell them)
3. Main Ideas and Sub Ideas (Tell them)
4. Benefits (In persuasive presentations)
5. Review Sentence (Tell them what you told them)
6. Conclusion

The following tips will help your presentation become animated, interesting and engaging. If you can videotape a rehearsal, watch your delivery. Then rehearse again using some of the techniques described below. Experiment with different presentation styles until you find one that is comfortable and effective.

POSTURE

Keep your posture erect but relaxed. You want to stand up straight but not stiff. Your feet should be pointed at the audience with your weight evenly distributed. Don't place your weight on one hip, then shift to the other and back again. This shifting can distract the audience.

MOVEMENT

Typically, speakers tend to stand in one spot, feet rooted like a tree to the ground. If your presentation will be delivered from a lectern, you should experiment. If appropriate, move to the side or front of the lectern to get nearer the audience. Many professional speakers do this. It is engaging, and audiences feel closer to the speaker without barriers. If you are using a microphone you will need an extension cord or lavalier mike. In a formal presentation, or if the lectern is at a head table, this technique may not be practical.

When not using a lectern, you should normally stay within 4–8 feet of the front row. Don't stay frozen in one spot but don't pace either. An occasional step to either side, or even a half-step toward the audience for emphasis, can enhance your presentation. Stay close, stay direct, and stay involved with your audience.

SHOULDER ORIENTATION

When delivering a presentation, keep your shoulders oriented toward the audience. This will help keep your eye contact on the audience where it should be. Shoulder orientation becomes critical when using visual aids. You will have to angle away from the audience but it should not be more than 45 degrees.

DON'T SPEAK UNLESS YOU HAVE EYE CONTACT WITH THE AUDIENCE.

GESTURES

The importance of natural gestures, uninhibited by anxiety, cannot be overstated. Too often anxiety holds back this important channel of communication. We use gestures for emphasis in normal conversation without thinking about what we are doing with our hands. *Learn to gesture in front of an audience exactly as you would if you were having an animated conversation with a friend—nothing more, nothing less.*

Using natural gestures won't distract from a presentation; however, doing one of the following certainly will:

Keeping hands in your pockets-



Or handcuffed behind your back-



Or keeping your arms crossed-



Or in a fig leaf position-



Or wringing your hands nervously-



EYE CONTACT

Interviewing a person who looked at the wall or floor when answering your questions would not inspire your confidence in that person. In our culture we expect good, direct eye contact. Yet in many presentations, a speaker will look at a spot on the back of the wall, or at a screen, or at notes—everywhere but into the eyes of the audience.

Eye contact opens the channel of communication between people. It helps establish and build rapport. It involves the audience in the presentation, and makes the presentation more personable. (This is true even in formal presentations.) Good eye contact between the speaker and audience also helps relax the speaker by connecting the speaker to the audience and reducing the speaker's feeling of isolation.

The rule of thumb for eye contact is *1–3 seconds per person*. Try not to let your eyes dart around the room. Try to focus on one person, not long enough to make that individual feel uncomfortable, but long enough to pull him or her into your presentation. Then move on to another person.

When you give a presentation, don't just look at your audience—*see them*. Seek out individuals, and be aware that you are looking at them.

If the group is too large to look at each individual separately, make eye contact with individuals in different parts of the audience. People sitting near the individuals you select will feel that you are actually looking at them. As the distance between a speaker and audience increases, a larger and larger circle of people will feel your "eye contact."

USING YOUR VOICE

There are three main problems associated with voice: a monotone, an inappropriate rate of speech (usually talking too fast) or volume that is too loud or too soft. Make sure your voice is working for you. The following suggestions will help you speak with a strong, clear voice.

Monotone

Most monotone voices are caused by anxiety. As the speaker tightens up, the muscles in the chest and throat become less flexible and air flow is restricted. When this happens, the voice loses its natural animation and a monotone results.

To bring back the natural animation you must relax and release tension. Upper and lower body movement are vital. This doesn't have to be dramatic movement—just enough to loosen the muscles and get you to breathe normally. Videotaping, or audio taping, or feedback from a friend will let you know how you're doing.

Learn to listen to yourself; stay aware not only of what you are saying but also how you are saying it.

Talking too fast.

Our average conversational rate of speech is about 125 words per minute. When we become anxious, that rate will usually increase. An increased rate of speech is not necessarily a problem, if your articulation is good. However, if you are delivering a technical presentation, or one in which the audience needs to take notes, you need to watch your pace.

Another indication that you are talking too fast is when you trip over words. When this happens, slow down. Listen for yourself to say the last word of a sentence, pause where the period would be, and then proceed to your next sentence. Pausing during a presentation can be an effective device to allow your important points to sink in. Don't be afraid to allow periods of silence during your presentations. The audience needs time to digest what you are saying.

Problems with volume.

In most cases, problems with volume can be solved with practice. You need to stay aware of your volume. It is appropriate to ask during an actual presentation, "Can you hear me in the back?" The audience will usually be honest because they want to hear what you are saying!

To find out if you have a volume problem before a presentation, ask someone who will give you a straight answer. Ask that person if you can be heard in the back of a room, if you trail off at the end of a sentence, if a lack of volume makes you sound insecure or if you are speaking too loudly.

If your problem is a soft voice, there is a simple exercise to learn how to increase your volume. Recruit two friends to help you. Go into a room that is at least twice the size of the one where you normally give presentations. Have one person sit in the front row, and the other stand against the back wall. Start speaking, and have the person in the back give you a signal when you can be heard clearly. Note your volume level. How does it feel? Check with the person in the front row to make sure you weren't too loud.

A voice consistently too loud sometimes indicates a slight hearing loss. If your voice is judged too loud you may wish to check with your doctor. If you check out OK, then do the above exercise again, but this time let the person in the front row give you a signal to soften your voice, and then check with the person in the back to make sure you can be heard.

QUESTION AND ANSWER TECHNIQUES

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR AUDIENCE TO ASK QUESTIONS

Often you will want your audience to ask questions. When you have delivered technical information, complicated ideas, or are leading a training session, it is a good idea to check audience comprehension by taking questions.

If you ask for questions passively you won't encourage a response. It's mostly a matter of body language. Standing away from the audience, hands stuffed in your pockets, and mumbling "Any questions?" does not encourage questions from an audience.

Those who actively seek questions will step toward the audience, raise a hand and ask, "Does anyone have questions for me?" You might also ask, "What questions do you have?" You *assume* the audience will ask questions, and they often do. Also, pause long enough after asking for questions, so the audience will have time to think of questions (the silence should get to them before it gets to you!). Raising your hand will accomplish two things. One, it is the visual signal for questions and will encourage those who might be shy. Also, it helps keep order. The audience will follow your lead and raise their hands, instead of yelling out their questions.

HOW TO LISTEN TO QUESTIONS

Perhaps you have seen a speaker listen to a question while pacing back and forth, not looking at the question asker, and then interrupt with something like, "You don't have to finish, I know what you're asking." The speaker may not know what is being asked until the question is finished. It is important to wait until the question has been fully asked.

While the question is being asked, you should watch the person who is asking it. Often it is possible to pick up clues to the intensity of the question, the feelings behind it and any hidden agendas if you are aware of body language.

During questions, be careful what you do with your hands! Imagine giving a presentation enthusiastically, and presenting your ideas confidently. Then imagine that when you receive a question, you stand looking at the floor rubbing your hands together nervously. This behavior can negate the confident image you provided during the presentation. Your hands should stay in a neutral position, arms at your sides, fingers open. Focus on the question and listen carefully.

HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

Prepare for questions. You should be able to anticipate most of the questions you receive. Practice answering them. Prepare for the worst and everything else will seem easier. Some speakers prepare back-up visual aids, just to be used when answering anticipated questions.

Clarify. If the question you receive is lengthy, difficult to comprehend, multipart or involved you may want to restate it for clarification. If it is simple and straightforward, this may not be necessary. Very often as people are asking a question they are thinking aloud, and the question might be quite simple but buried in 17 paragraphs of their commentary. Clarification may also allow you to soften hostile language used in the question and it will certainly allow you more time to consider the answer.

Amplify. Have you ever been sitting in the back of an audience and someone in the front row asks a question and you can't hear it? If in doubt you might want to repeat the question so that you are sure everyone heard it. This technique can also give you extra thinking time.

Maintain your style. When answering questions, it is important to maintain the same style and demeanor you used in the presentation. A change in demeanor can suggest that you are not confident about your position.

Be Honest. If you don't know the answer to a question, then you can simply say, "I don't know the answer but I will find out and get back to you." Or, if coworkers might know the answer you can ask them for help.

Involve the whole audience in your answer. Have you seen speakers who get involved with the person who has asked a question and ignore the rest of the audience? In some situations the questioner may try to "hook" the speaker with a difficult question. You can always tell if a speaker is "hooked" because he or she focuses only on the person who asked the question.

Employ the 25%–75% rule. Direct approximately 25% of your eye contact to the person who asked the question and approximately 75% to the rest of the audience. (This is especially important in a hostile question and answer situation). Don't ignore the person who asked the question, but don't ignore the rest of the audience either. This will help you stay in command of the situation and keep the audience involved in your presentation.

Don't preface your answer. Sometimes, when we hear a speaker start an answer with, "That's a very good question; I'm glad you asked it," it may be a sign that the speaker is unsure of the answer.

It's best not to preface answers but simply to go into the answer (after repeating the question, if appropriate). At the end of your question-and-answer session you can say something like, "Thank you for all your excellent questions."

Most presentations include time for questions and answers. Sometimes questions are asked during the session and, sometimes, at the end. In many cases a speaker has the option of where he or she would like to have questions asked. If this is the case, then you can ask the audience to interrupt you whenever they have questions, or you can request that they save their questions until you've finished the presentation.

PRESENTATION QUICK CHECK

DELIVERING YOUR PRESENTATION

I plan to:

- Stay aware of not only what is said, but how I say it.
- Be animated, enthusiastic and direct in my delivery.
- Use eye contact to make my presentation personable and conversational.
- Keep a clear, strong voice and not speak too fast.

QUESTION-AND-ANSWER TECHNIQUES

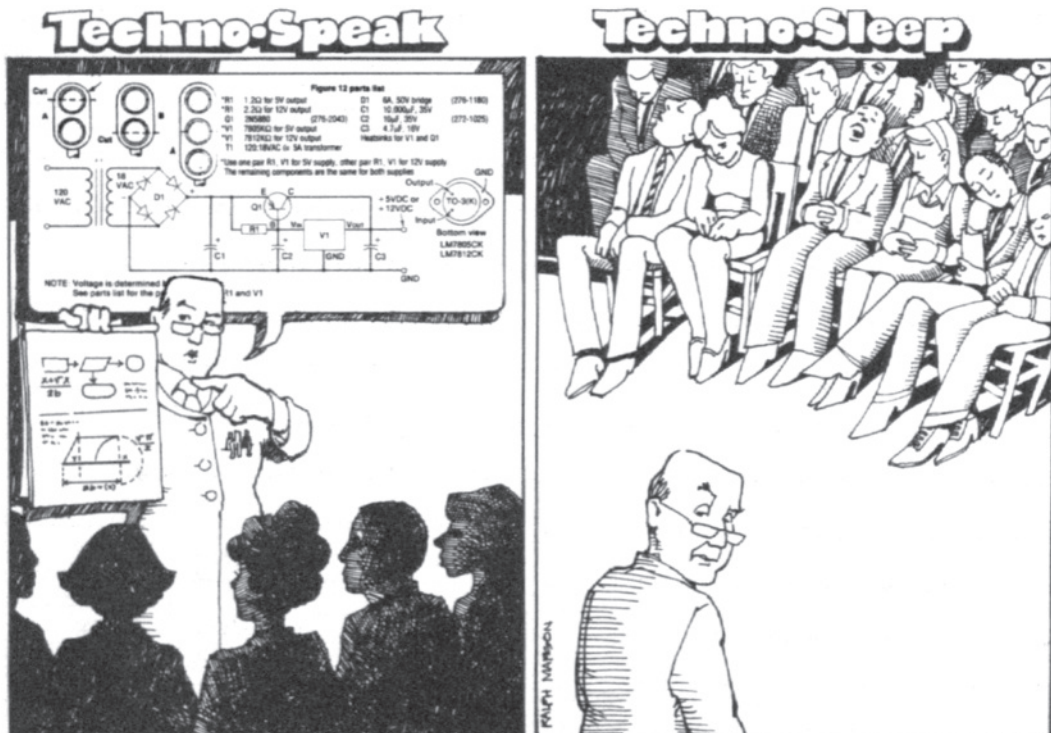
I plan to:

- Ask for questions by stepping forward with my hand raised.
- Anticipate questions and practice the answers.
- Watch the questioner and listen carefully to the question.
- Keep my hands in a neutral position when listening to questions.
- Repeat the question to make sure everyone heard it, or for clarification.
- Keep the same style and demeanor that I had during the presentation.
- Use eye contact and involve the whole audience in my answer.

PRESENTING A TECHNICAL PAPER AT A PROFESSIONAL MEETING

Isaiah is an engineer about to present the results of some research he has been working on for the past two years. He is making the presentation at a national meeting of his professional society. It is 1:30 in the afternoon and the room is a bit warm. In his 2½ hour presentation he has over 100 slides to show and has little time for breaks since he is planning to read directly from his manuscript. He is worried that the audience will doze off while he is speaking.

Isaiah's worry is well-founded. Reading a manuscript in any presentation can be deadly. At a professional meeting especially, there is the expectation of not only excellent content but a lively presentation of the material as well.



General Hints for Success:

1. Complete the Technical Presentation Check List provided at the end of this section.
2. Plan breaks. Especially after lunch, avoid this time slot if you can. Do not speak for more than one hour without a 5–10 minute break.
3. Rehearse your presentation at least twice. Have a colleague listen to you and throw some questions at you so you can practice answers to questions you might get.
4. Arrive early, check out the room and make sure the AV equipment is in proper working order.
5. Find out if the signals are given or plan a way to watch the time so you stay on schedule.
6. Make sure you have enough handouts for the entire audience and then add 10%, just in case your talk is more popular than you thought it might be.
7. Have fun!

Organization

A technical presentation and a technical paper are two different things. The paper will tend to be more detail oriented and formal—the presentation will provide more of an overview and be more conversational in its style.

The expectation is that you will be talking *about* the paper—not reading from it. Summarizing the key areas of the paper and discussing them in a professional, but conversational manner, is usually what's called for.

Some of the major areas to be summarized in your presentation might be:

History of the subject or problem addressed

Research approach

Methodology/Techniques

Results

Interpretation

Implications for others

Use Section IV, Organizing Your Presentation, to plan the presentation of your thoughts and data.

Visual Aids

When using visual aids at a professional meeting to help explain your thoughts and data, keep the following points in mind:

1. Avoid tabular data in favor of graphs—this will more quickly allow the audience to see the relationship of the data presented.
2. Avoid “hand done” visuals that will detract from the professionalism of your talk.
3. Stick to the information content rules of thumb presented in the chapter on visual aids. Remember the K.I.S.S. principle!
4. Make sure that 35mm slides are placed in a carousel correctly and number them in the lower left hand corner (when held so it reads correctly to you.)
5. Find out how big a room you are presenting in and make sure that the person in the back row can easily see all the material on your visual.
6. Break up slide shows that exceed 20 minutes with black slides that allow for some speaker/audience interaction.
7. Limit the number of visuals—remember the audience wants to hear you present your ideas, not just see your data on the screen.

TECHNICAL PRESENTATION CHECKLIST

Place a checkmark next to...

- 1. Complete the Audience Analysis Worksheet in this book.
- 2. Secure information on time allotment for presentation and question and answer session.
- 3. “Translate” the paper into a presentation format.
- 4. If part of a panel presentation, find out what other panelists will present and what time restrictions there will be.
- 5. Check on availability, and type of visual aid equipment.

- 6. Plan visual aids.
- 7. Produce visual aids.
- 8. Rehearse presentation, without reading directly from the paper.
- 9. Prepare any handouts.
- 10. Plan for breaks during the presentation if longer than one hour.