



UNIT-9

Presentation Skills

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- Establish rapport with your audience
- Implement techniques to reduce nervousness and fear
- Prepare, practice, and deliver a short presentation

Unit 9

Presentation Skills

Why Make Presentations?

As you grow in your career, one way to demonstrate your knowledge and abilities is by making presentations. Perhaps you won't be making presentations at a board of directors meeting, but there will be opportunities to make presentations to your coworkers. For example, your boss may ask you to present a new company policy, or you volunteer to host a lunch-and-learn where you share some of your knowledge in the form of a presentation. You might make presentations on behalf of your boss at regular company meetings.

A formal presentation is a planned event where one or more people speak, visual aids such as PowerPoint or handouts are used, and the purpose is to pass along information that will be useful to the audience.

One key aspect in making a presentation is that it involves public speaking. Many people rate public speaking as their number one fear. Essentially, they are afraid the audience won't accept them; however, this is not true. The audience wants the speaker to succeed. They're glad you are the one speaking and not them. All you need to do in order to be a successful presenter is be prepared, confident, and relaxed. Good preparation will calm your nerves and help you avoid making mistakes.

Good Preparation

Whenever you are faced with giving a presentation, you should start by focusing on the purpose. Ask yourself: Why am I speaking? What do I want to achieve? What should the audience get from the presentation? What are their needs and expectations? What will be their attitude toward my ideas? What do they already know? Do they need to hear the presentation in a particular order?

Good presenting is about entertaining as well as conveying information. Your audience will remember more if they enjoy themselves.

You'll have approximately ten to fifteen seconds at the start of your presentation to make a positive first impression, so make sure your opening is strong and well rehearsed. Don't start with a joke, since jokes are risky. And, if something goes wrong, don't apologize for anything.

The average attention span of your audience is only about five to eight minutes, so you'll need to spice up your material to help keep your audience interested. For example, you might include stories, questions, pictures, cartoons, video clips, sound clips, graphs, audience participation, quotes, and props.

Structure

No matter how interesting your material is, your audience will have a difficult time following your presentation if it is carelessly assembled. The structure of your presentation should be simple, clear, and logical.

Start by breaking your main topic into three to five ideas. Then, present each idea along with supporting materials and evidence. Make sure you cite any sources for your data. Some common presentations structures include:

- Problem and solution
- Comparisons
- Chronological order
- Theory and practice
- Desire and action

If your presentation will be longer than forty-five minutes, you'll need to plan on giving your audience a break. You need to let everyone get up and stretch their legs, otherwise they'll fade out on your regardless of how engaging your presentation. After ninety minutes, you'll need to schedule a break to allow your audience to use the restrooms.

One thing you can do to take the pressure off yourself is to not talk the entire time. Plan your presentation to include audience participation. Have the audience work together to communicate and solve problems.

Starting and Ending Your Presentation

Before you begin your presentation, you will have gathered some ideas about who your audience is and how they will receive your message. As you begin speaking, your audience will be deciding whether you are worth listen to. Are you interesting? Are you energetic, enthusiastic, and sincere?

The first words out of your mouth must get your audience's attention. You must entice them to listen to you. There are several suggestions for how to start your presentation, including the following:

- Ask the audience a question.
- Quote from someone famous.
- Tell a story.
- Provide some historical background.
- Talk about a current issue in the news.
- Shock your audience with statistics, announcements, and warnings.

Whatever you decide to do, the opening must naturally lead into the body of your presentation. In addition to getting your audience's attention, your introduction should also provide a statement about the purpose of your presentation. You should include an agenda of topics that will be covered.

To conclude your presentation, you should give your audience something they can take with them by summarizing key points, calling for action, asking a question, telling another story, or using a prop or visual aid.

Visual Aids

Visual aids improve the retention of the spoken word by up to 70 percent. Therefore, if you can include printed visual aids (such as handouts) or a projected PowerPoint presentation, you will improve your audience's memory.

When creating PowerPoint presentations, follow these guidelines:

- Keep your slides uncluttered and simple.
- Don't have more than five words to a line.
- Don't have more than seven lines per slide.
- Don't overuse PowerPoint animations and sound effects.
- Use a readable serif font, such as Times, for your headlines.
- Use 14- to 16-point fonts for headlines.
- Use sans serif fonts for your body text. Arial is a popular sans serif font.
- Use no more than two different fonts on each slide.
- Use no more than size/bold/italic combinations.
- Use 12- to 14-point fonts for body text.
- Avoid all uppercase (capital letters) for the body text.
- All uppercase is okay for headings.

In addition to PowerPoint presentations, your visual aids can include overhead transparencies, flip charts, photographs, illustrations, maps, graphs, and diagrams.

Handouts

Handouts can also be useful in reinforcing the concepts of your presentation. You can use handouts to provide background material or additional reading material. You can distribute handouts before your presentation or make them available afterward. Handouts should be simple and directly related to the presentation.

For many business presentations that use PowerPoint slides, a copy of the slides is printed in handouts view, with two or three slides per printed page. This gives the audience a place to take notes. One key thing to watch for with handouts is distracting your audience. If you want the audience to pay attention to you rather than having their noses buried in your handouts, distribute the handouts when you are finished.

Solid Delivery

There are several ways you can deliver your presentation. For example, you can read your notes, memorize your speech, or speak extemporaneously. Free flowing or extemporaneous speaking is usually the most effective style of delivery, since you will be able to connect with your audience, make eye contact, and be sincere. While it is unnecessary to write out the entire script of your presentation, many presenters prefer this step. The process of writing helps them remember the presentation later. If you must, you can use cue cards to help jog your memory with key bullet points.

Always rehearse your presentation. Never go into an important presentation without giving yourself time to practice. Some people practice while driving to work. Others practice at home in front of a mirror. The more you practice, the more effective you'll be. As you refine your delivery, you'll be able to focus on body language, movement, use of hands, and eye contact. You'll also be more comfortable using your visual aids.

Always check the room where you'll be delivering your presentation. Give yourself enough time to rearrange the room if necessary. Try to get comfortable in the room before anyone else arrives.

While it is natural to feel nervous before a presentation, your job as a presenter is to harness that anxiety and use it to energize your presentation. Without this energy, your presentation can be lifeless.

You can control your nervousness by rehearsing, visualizing a successful presentation, and using positive thinking. Yogic breathing techniques are also helpful. By exhaling completely and holding your diaphragm tightly, you can squeeze out the nervousness. Deep breathing also helps.

As you begin delivering your presentation, speak naturally and loudly enough so you can be heard. Enunciate clearly and vary the pitch and the pace.

Pausing between thoughts is sometimes as important as the thoughts themselves. It gives the audience time to digest what you've just said.

Be aware of your body language, since the way you use your body enhances or weakens your message. Use your hands, your posture, and facial expressions to emphasize your message. Audiences are generally impressed by enthusiasm, energy, and sincerity. Your audience will see you this way if you stand tall, smile, act confident, keep eye contact, gesture when appropriate, and look as if you are enjoying yourself.

For most presentations, people will want to ask questions; therefore, it is important that you anticipate the kind of questions you'll get and be prepared to answer them. One good way to manage your presentation is to hold audience questions until the end of the presentation. In many cases, a question someone asks at the beginning is covered later in the presentation itself.

As your audience asks questions, listen carefully and make sure you understand the question. It's a good idea to rephrase the question in your own words, so that everyone can hear it and to confirm that you understood the question correctly. Your answer should be concise and refer to any visuals or slides in your presentation.

If a person asks a long and rambling question, paraphrase only part of it and give it a short answer. Usually, this will satisfy the person.

If people in your audience begin to talk amongst themselves, stop and look at them. You don't have to say anything, just look at them. They'll soon get the point. This technique can work with an entire unsettled audience, too.

Don't be defensive when answering questions. Keep your body language open and be as pleasant as possible. Don't make up an answer. If you don't know the answer, be honest and tell your questioner you'll follow up with an answer later. Don't get into arguments with an individual in the audience. And, if you need time to think about a question, take your time and pause.

Don't end your presentation with a "thank you." Your audience should be thanking you; you shouldn't be thanking them. The same goes for "any questions" or "that's it." If you plan time for taking questions, always have a final presentation summary ready that truly concludes your presentation. Inspire your audience. Energize them to follow your ideas and take action. End with a statement or a question that summarizes your presentation in one sentence. If there's only one thing your audience should do or remembers when you are finished, now is the time to make sure you communicate it.

Group Presentations

Sometimes business presentations are made by teams. The same principles apply whether you are delivering a presentation alone or in a group; however, you need to pay attention to the roles of the team members, plan the transitions between individual team member speeches, and provide each other with support and feedback.

Make an assessment of the team's strengths and weaknesses with regard to speaking skills. The strongest speakers should introduce and close the presentation.

The first speaker should introduce the group and try to capture the attention of the audience, motivate them, and give them a preview of the main ideas that will be covered in the presentation. The last speaker needs to summarize the presentation so that the key concepts are reinforced from a different perspective.

The transitions between speakers that occur in group presentations can sometimes be problems because each individual is working on his or her speech by him or her-self. Some attention needs to be given to the entire presentation as a whole and how each person contributes to the common purpose. Therefore, each person adds value to the group. So, rather than just announcing the next person to talk, you can introduce the important concepts the next speaker will cover.

While various members of the team are speaking, make sure you support the speaker. Don't fiddle with your notes or look off into space. Keep your attention on the speaker. If anyone in the audience looks at you, he or she should see that all your attention is focused intently on what the current speaker is saying.

After you finish your group presentation, spend some time reviewing what happened and learn how to make improvements in the future. Did you achieve your objective? Were your visual aids effective? Did the schedule and transitions work out OK? Did anything unexpected happen? What could you do differently next time?

The team members in a group presentation should coach each other throughout the process, from researching and writing to rehearsing and refinement. Then, when you've completed your presentation, you work together as a team of coaches, providing positive and constructive feedback as well as congratulations. By having everyone involved and contributing, a successful group presentation can be a very rewarding work experience.

Further Reading:

- ✓ Carnegie, Dale, and Joseph Berg Esenwein. *The Art of Public Speaking*. CreateSpace , 2011.
- ✓ Osborn, Michael, Randall Osborn, and Suzanne Osborn. *Public Speaking (8th Edition)*. Allyn & Bacon, 2008.
- ✓ Stevenson, Doug. *Never Be Boring Again*. Cornelia Press, 2003.