

The Art and Science of Presenting a Lecture

"Self-confidence is the first requirement for success"
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Overview

For an effective (remembered, respected, admired) presentation there are few things to know but they are **absolutely required**. As these requirements unfold you will note that there are no real surprises, revelations, or magic, and no shortcuts. There is simply the key ingredient which is common sense.

- First - **Know your subject well**. This sounds as obvious as it is. Knowing your subject well allows you to carefully select the few points you want to make. Too much information or data not only ruins your talk, but is usually interpreted as a smoke screen for ignorance. After you have selected that which is important and relevant to the message you wish to convey ...
- Second - **Organize your material** so that the points you make flow smoothly. You are there to tell a story - tell it in a logical order. As you organize decide which points or bits of information would best be emphasized by audio-visual means. One effective way to do this is to think of what points would make good slides or transparencies and build your presentation around them.
- Third - **Prepare and practice** so that you do not need more time than you have been allotted. Always keep in mind that it always takes longer to present that which you have written than you think. Practice your presentation as many times as it takes to say what you want to say within the allotted time. **Never go beyond the time you have been assigned** - this is poor planning at best and usually interpreted as arrogance. Also, do not be tempted, or so ill prepared as to be required, to read a paper or presentation. A paper read will, for sure, be resented.

Of course, one must always keep in mind that not everyone learns best by being lecture to. Of the four adult learning styles be sure that you combine the Visual and Auditory to full advantage. Visual represents the bulk of learning (50+%) so use it to the maximum and make your presentation "slides" attractive. Auditory learners are about 30% of your audience and it is these who need to be kept listening by some of the hints to follow. The other forms, the Kinesthetic (or doing) and the Emotional can be accounted for by using diverse techniques to keep all of the audience interested.

The Essentials

When you speak, talk **to** the audience rather than to the desk, the podium, or to your slides. Only your barber will be interested in the back of your head. At the completion of the presentation, stay at the podium and ask for questions. **Always repeat every question** so that everyone in the audience will know what was asked and therefore, the relevance of your next comments. It's not possible to emphasize this point too strongly. Then, make the reply to the whole audience - not just the questioner. If you think you will forget two or three questions then take notes but repeat each question before you answer it even if the answer is "I don't know".

Using the slides you have made so that you do not have to "read" your presentation does not mean that you read every word on the slide. Believe it or not, the audience also knows how to read and will have probably read the whole slide while you are still on the first few points. This is especially so if what you say is in a monotone or without voice inflections or emotion.

Learn how to use a microphone so that the volume is adequate and your voice modulations are kept to an interesting level. Be sure you do not drone on in a monotone. A lapel microphone is the best in this regard but check out the sound system days or at least hours prior to your talk so that there are no surprises. Do not be afraid to adjust the mike so that you are heard.

Learn how to use and handle the beam of your light pointer. **Never, never rotate or jiggle or bounce the pointer light** around the point you are making. Nothing is more frustrating and irritating to your audience than to sit while you keep them wondering what you are pointing at. Just be aware of where the light is at all times i.e. move the pointer only in slow motion, if at all.

Another device with which you **must** become handy and familiar is the projector. Knowing what to do if a slide jams or a bulb burns out not only puts you in control but you may be the only one who does know. The projector, room size, and screen size are essential parts of your pre-talk checklist. Don't talk (fly) without it.

When you practice your talk, try to be conscious of your anxiety mannerisms or words. This is especially in reference to "Ahs". For a laugh (or cry) have a friend count the number of times you "Ah" or whatever you use to bridge the gap in your thinking or remembering. Guaranteed you will be quite surprised but take heart that you are not alone and these verbal ticks can be minimized by conscious effort.

Audio-Visual Aids

The single most important decision you will make is how to prepare illustrative material such as Handouts, slides and/or transparencies. The use of audio-visual aids add a great deal to a presentation and not only make your presentation easier, but also they greatly benefit your audience. As a generality, however, these are the least well done aspect of many presentations. The purpose of this review is to make you an exception.

Handouts - These serve three main functions: 1) They are a **requirement** for all CME credit events and presentations, 2) they leave a lasting impression of your lecture or seminar that the audience can use as a reminder, at some time in the future, of what your talk was about and 3) they are a vehicle for you to give to your audience more information than you had time for in the presentation. Also, a really useful handout duplicates some of your main slides which allows the audience to actually listen to what you have to say rather than frantically taking notes. The fact that you have taken the time to outline and organize your information for those who have come to listen will greatly enhance your image and increase your credibility.

Slides - These are almost essential to a free and easy style of presenting a talk, or lecture. They allow one the freedom of talking with minimal notes. For this reason, the single most important decision you will make is what to use to illustrate or highlight the points of your talk. Poor slides can ruin even a brilliant presentation and good slides can enhance even a poor presentation so make sure you plan this aspect of a presentation very carefully.

Most errors in slide-making stem from the mistaken assumption that legibility in one form assures legibility in another. What you are able to read at 12 to 14 inches is just not readable on a slide, even in a small room. Your goal is to insure that those in the audience seated at the rear can easily read every word and not just make them out. In general, if you can read a 2" x 2" (51 x 51 mm) slide as is at 14 inches without a magnifier, people in the rear seats can probably read them on the screen. To accomplish this there are some rules of thumb - commit them to memory - or at

least think about them occasionally.

- Your template into which all double spaced typing must go is 3 x 4.5 inches.
- This is 7 to 9 double-spaced lines of 54 elite (or 45 pica) characters wide.
- Upper and lower-case letters can be used as artistically desired.
- Limit each slide to 15 to 20 words or 25 to 30 data (elements).
- Use several slides rather than one complicated one for lengthy discussions.
- Make extras of slides you wish to show one more than once for emphasis.
- Limit each slide to one main idea. Your audience will not be impressed by more.
- The best type is **BOLD** and clear. Arial is best . True, a word processor helps.
- The best font is **Arial** or one like it and in bold, NOT Times Roman which looks great in a text setting but does not project as clearly as one of the "sans serif" types (Arial for example).
- Slides made from copying tables or graphs from books are invariably failures.
- Graphs and histograms are usually more easily read than tables. Take the time.
- White on dark is best if it is hard to control the lighting and the room is generally light whereas, dark on white is preferable if you need more light in the room.
- Make use of background color or, better, two colors but when you use a dark background, you must use white or yellow or some other light colored lettering.
- Watch out for computer generated colored slides as visibility on your VGA screen does not guarantee visibility from a slide across a room. Unreadable words in black on a purple background will not enhance your credibility even if they are pretty on your computer screen up close. Dark two-toned background with light clear (Arial) type is excellent.

Once you are ready to begin practicing your presentation keep a few more points in mind:

- A slide expands or compliments a point you are making - never leave a slide on the screen after you have gone on to the next subject or part of your talk. Make use of blank slides.
- Slides are to supplement and support your oral presentation, not simply to repeat that which you are saying. A common error is for the speaker to actually read the slides to the group
- Rehearse your presentation with a projector or your computer screen so that you become familiar with the sequence and timing of the slides. Few things make you look disorganized than to not know your slides sequence.
- Never put yourself in the position of having to apologize for a slide. If you find yourself with a poorly readable slide when you project it just drop it as the effect on your presentation will not be neutral - it will be negative.

For those using actual slides rather than Power Point or Harvard Graphics, consider the following:

- Numbering your slides (in pencil as you may need them in another talk) is more than just a convenience. What if the projectionist spills them?
- Thumb-spot each slide in the lower left corner of the slide as you read it. Then, with the "spot" in the upper right hand corner it will be correctly placed in the slide tray. They go in the slide tray upside down! You would be surprised how many speakers do not know this.

If you choose to write out exactly what you intend to say, keep in mind that it always takes longer to say it than you think. A very rough approximation is that you can say 400 words in 5 minutes. As you write it out or plan it remember that your aim is to *interest* your audience. People tend to be interested if there is relevance to general principles along with your not taking yourself too seriously.

Transparencies - One of the main advantages of the overhead projector is that transparencies can be made without the delay required for photographic slides. Another advantage is that they can be hand-made at anytime before or even during a presentation and you are in control of them at all times. They can also be made from typed and printed originals. But herein lays a big risk. As tempting as it is to make a copy of a really superb table from a journal don't do it as they are totally useless. Some general tips for using 8.5 x 11 transparencies whether they are from typed or printed material or are done by hand:

- Leave at least a 1 inch (2.5 cm) margin free of writing all around
- Do not be afraid to use different colors to highlight points.
- If not you, find someone with neat printing. These make excellent "slides".
- As you face the audience, if you can read the sheet so too can the audience.
- Do not look at the screen, look at your audience and the transparency.
- Blank transparencies make excellent "blackboards" to illustrate your points.

Conclusion

I hope the information above is of some help to you as you prepare for the talk to which you have been assigned, whether it be your first or just one more of hundreds you give or present each year, it will have served its purpose. Remember that the beneficiary of you following the guidelines above is your audience. Nothing is more rewarding than an appreciative audience who takes away from your talk the messages you intended.

Few things are remembered more than an interesting and stimulating speaker and in most cases, that speaker will have appeared to have written what you have just read. Good luck.

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