



PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES

Mastering Presentation Skills

Why presenters fail?

Many speakers are very good at what they do, yet they fail to excite the audience, let alone get the message across. Why?

Presenting anything involves more human element than the subject matter itself! When you speak, the voice should come from within you, not just from your throat. For example, a speaker with a monotonous tone will most likely get the audience to start looking elsewhere or lose interest in what he/she is saying very quickly.

Speakers should vary their tone every now and then based on the topic they are delivering. Also, the right image with some text in their presentations would most likely keep audience guessing for more.

This book aims at highlighting some of the more useful presentation techniques using Microsoft PowerPoint as the delivery tool. Of course, many will argue that speakers do not actually need a software tool for delivery purposes. There are many good speakers who can convince you the minute they open their mouth.

Some sales personnel are very good at their work while some are just not born to do sales or marketing. Techies, as some would call those who are highly interested in anything technical, be it computers, electrical or electronic items, digital items, etc. are just so passionate with technology that they can tell you exactly what the item consists of. However, when you get this group of people to explain how it works to the “man on the street”, they will most likely fail. Why? It is because of the language and technicalities used that not many of us will understand. It is better to get someone who knows a little on technical issues but great with people to do the explanation. The message always gets across far better this way.

Giving a presentation

- ❖ Presentations are used mainly when you want to deliver a message, an idea or information to an audience (of any size). You should have a clear view of what you will be speaking and to whom you will be addressing the topics.
- ❖ Preparing your presentation is the key to how successful it will be. It is better to know who will be your audience in advance so that you will know some of their expectations. For example, finance people will most likely be amused with presentations using numbers as they can relate to it better. However, for someone who is involved in administration work, these figures may not mean very much to them.

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- ❖ Write a plan of how you will structure your presentation from beginning to end. You should structure it such a way that it is similar to writing an essay i.e. an introduction followed by the main body and finally a conclusion.
- ❖ Keep in mind the amount of time you have and be sure that you will not exceed this. It is always better to finish early than late. Time yourself to make sure that you deliver everything within the time allocated.
- ❖ Before you do the actual presentation, practice as much as possible. Your voice, body language, eye contact, and dressing are highly important. Many do not take effort to brush up on these matters. In fact, quite often you will find that many new speakers tend to stammer and just not confident of themselves.

The presentation

The perfect start is to 'win' the audiences' interest by using a dramatic statement, or some humour. For example, you can complement some members of the audience, enlighten them with some jokes, etc.

However, never pick on any of them especially when they give you a hard time. It is always to safer to play a more passive role than to respond to them.

Try to create a bond and establish some rapport with just about all of them. Do not be a sexist, or racist, as this will only lead to the audience giving you a bad evaluation.

Use visual aids like an over-head projector (transparent slides) or a flip chart

End your presentation with something that the audience will remember, even if it is something simple like a visual or a closing statement.

Presentations are a way of communicating ideas and information. A good presentation needs to have the following:

- ❖ **Content** - It contains information that people need. Unlike reports, it 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.
- ❖ **Packaging** - It must be well prepared.
- ❖ **Human Element** - A good presentation will be remembered much more than a good report because it has a person attached to it.

Presentation tips for public speaking

- ❖ Know the needs of your audience and match your contents to their needs.
- ❖ Know your material thoroughly. Put what you have to say in a logical sequence.
- ❖ Ensure your speech will be captivating to your audience as well as worth their time and attention. They have made time and effort to be there to listen to what you have to say.
- ❖ It is not what you say that matters but how you say it.
- ❖ Practice and rehearse your speech at home or where you can be at ease and comfortable, in front of a mirror, your family, friends or colleagues.
- ❖ Use a tape or digital recorder and listen to yourself. How does your voice sound? Do you sound confident enough?
- ❖ Videotape your presentation and analyze it. You may learn that you had missed out on a few points when you do so.
- ❖ Know what your strong and weak points are. If you do not know, get someone close to you to let you know what these are.
- ❖ Emphasize your strong points during your presentation. Take advantage of your positive aspects and focus more on what you are good at.
- ❖ When you are presenting in front of an audience, you are performing as an actor is on stage. The rest of the audience is here to watch you!
- ❖ How you are being perceived is very important. Usually, you can tell by the way the audience look and analyze you.
- ❖ Dress appropriately for the occasion. Even if you are making a presentation to the public on a non-working day, it is better to be properly attired than to remain casual.
- ❖ Present the desired image to your audience.
- ❖ Look pleasant, enthusiastic, confident, proud, but not arrogant. Remain calm. Taking a deep breath can help to a certain extent.
- ❖ Appear relaxed, even if you feel nervous.

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- ❖ Speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and show appropriate emotion and feeling relating to your topic. Do not rush through your presentation.
- ❖ Establish rapport with your audience. Stop every now and then to get to know your audience.
- ❖ Vary the tone of your voice and dramatize if necessary. This has a greater impact compared to a monotonous tone.
- ❖ Body language is important. How you move your hands, smile, posture, etc. are all important.
- ❖ Standing, walking or moving about with appropriate hand gesture or facial expression is preferred to sitting down or standing still with head down and reading from a prepared speech.
- ❖ Use audio-visual aids for enhancement if appropriate and necessary. There is a greater tendency to remember something that can be seen and shown and not just told.
- ❖ Master the use of presentation software such as *PowerPoint* well before your presentation. You do not have to be an expert but know it enough to create an impact.
- ❖ Do not over-dazzle your audience with excessive use of animation, sound clips, or gaudy colors which are inappropriate for your topic.
- ❖ Do not torture your audience by putting a lengthy document in tiny print on an overhead and reading it out to them. Always use larger sized fonts and keep them consistent throughout all your slides. The color that you use is also important.
- ❖ Speak with conviction as if you really believe in what you are saying. The audience has paid to hear you talk, even if you do not know much!
- ❖ Persuade your audience effectively.
- ❖ The material you present orally should have the same ingredients as that which are required for a written research paper, i.e. a logical progression from INTRODUCTION (Thesis statement) to BODY (strong supporting arguments, accurate and up-to-date information) to CONCLUSION (re-state thesis, summary, and logical conclusion).
- ❖ Do not read from notes for any extended length of time.

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- ❖ It is quite acceptable to glance at your notes infrequently.
- ❖ Speak loudly and clearly. Sound confident. Do not mumble. If you made an error, correct it, and continue.
- ❖ No need to make excuses or apologize profusely.
- ❖ Maintain sincere eye contact with your audience.
- ❖ Use the 3-second method, e.g. look straight into the eyes of a person in the audience for 3 seconds at a time.
- ❖ Have direct eye contact with a number of people in the audience, and every now and then glance at the whole audience while speaking.
- ❖ Use your eye contact to make everyone in your audience feel involved.
- ❖ Speak to your audience, listen to their questions, respond to their reactions, adjust and adapt.
- ❖ If what you have prepared is obviously not getting across to your audience, change your strategy mid-stream if you are well prepared to do so. Remember that communication is the key to a successful presentation.
- ❖ If you are short of time, know what can be safely left out.
- ❖ If you have extra time, know what could be effectively added.
- ❖ Always be prepared for the unexpected. For example, what would you do if there is a power failure, or if your hardware fails? If anything can go wrong, it may go wrong!
- ❖ Pause whenever necessary. Allow yourself and your audience a little time to reflect and think.
- ❖ Do not race through your presentation and leave your audience, as well as yourself, feeling out of breath.
- ❖ Add humor whenever appropriate and possible.
- ❖ Keep audience interested throughout your entire presentation. This will take time and lots of practice. You cannot master this overnight.

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- ❖ Remember that an interesting speech makes time fly, but a boring speech is always too long to endure even if the presentation time is the same.
- ❖ When using audio-visual aids to enhance your presentation, be sure all necessary equipment is set up and in good working order prior to the presentation.
- ❖ If possible, have an emergency backup system readily available.
- ❖ Check out the location ahead of time to ensure seating arrangements for audience, whiteboard, blackboard, lighting, location of projection screen, sound system, etc. are suitable for your presentation.
- ❖ Know when to STOP talking. Give the audience time to think and raise question too.
- ❖ Use a timer to time your presentation when preparing it at home.
- ❖ To end your presentation, summarize your main points in the same way as you normally do in the CONCLUSION of a written paper.
- ❖ Terminate your presentation with an interesting remark or an appropriate punch line.
- ❖ Leave your listeners with a positive impression and a sense of completion.
- ❖ Finally, thank your audience for being there and putting up with you!!

Other pointers for public speaking

Mistakes

- ❖ Mistakes are all right.
- ❖ Recovering from mistakes makes you appear more human.
- ❖ Good recovery puts your audience at ease - they identify with you more.

Humour

- ❖ Tell jokes if you are good at it; otherwise leave it out.
- ❖ There is nothing worse than a punch line that has no punch.
- ❖ Gentle humour is good in place of jokes.

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Tell stories

- ❖ Stories make you a real person not just a deliverer of information.
- ❖ Use personal experiences to bring your material to life.

How to use the public speaking environment

- ❖ Try not to get stuck in one place.
- ❖ Use all the space that is available to you. Move around.
- ❖ One way to do this is to leave your notes in one place and move to another.

Technology

- ❖ Speak to your audience not your slides. Your slides are there to support you, not the other way around.
- ❖ Ideally, include graphics wherever possible with text.
- ❖ If all the technology on offer fails, it is still you the audience has come to hear.

More on good speakers

- ❖ Spend more time listening than 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 thoughts when others talk.
- ❖ Plan responses after others have finished speaking, NOT while they are speaking.
- ❖ Provide feedback but do not interrupt unnecessarily.
- ❖ Analyze by looking at all the relevant factors and asking open-ended questions. Keep the audience guessing for more.
- ❖ Keep the conversation on what the speaker says, NOT on what interests them.

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Understanding your voice

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. 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.

Pace: 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.

Body communication

Eye contact: Speakers who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth, and credibility. This does not mean that you should stare at some of the members of the audience! Always look at a person's eye when you speak to them.

Facial Expressions: Smiling is a powerful cue that transmits happiness, friendliness, warmth, and liking.

Gestures: If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring and stiff.

Posture and body orientation: You communicate numerous messages by the way you talk and move. 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. Increasing the proximity enables you to make better eye contact and increases the opportunities for others to speak. Never touch a person when you want to communicate. It may not be acceptable to some.

Reducing tension and anxiety

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. Try to recall as much as you can without looking at your own notes.

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!

Preparing 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, informing 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.

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)?

You want to include some visual information that will help the audience understand your presentation. Develop charts, graphs, slides, handouts, and anything else that may be necessary.

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

Handling questions

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 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 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 verses you." You do not want to risk alienating them.

Working with PowerPoint slides

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

Working with graphics

If you want to use a graphic to emphasize a point or illustrate an idea, PowerPoint lets you import a variety of image file formats - BMP, GIF, JPEG and clip arts.

To import an image into PowerPoint, while in the Slide view select Insert /Picture/From File and navigate to the source file.

Keep file size to a minimum

Images significantly increase a presentation's file size and slow down playback, so try to keep the image's file size as low as possible. PowerPoint allows you to crop and resize an imported image, as well as adjust its brightness and contrast (in either program, just click on the image to open the image properties pop-up toolbar).

Recycle your images

If you use the same image more than once, copy and paste it from slide to slide. Do not re-import it. This is especially important if you want to include a corporate logo or custom background on each page.

Choose a compact format

The image's file size also depends on its format. The lowest file size formats are GIF and JPG (common on the Web), but the quality of these formats might not be adequate.

Working with charts

Translating raw numbers into charts and graphs can be very effective. A graph can instantly communicate your data's meaning-but the key is using the appropriate chart format for the data.

First, determine the main point of the data. To show a solid share of market in our sample presentation, for instance, use a simple pie chart.

A line or area chart can illustrate steadily climbing sales, and a bar chart makes complex comparisons (like how you compare with your competitors) easy to see.

Next, you should distill the data to its essential elements to keep the on-screen message clean and easy to absorb. Again, if the details are important, include some of the information in your live comments and offer details in the handouts.

To add a chart, create a new slide, specify a chart as the page type and double-click on its placeholder text in the slide. In the Properties window that opens, select a chart type and enter the data into the spreadsheet.

You can customize fill colors and effects, font size, color, position and axis lines, and include a legend by right-clicking on each element and opening the properties window.

Working with multimedia elements

By now your presentation has taken shape, with all the slides built and in place. It is probably "presentable," but adding a few special effects can transform your static slides into an interactive multimedia show.

Multimedia elements, such as animation, should be used sparingly. Special effects should serve as visual cues that tell your audience what to look at and in what order.

Animation effects should follow a pattern-a style template-from slide to slide to avoid visual chaos. For instance, if you use a headline effect such as a wipe-right or fly-from-left, it should always be the same, and bullet points should also build the same way on each slide.

Charts should build simply, with consistent effects. For example, vertical bars might "grow" from the baseline singly or in a group, or a pie chart's core might appear, followed by the individual pie slices.

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There are two types of animation you can add with PowerPoint i.e. transitions between slides and how individual elements appear on slides.

Options abound for both, with virtually limitless combinations. You should experiment with the settings until you find a sequence that you like.

To attach a transition to an element within a slide in PowerPoint, open the Slide view, highlight the element and select Slide Show/Preset Animation or Custom.

The Preset Animation effects include dissolve, typewriter, laser text, fly and other basic transitions.

The Custom Animation menu gives you greater control over transitions. It includes the Timing tab, which lets you select specific items to animate, in what order and whether they animate automatically or on mouse-click.

The Effects tab lets you determine the transition effect (animation only, sound only or a combination) to apply to each element. Add similar transitions to a chart from the Chart Effects tab.

You can preview your animation selections in the Custom Animation screen's upper right window. You will need to repeat this process for each slide you want to animate.

PowerPoint also lets you embed standalone video, music or sound effects that are triggered automatically or by a mouse action. In PowerPoint, select Insert/Movies and Sounds. Like sound transitions, use sound effects selectively and make sure you will not have to speak over them.

Keep in mind that large video or sound files can also significantly slow down the playback of your presentation. Be sure to test all effects on the actual presentation equipment you will use to make sure everything goes as planned.