

Tips for Preparing Presentations

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General Guidelines for Presentations

Before you start: Make sure you have prepared a speech appropriate to the speaking situation. Know your audience members and understand what they are likely to know, believe, and value. Then, choose your tone, words, examples, etc. to help that particular audience understand what you have to say. Also, check out the speaking site so that you know what to expect in terms of adjusting your voice and eye contact to meet the room specifications.

Structure

Introduction

1. Write an introduction that provides us with a clear roadmap of what the entire presentation will reveal. Preview the main points or ideas so that audience members know how to make sense of the material you present.

Body

2. The body of your speech should elaborate on the ideas you introduced at the start of your talk. Give examples to illustrate or help describe the points you try to make.
3. Along the way provide transitions so that audience members remember what you have covered and see where you are going.
4. Provide appropriate and accurate background research and information (with citations). **You want to be sure to acknowledge verbally ideas that belong to other people.**

Conclusion

5. When you conclude your presentation, alert the audience to your conclusion **WITHOUT** saying “in conclusion” or “today I talked to you about...” Be sure to provide a review of the materials you covered in your presentation.

Delivery

1. Do not read your paper. Instead, review your paper and select the major ideas. Take those ideas and form a key word outline that enables you to talk through the paper in an organized fashion. Remember, you only have a few minutes to cover the essentials.
2. Do not memorize your paper.
3. Be vocally expressive. Vary your rate and tone to reflect meaning and to animate your voice in a way that generates interest.
4. Use pauses carefully. Pauses enable speakers to draw attention to important points and to allow audience members opportunity to think about what you have said.

5. Make eye contact with audience members. Avoid glancing at the back of the room or over audience members' heads; make genuine contact to show your effort at communicating with them.
6. Control nervous mannerisms. Avoid vocal fillers (um, uh, you know) as well as shuffling your notes, playing with pens or change.
7. Practice pronunciation and articulation. Learn how to pronounce words correctly; pay special attention to technical terms, proper names, etc. Don't mumble or slur your words. Both pronunciation and articulation impact how audiences perceive your credibility.
8. Choose appropriate clothing. Pick professional clothing that will instill confidence and credibility. Avoid collarless and sleeveless clothing, jeans, excessive jewelry (i.e., more than 3 pieces), etc. If in doubt, don't wear it.
9. Practice your presentation. Don't wait until the last minute—having a great research project does not mean you will have a successful presentation. Time what you plan to say and cut portions if it exceeds the time (**max 7 minutes**). Practice in front of an audience to obtain feedback about your presentation. Practice at least five times.

Ideas for Computer-assisted Presentations

Before you start: Remember, visual aids—regardless of type—are not substitutes for your speech. So, don't put all that you want to say on your visuals. Instead, use key words to emphasize your presentation. Visual aids, if done correctly, can enhance your credibility. Those who use them well will come across more prepared and more professional.

More guidelines to help...

1. To determine how many slides you need for your talk, divide the minutes of your talk by 2, then add 1. This is a guideline for the maximum number of slides for a presentation that length.
2. Don't cram everything on a slide. Limit yourself to one idea a slide.
Guideline to follow: Use a maximum of 3 and 5 lines of text per slide; 3-5 words per line.
 - If you are using Powerpoint to highlight key words from each of your main points, for example, each main point gets its own slide.
 - If you are showing statistics, one statistic per slide.
 - If you are creating an overview of the problem in the intro, but plan to spend the body of your speech discussing solutions, then it is OK to put all of the problems on 1 slide, but put each of the solutions on separate slides as they probably comprise your main points.

3. Each slide should have a title. If you quote bibliographic material, the slide should also have a citation for the source (HINT: put citations in a smaller type face 24 pt.).
4. Keep things consistent. Background colors/templates should be the same throughout. Fonts for all titles should be same color/size (40-44 pts). All other copy should be same font and color (i.e., no more than 2 font types and colors per presentation). A good size for the body of the slides is 28-32. If you animate your slides, animation style should be the same.
5. Use a healthy amount of “blank” space. Don’t feel compelled to cram words and images on a slide so that all space is used. “Less is more” is a good philosophy to follow.
6. Beware of color. Color is effective when you have good contrast, but many colors are hard to read—especially on the Liberal Arts TV screens. (HINT: Avoid red type faces. It tends to “burn” the eye, “jump” around on the screen.
7. Avoid overused visuals. Beware of clip art that all have seen—and used numerous times. Visual aids are effective when they make us remember.
8. Maps, charts, graphs need explanations to help audience members decode the information or illustration.

Practice with your slides. Find an empty classroom and practice, practice, practice. Many underestimate the timing. Others forget to change slides, or to engage in eye contact. So, practice—you will feel much more comfortable.

Additional Resources

Hamilton, Cheryl. *Communicating for Results: A Guide for Business and the Professions* (6th edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001.

O’Hair, Dan, Rob Stewart, and Hannah Rubenstein. *A Speaker’s Guidebook*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001.