

Giving Effective Presentations

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Apprehension about oral communication, or public speaking is rated as the number one fear among most individuals.¹ Developing skill in, and comfort with, public speaking is important whether we are presenting oral reports and proposals, responding to questions, or training co-workers. Effective speakers are able to communicate information in a way that stimulates interest, helps the audience to understand and remember, and influences attitudes and behaviours.

Many of us think that effective speakers are born rather than made. In truth most successful speakers work hard and invest a great deal of time and effort in to improving their speaking capabilities. Effective public speaking is a learned skill and activity that requires lots of practice. Like other learned skills, having a strategy with clear action steps can help you achieve your goal.

DETERMINE YOUR SPECIFIC SPEECH GOAL AND ADAPT IT TO YOUR AUDIENCE

When planning your speech, select a subject that is important to you, and that you are knowledgeable about, and brainstorm to generate as many ideas as possible. Analyze your audience by considering their age, education level, gender, knowledge, culture, geographic uniqueness, and group affiliation. From this you can predict their interest in, knowledge of, and attitude toward both you and your topic.

By conducting an audience analysis, you can collect demographic data on your audience and determine their similar characteristics, predict their level of interest and knowledge of the topic, and their perceived attitude toward you as a credible source of information. This information and knowing the location or setting for your presentation will provide guidelines on how to meet the audience expectations and determine the tone of the speech. What is the size of the audience and venue? What time of day will it be scheduled? Where in the program does the speech occur? What is the time limit? Will the necessary equipment be available?

After choosing your topic, and analyzing the audience and the setting, you will want to identify both your **general goal** and your **specific speech goal**. The **general goal** is the intent of your speech – *if you want to entertain, inform, or persuade your audience*. The **specific speech goal** is a single statement specifying the exact audience response you are looking for² such as *I want my audience to understand the importance of correct site surgery*.

A thesis statement, or sub-goal, outlines the specific elements of the speech that will support the specific goal statement – i.e. *the three criteria for correct site surgery will be to develop a policy, provide education for healthcare workers, and follow the seven absolutes for surgical site verification*.

GATHER AND EVALUATE MATERIAL

Reviewing all available resources will provide you with high quality information and help support your specific speech goal. Draw on your own knowledge and experience and utilize books, periodicals, encyclopaedias and other electronic databases. Use examples, illustrations, anecdotes, narratives, or statistics for comparisons and contrasts. Interesting and vivid research and resources will bring your topic to life.

ORGANIZE AND PLAN THE MATERIAL

Write an outline of the body of the speech, prepare the introduction and the conclusion, list the resources, and then review and revise.

The introduction (7 to 50% of the total speech) should grab the attention of the audience. Arouse their interest by asking a question, making a startling remark, or providing an illustration. Let them know what the speech is about. Set an appropriate tone for the topic – a humorous opening for a serious issue will confuse the audience. If you are enthusiastic, warm, friendly, and display passion you will establish a bond of goodwill.

In the body (45 to 88% of the speech) identify the main points, or building blocks, of your speech. These are the ideas that you want to be remembered. They should be clear, follow the same structural pattern, meaningful, and limited in number (usually to five or fewer). They should be organized according to time, topic, or logical sequence. Be sure to provide clear transition between sections of the speech.

In the conclusion (5% of total) focus on two goals:

- Wrapping up the speech by reminding the audience what you said; and
- hammering home a memorable message.

Four types of conclusions are summary, story, appeal to action, and emotional impact. An effective conclusion can make the entire speech more effective.

HOW TO USE VISUAL AIDS

Use the **KISS principle** (**K**eep **I**t **S**imple **S**illy). Don't overload the audience with irrelevant or in-appropriate material. Keep cartoons to a minimum.

Use **key words or phrases**. For overheads and power point, keep to the 6X6 rule – up to 6 words per line, no more than 6 lines. Avoid printing in yellow or in red as they are both difficult to read. Use a 24 to 36 point font for headings and an 18 point font for the text. Refrain from using more than two styles of font.

Talk to the audience, not to the visual aid. Stand to the side and don't turn your back to the audience. **Place yourself at center stage.** Use yourself as a

visual aid. Dress appropriately. Don't chew gum or eat food. Your posture, gestures and movements can provide descriptive motions.

Use **pointers sparingly**. Point at the screen, not the projector as you often block the view. Don't play with the pointer when not using it and keep your shoulders orientated toward the audience.

TIPS FOR REDUCING ANXIETY

- 1 - **Be well prepared.** Plan ahead, rehearse your speech and know your visual aids. Arrive early to check the room set-up, chair placement, lighting and the temperature. Start on time.
- 2 - **Be organized.** Organized thoughts will give you confidence to focus your energy on your presentation.
- 3 - **Practice.** You will gain confidence by practicing out loud to the pillows on the sofa, the cat, the dog, or the mirror. Learn to pause. Be aware of your rate of speech and tone of voice. Audio taping a practice session using your visual aids can help determine an accurate speed as well as evaluate your fluency, enthusiasm, and voice expressiveness.
- 4 - **Visualize yourself doing well.** Do not underestimate the importance of self-visualization in gaining a higher level of self-esteem.
- 5 - **Maintain eye contact.** Pick out friendly faces and make eye contact for four to six seconds. Moving your eyes in a 'Z' pattern across the room is an effective way to engage everyone.
- 6 - **Concentrate on your message** and you will forget about yourself. Confidence, conviction, and enthusiasm portray professional qualities.
- 7 - **Don't apologize.** Negative thinking will bring negative results.
- 8 - **Move around naturally.** This releases nervous energy and restores calm. Avoid moving in a strategic pattern. Use gestures to support your message.
- 9 - **Breathe, breathe, and breathe.** This increases blood flow and helps you relax.
- 10 - **Dress in comfortable clothes.** Clothes that you like and feel good in will increase your confidence.

Giving Effective Presentations (cont.)

Preparing a speech is similar to writing a research paper. Plan, research, organize and prepare an introduction, body and conclusion. The memorable public speaker enhances a presentation by using a variety of strategies involving and engaging the audience, and by effectively preparing through practice, practice, and more practice. Through vocal expressions, eye contact, spontaneity, fluency, and enthusiasm, the speaker can achieve a conversational quality and connection with the listeners.

Simply:

Tell them what you're going to tell them; tell them; and then tell them what you told them.

For more information on this topic please contact the author by e-mail at nadine.inglehart@calgaryhealthregion.ca.

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