

Presentation Skills

Introduction



Presentations and reports are ways of communicating ideas and information to a group. But unlike a report, a presentation carries the speaker's personality better and allows

immediate interaction between all the participants. A good presentation has:

Content - It contains information that people need. But unlike reports, which are read at the reader's own pace, presentations 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. Where as reports have appendices and footnotes to guide the reader, the speaker must be careful not to loose the audience when wandering from the main point of the presentation.

Packaging - It must be well prepared. A report can be reread and portions skipped over, but with a presentation, the audience is at the mercy of a presenter.

- **Human Element** - A good presentation will be remembered much more than a good report because it has a person attached to it. But you still need to analyze if the audience's needs would not be better met if a report was sent instead.

The Voice

The voice is probably the most valuable tool of the presenter. It carries most of the content that the audience takes away. One of the oddities of speech is that we can easily tell others what is wrong with their voice, e.g. too fast, too high, too soft, etc., but we have trouble listening to and changing our own voices.

There are four main terms used for defining vocal qualities:

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. An airplane has a different sound than leaves being rustled by the wind. 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. Pee Wee Herman has a high voice, Barbara Walters has a moderate voice, while James Earl Jones has a low voice.

- **Pace:** This is how long a sound lasts. 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.

Color: Both projection and tone variance can be practiced by taking the line "This new policy is going to be exciting" and saying it first with surprise, then with irony, then with grief, and finally with anger. The key is to *over-act*. Remember Shakespeare's words "*All the*

world's a stage"—presentations are the opening night on Broadway!

There are two good methods for improving your voice:

1. Listen to it! Practice listening to your voice while at home, driving, walking, etc. Then when you are at work or with company, monitor your voice to see if you are using it how you want to.
2. To really listen to your voice, cup your right hand around your right ear and gently pull the ear forward. Next, cup your left hand around your mouth and direct the sound straight into your ear. This helps you to really hear your voice as others hear it...and it might be completely different from the voice you thought it was! Now practice moderating your voice.

The Body

Your body communicates different impressions to the audience. People not only listen to you, they also watch you. Slouching tells them you are indifferent or you do not care...even though you might care a great deal! On the other hand, displaying good posture tells your audience that you know what you are doing and you care deeply about it. Also, a good posture helps you to speak more clearly and effectively.

Throughout your presentation, display:

- **Eye contact:** This helps to regulate the flow of communication. It signals interest in others and increases the speaker's credibility. Speakers who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth, and credibility.
- **Facial Expressions:** Smiling is a powerful cue that transmits happiness, friendliness, warmth, and liking. So, if you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likable, friendly, warm, and approachable. Smiling is often contagious and others will react favorably. They will be more comfortable around you and will want to listen to you more.
- **Gestures:** If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring and stiff. A lively speaking style captures attention, makes the material more interesting, and facilitates understanding.



Posture and body orientation: You communicate numerous messages by the way you talk and move. Standing erect and leaning forward communicates that you are approachable, receptive, and friendly. Interpersonal closeness results when you and your audience face each other. 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. You should look for signals of discomfort caused by invading other's space. Some of these are: rocking, leg swinging, tapping, and gaze aversion. Typically, in large rooms, space invasion is not a problem. In most instances there is too much distance. To counteract this, move around the room to increase interaction with your audience. Increasing the proximity enables you to make better eye contact and increases the opportunities for others to speak.

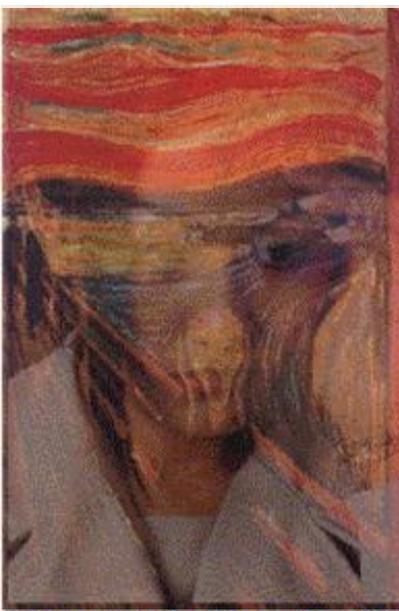
Voice. One of the major criticisms of speakers is that they speak in a monotone voice. Listeners perceive this type of speaker as boring and dull. People report that they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to those who have not learned to modulate their voices.

Active Listening

Good speakers not only inform their audience, they also listen to them. By listening, you know if they are understanding the information and if the information is important to them. *Active listening* is NOT the same as hearing! Hearing is the first part and consists of the perception of sound.

Listening, the second part, involves an attachment of meaning to the aural symbols that are perceived. Passive listening occurs when the receiver has little motivation to listen carefully. Active listening with a purpose is used to gain information, to determine how another person feels, and to understand others. Some good traits of effective listeners are:

- Spend more time listening than talking (but of course, as a presenter, you will be doing most of the 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 own thoughts when others talk.
Let the other speaker talk. Do not dominate the conversation.
- Plan responses after others have finished speaking...NOT while they are speaking.
Their full concentration is on what others are saying, not on what they are going to respond with.
Provide feedback but do not interrupt incessantly.



Analyze by looking at all the relevant factors and asking open-ended questions. Walk the person through analysis (summarize).

- Keep the conversation on what the speaker says...NOT on what interest them.

Listening can be one of our most **powerful** communication tools! Be sure to use it!

Part of the listening process is getting feedback by changing and altering the message so the intention of the original communicator is understood by the second communicator. This is done by paraphrasing the words of the sender and restating the sender's feelings or ideas in your own words, rather than repeating their words. Your words should be saying, "This is what I understand your feelings to be, am I correct?" It not only includes verbal responses, but also nonverbal ones. Nodding your head or squeezing their hand to show agreement, dipping your eyebrows to show you don't quite understand the meaning of their last phrase, or sucking air in deeply and blowing out hard shows that you are also exasperated with the situation.

Carl Roger listed five main categories of feedback. They are listed in the order in which they occur most frequently in daily conversations (notice that we make judgments more often than we try to understand):

1. **Evaluative:** Makes a judgment about the worth, goodness, or appropriateness of the other person's statement.
2. **Interpretive:** Paraphrasing - attempt to explain what the other persons statement mean.
3. **Supportive:** Attempt to assist or bolster the other communicator
4. **Probing:** Attempt to gain additional information, continue the discussion, or clarify a point.
5. **Understanding:** Attempt to discover completely what the other communicator means by her statements.

Nerves

The main enemy of a presenter is tension, which ruins the voice, posture, and spontaneity. The voice becomes higher as the throat tenses. Shoulders tighten up and limits flexibility while the legs start to shake and causes unsteadiness. The presentation becomes "canned" as the speaker locks in on the notes and starts to read directly from them.

First, **do not fight nerves, welcome them!** Then you can get on with the presentation instead of focusing in on being nervous. Actors recognize the value of nerves...they add to the value of the performance. This is because adrenaline starts to kick in. It's a left over from our ancestors' "fight or flight" syndrome. If you welcome nerves, then the presentation becomes a challenge and you

become better. If you let your nerves take over, then you go into the flight mode by withdrawing from the audience. Again, welcome your nerves, recognize them, let them help you gain that needed edge! Do not go into the flight mode! When you feel tension or anxiety, remember that everyone gets them, but the winners use them to their advantage, while the losers get overwhelmed by them.

Tension can be reduced by performing some relaxation exercises. Listed below are a couple to get you started:

- Before the presentation: Lie on the floor. Your back should be flat on the floor. Pull your feet towards you so that your knees are up in the air. Relax. Close your eyes. Feel your back spreading out and supporting your weight. Feel your neck lengthening. Work your way through your body, relaxing one section at a time - your toes, feet, legs, torso, etc. When finished, stand up slowly and try to maintain the relaxed feeling in a standing position.
- If you cannot lie down: Stand with your feet about 6 inches apart, arms hanging by your sides, and fingers unclenched. Gently shake each part of your body, starting with your hands, then arms, shoulders, torso, and legs. Concentrate on shaking out the tension. Then slowly rotate your shoulders forwards and the backwards. Move on to your head. Rotate it slowly clockwise, and then counter-clockwise.
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.
- 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!
- Never drink alcohol to reduce tension! It affects not only your coordination but also your awareness of coordination. You might not realize it, but your audience will!