Effective Presentations

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Effective presentations

The ability to effectively present information to customers, clients, superiors and peers is an important skill in today's workplace, demonstrating expertise, poise and confidence in a sometimes difficult setting.

An effective presentation connects to the audience by:

- Telling an interesting story.

- Being logically and concisely structured.

- Speaking to its specific interests and/or needs.

- Appealing visually to the audience.

- Using straightforward and appropriate language.

- Addressing the topic at hand.

Presenters are evaluated by the quality of their content and what is said, but they are also (and often more so) assessed by how they deliver their content or how they say it, and how they look while saying it.

Purpose of presentation

Professional presentations will almost always have one of two purposes — to inform or to persuade.

Informative

- The purpose of an informative presentation is to promote understanding of an idea or to convey information.

- They are often used to provide people with information about a concept or idea that is new.

- These types of presentations are kept brief and to the point — stick to the facts and avoid complicated information.

- Examples of informative presentations include conducting training, discussing organizational changes and hosting an information session.

Persuasive

- The goal of a persuasive presentation is to get the participants to accept a belief/position, make a particular decision or take some action.

- It offers a solution to a controversy, dispute or problem.

- These types or presentations include the rationale for why the desired conclusion is in the audience's best interest.

- Examples of persuasive presentations include making sales calls to potential customers and proposing a business case to leadership.

Structuring your content

The substance of your presentation should follow a structured approach, beginning with an introduction, continuing with the body of the content and ending with a conclusion.

Introduction	• Get the audience's attention by clearly identifying "what is in it for them." • Establish your credibility as an authority on the subject matter. • Preview the main points you will discuss.
Body	• Deliver each main point with supporting details and anecdotes. • Clearly transition from one point to the next. • Tie each main point back to the overall argument you are making.
Conclusion	• Identify that you are transitioning to the conclusion. • Summarize the intent of your presentation and supporting arguments. • Allow time for audience questions and answers. • Thank the audience for their interest, time and engagement.

Using notes and visual aids

You may want to consider using notes, visual aids and handouts to guide you and your audience through the presentation. However, it is important to remember the following:

Notes

- Pause.
- Do not fidget.
- Do not read.
- Hold with pride.
- Do not apologize.

Visuals/handouts

- Keep them simple.
- Introduce the visual.
- Practice using the visuals.

PowerPoint presentations

- Do not overdo graphics.
- Avoid clip art / animations.
- Use simple, large font and few words.
- Use outlines and bullets instead of paragraphs with sentences.
- Consider using a printout of slides as notes.
- Keep color variety to a minimum.
- Test the setup.
- Talk to your audience.
- Do not read the slides.
- Consider a wireless mouse.

Using PowerPoint

PowerPoint is a common tool for creating presentations in today's workplace. Structuring your slides logically will help your audience understand your message.

Write a clear title that describes what the slide conveys.

Use lists and outlines to present content in an easily-consumed way.

Use the notes section to write out your speaker's notes.

Write a one to two sentence tagline to introduce the content of the slide.

Use images and graphics to reinforce the message of the slide.

Verbal Communication — Using Your Voice

Your voice is an essential tool that can be used to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade. The following are several elements of your voice that can be changed to fit the purpose of your communication and your audience:

- **Volume** — how loudly or quietly you speak
- **Speed** — how quickly or slowly you speak
- **Pitch** — how high or low your voice is
- **Expression** — the tone you use when you speak
- **Emphasis** — how you stress particular words

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- Your voice is a dynamic tool that you can use to bring attention to key parts of your presentation.
- The ability to alter your voice to reinforce your message is an important skill.
- Change the **volume** of your voice for emphasis of key points.

Leveraging your voice

Vocal skills are a valuable tool to keep your audience engaged and achieve the desired outcome of your presentation. There are four critical characteristics of vocal quality:

Projection	Pitch	Pace	Pause
• Project to the back of the room.	• Vary the tone of your speech.	• Change your delivery rate throughout.	• Give the audience a chance to reflect and absorb.
• Pretend the room is twice as deep.	• Watch the pitch at the end of your sentences.	• Beware of pace extremes that could be distracting.	• Give yourself a chance to breathe and collect thoughts.
• Breathe to project.	• Relax your throat to lower your voice.	• Slow your pace to emphasize significant points.	• Use pauses to help eliminate filler words such as "um," "like" and "uh."
• Alter volume strategically.			

Body language

Presentations are a performance. Similar to other forms of communication, how you as the presenter visually appear can have a significant impact on how your message is received. Be mindful of the following:

Eye contact

- Establish eye contact with a member of the audience (zone coverage if necessary).

- Hold the eye contact for the duration of one complete thought if possible.

Hand and arm gestures

- Use large gestures to emphasize or demonstrate points of your message.

- Return your hands/arms to neutral position at your side when not gesturing.

- Create the condition for gesturing, not the gesture.

Placement and movement of the feet

- Move strategically (for emphasis and variety).

- Stop and plant your feet solidly before speaking.

Managing nervousness

Being nervous before and during a presentation is natural. However, your ability to control that nervousness will impact the ultimate success of your presentation. To manage your nervousness, you should:

- Know your content, audience and venue.

- Memorize the first two minutes.

- Avoid consuming caffeinated beverages.

- Analyze what is making you afraid.

- Visualize success.

- Be aware of and avoid your nervous habits.

- Increase your volume.

- Find a friendly face in the crowd.

- Use your notes (effectively).

- Pause and breathe.
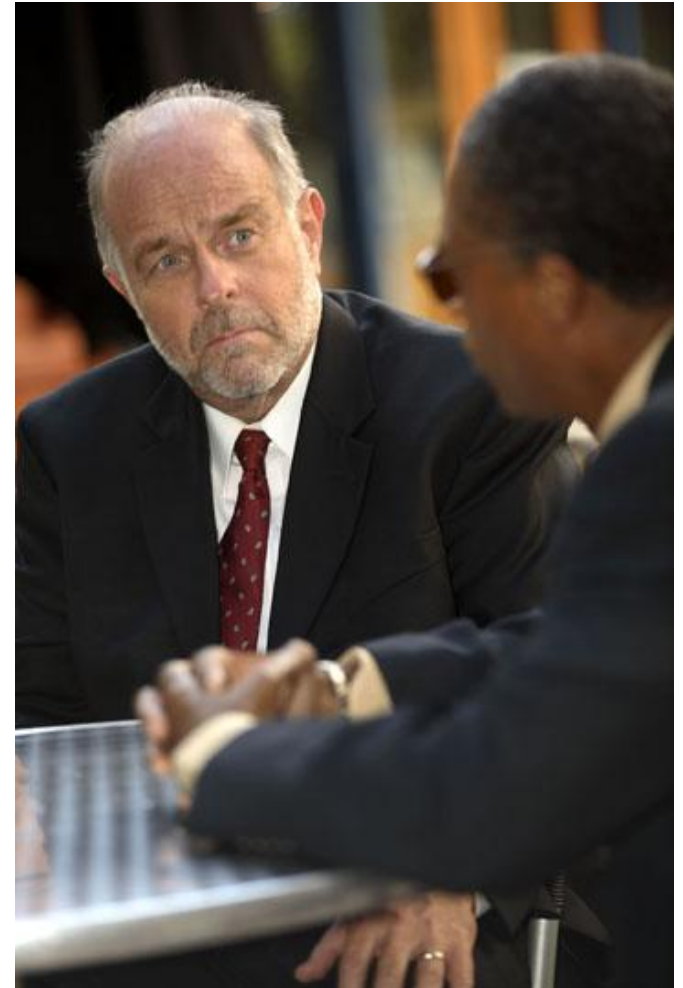
Final tips

Being able to present effectively is an important skill in the workplace. Remember the following tips when making a presentation:

- Understand the purpose of your presentation — is it persuasive or informative?

- Think from your audience's perspective — how can they best receive your message?

- Structure your presentation around the introduction, body and conclusion.

- Remember to keep visuals simple. The point is to aid in making your argument, not distract from it.

- Anticipate likely questions and proactively address them in the presentation.

- Do your homework and practice.

- Understand your nervous habits and work on managing them during practice runs.

- Test all technology you plan to use well in advance and be prepared to proceed in case of technical difficulties on presentation day.

- Relax. People will attend your presentation because you have some form of information that they are interested in or need to hear. Enjoy sharing it with them!

For more tips on creating, preparing and conducting presentations, please review the Effective Presentations Checklist Quick Reference Card.