

## Practical Teaching



# Practical teaching: great presentations every time

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Effective presentations involve careful preparation and artful delivery of ideas that connect with the interests and needs of learners. Great presentations illuminate, inspire and challenge. Presentations or lectures are particularly good at providing a framework for learning new concepts, modeling a creative mind at work, challenging accepted beliefs and attitudes and stimulating further learning. To create effective presentations, good preparation, organization, visuals and dynamic delivery are needed.

### PREPARATION

Preparation begins with an examination of content, learners and context. Understanding and selecting the essential content is the first step in the process. Three criteria for narrowing a topic include focusing on what the learners need to know, what is important to learn, and/or what is interesting. But the key is to

connect content with the needs and interests of learners. Effective presenters are able to transform their content to meet the unique needs of their learners. Contextual variables to consider include time frame, facilities and type of presentation (for example plenary presentation at a national meeting, large lecture in a course sequence, or a single clinical case presentation).

### ORGANIZATION OF PRESENTATION

With a good understanding of content, learners and context, specific planning can begin on the organisation of the presentation. Like any good story, a presentation should have a beginning, middle and end; or an introduction, body and conclusion.

#### Introduction

There are three purposes for an introduction. First, the presenter must capture the attention of the

audience. Concrete and dramatic cases, stories, analogies and examples work best. Second, a preview of the entire presentation should be offered in the form of an outline of the key points, a series of questions to be answered or objectives. Third, the affective climate or feeling tone of the session should be firmly established in the introduction. If you want to encourage active participation, a friendly atmosphere of openness and an invitation to ask questions will help. When the presentation is part of a series, offer a bridge from prior presentations to this one. Always connect new ideas to the prior knowledge of the audience.

#### Body

Effective presentations are built around a single theme and have a limited number of main points. In a fifty-minute presentation, three to five main points are optimal. A clear conceptual structure for the presentation is particularly important when reviewing

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complex and difficult information. Cluster or chunk content into main points and filter out information by focusing on what is important, needed and of interest. Main points can be arranged chronologically, logically, in a problem/solution, inductive or deductive format. Each main point should have several sub-points, examples or supporting material. Since maximum audience attention is attained at about 12–15 minutes into a presentation, it is important to vary the methods used (i.e., questions, discussion, demonstration, video clip, illustration, learning task assignments, self-tests or other activities) approximately every 15 minutes. When asking questions, use closed ended questions and a show of hands for large audiences and open-ended questions for smaller groups. The quality of responses to questions will increase dramatically with increased wait-time (3–5 seconds). Such methods of encouraging active participation also keep learners focused and engaged in learning.

### Conclusion

At the end of a presentation, summarise and conclude decisively. You can summarise yourself or ask participants to summarise. In a presentation to a large group, the usual signal for the end of the presentation (and

applause) is ‘Thank you.’ In ongoing courses, the conclusion is also the logical place to provide a bridge to the next class – previewing the readings, assignments or key concepts to come.

### VISUAL AIDS

Visuals can dramatically increase learning, especially long-term memory. The key to designing visuals is to keep them simple, uncluttered and clear. Practical tips for using blackboards, overhead transparencies and slides will be reviewed and illustrated.

#### Blackboard

The blackboard is an inexpensive and easy to use visual aide that can provide students with an outline of your presentation, a visual representation of content (for example charts or diagrams), a record of students’ thoughts, and a summary of major points. Some tips include:

1. Plan how you will use the blackboard.
2. Use large writing so that everyone can read it and print legibly.
3. Talk to the audience – not to the board.
4. Use multiple colours of chalk to emphasise points or make diagrams.

#### Overhead Transparencies

Overheads can be easily made but require careful design in order to be effective. One of the virtues of the overhead is that you can leave the lights on while using it.

1. Use approximately one or two transparencies per five minutes.
2. Include only one major idea per transparency.
3. Limit to seven words per line and seven lines per overhead.
4. Use large type: 36–40 points for title and 24–30 points for major points. Use phrases, not sentences.
5. Simplify drawings or charts.
6. Check the projector for working order and focus it. Position the projector so that you do not block the screen with your body.
7. When showing the overhead, face the audience, point to the overhead itself, and turn off the projector when you are not using it.

#### Slides and Power Point Presentations

With the ease and availability of digital projectors and programs like Power Point, it is easy to create professional quality visuals.

1. Use approximately one or two slides per minute.
2. Include only one major idea per slide.
3. Limit to seven words per line and seven lines per slide.
4. Use large type, and upper and lower case letters in a consistent font.
5. Simplify drawings or charts.
6. Software libraries are available on the web to add illustrations and pictures.
7. Check the projector for good working order and focus your first slide.





8. Select a template that is uncluttered and uses a dark background with white and/or yellow print. Do not use red or green colored print because of colour blindness.
9. Use an electronic pointer carefully and turn it off when not needed.

## PRESENTATION DYNAMICS

Even the most well planned presentation can be boring and hard to understand if the presenter lacks the ability to convey the information in a dynamic fashion. Presentation dynamics include the skillful use of enthusiasm, movement, gestures, voice and eye contact.

### Enthusiasm

A good presentation is dramatised with energy and enjoyment of the material. Enthusiasm is the highest correlating item to overall teaching effectiveness in student ratings of teachers. Characteristics associated with enthusiasm include the use of humour, energy and passion. These behaviours motivate learning, spark interest in the topic and maintain interest in the presentation.

### Movement

Body movement can heighten interest, emphasize key ideas, communicate feelings and connect you with the audience. Stereotyped movement, such as

pacing, can be distracting. Movement from one area of the classroom to another can capture interest and shift the focus of the conversation to another part of the room.

### Gestures

Your hands and arms can help make a powerful point and can reinforce your interest in the topic. The larger the audience, the larger your gestures need to be. Inappropriate movements can distract from the presentation; keep your hands away from pockets, loose change or keys, microphone cords or other distracting objects.

### Voice

Vocal variety and verbal pauses can provide energy, boost interest and provide drama to a presentation. Project your voice so it can be easily heard at the back of the room. If you have a naturally quiet voice, increase the volume of your voice beyond what you normally feel comfortable with, and use a microphone. You can use pauses for emphasis at the end of a series of ideas, as a transition from one idea to the next and after a rhetorical question. If you want the audience to respond to a question, wait at least 3–5 seconds.

### Eye Contact

Members of the audience want to feel that you are talking to them

as individuals. Your gaze should make contact with all members of the audience. Consciously scan the audience from side to side, and up and down the rows of the room. Find three friendly faces scattered in the audience, one at each side and one in the middle of the audience, and move your gaze between these friends.

## NERVOUSNESS

Everyone, including the most veteran presenters, gets nervous before going 'on stage.' Some anxiety is helpful, providing motivation to practice and energy for enthusiasm during the presentation. If you feel nervous, acknowledge it to yourself and think of it as a friend rather than an enemy. All of the same physiological factors are at work when you are enthusiastic as when you are nervous – so just reframe nervousness as enthusiasm.

The best counter-measure to nervousness is good preparation, a sense of control. Be a master of your material and know your audience. Practice your presentation multiple times, and visualise positive mental images of a successful presentation; in other words rehearse for success.

Just before the presentation, do something about your nervousness. Arrive with sufficient time to prepare. Take a brisk walk to work off the tension, sit tall in your chair so that you look and feel confident, or try to relax yourself physically. Bunch up the muscles in your body and hold for five seconds, then relax. Repeat some positive self-statements such as 'I am well prepared for this presentation,' 'I have mastered this material,' 'I care about this audience and this topic,' 'The audience will love this presentation,' or 'I am going to enjoy this presentation.'

The first 90 seconds of your presentation will set the stage for

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Teaching at the University of Paris in medieval times.

the rest of your efforts. Create a positive mental image for yourself before you begin, move briskly to

the podium, arrange your notes, look up and smile. Find a friend or a friendly and responsive face in

the audience and make eye contact, smile, and act pleased to see him or her. Warmth helps to break the ice and begin a positive relationship with the individuals before you. Take a deep breath and begin with energy, using a positive attention-getting opener. Many people find it helpful to memorise the first sentence or two to ensure a strong launch to the talk. Never begin with an apology or a statement about how nervous you are.

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#### Suggested reading

Ailes R, Draushar J. *You Are the Message: Getting What You Want By Being Who You Are*. New York: Doubleday; 1989.

Boylan, B. *What's Your Point: The 3-Step Method of Making Effective Presentations*. Adams Media Corporation; 2001.

DiResta D. *Knockout Presentations: How to Deliver Your Message with Power, Punch, and Pizzazz*. Chandler House Press; 1998.

Hoff R. *I Can See You Naked: A Fearless Guide to Making Great Presentations*. New York: Andrews and McMeel; 1992.

Renfrow D, Impara J. *Making Academic Presentations Effectively!* *Educ Researcher*. 1989;**19**:3, 20–21.

Sarnoff D. *Make the Most of Your Best: A Complete Program for Presenting Yourself and Your Ideas with Confidence and Authority*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston; 1983.

Sarnoff D. *Never Be Nervous Again*. New York: Crown Publishers; 1987.

## PRESENTATION OBSERVATION FORM

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE:

\_\_\_\_\_

TOPIC:

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe specific observation in relation to each element of the presentation.

Introduction

Notes

1. Introduced topic, stated objectives, offered preview.
2. Gained attention and motivated learning.
3. Established climate for learning and for participation.

Body of lecture

Notes

1. Presented 3–5 main points in clear and organized fashion.
2. Provided supporting materials, examples, and summaries.
3. Used visuals, handouts, and/or demonstrations.
4. Varied presentations.

Conclusion

Notes

1. Summarized major principles, key points without introducing new materials.
2. Provided closure or stimulated further thought.

Teacher Dynamics

Notes

1. Exhibited enthusiasm and stimulated interest in content.
2. Used appropriate voice, gestures, movement, and eye contact.
3. Encourage active participation.
4. Used questions to stimulate thought and discussion.

Strengths

Recommendations