

PROFESSIONAL ORAL PRESENTATIONS

You have an important message that you need to present in person to your audience.

You have chosen to give this face-to-face presentation because

- you want your audience to all hear your message at the same time
- you want an immediate response and interaction
- and you want to build relationships.

You can use the same communication techniques for spoken professional presentations in every kind of business relationship, whether in a job interview, or in a sales presentation to a management team, or in a speech to hundreds.

To set the tone, your opening statement should always include that you are delighted to be with this audience, specifically at that time and at that place. You are honored by the invitation.

THE SPEAKER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Consider **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**, and ask where is your audience on the pyramid? Your preference is that the audience is sharing a peak experience with you! In reality, many in the audience are probably at the bottom level, tired, hungry, and in need of caffeine!

The audience will be asking, “what is in this for me? Why are you telling me this? What value does this have for me? How will this make a difference in my life?”

People will sit in one place and think they will listen for 90 minutes, but true audience retention is only for 20 minutes of material.

Think about Americans' behavior as we watch television, using the clicker quickly, impatiently, and constantly.

- Your difficult and complex job is to connect with this restless, passive audience and to get your message through accurately, coherently, clearly, and persuasively.
- Your task is to deliver the message in an appealing, artful, non-distracting way. A good speech sounds like a natural conversation with a friend, in a comfortable, enthusiastic manner.
- You need to show a defined purpose, a controlled passion for your subject, and a genuine relationship with your audience.
- You are a living example of your message. The audience will believe you if you believe you.

Jack Canfield, a motivational speaker, says, “tell the truth and speak from your heart. If you do that, 85% of what you do will come naturally. Your body will move, you'll make eye contact, you'll penetrate the audience, you'll tell jokes if you're supposed to, you'll be vulnerable. People will connect with you...”

Most business communication centers on solving problems and creating change. Your role is to provide in the body of your talk a mission statement, the required information,

and the structure for change, so the audience members can solve their problems when they go out into the world.

- Most audiences remember messages which are focused, clear, practical, motivational, and customized.
- The speaker must show integrity and be humble, honest, believable, and sincere.
- The speaker must have presence and style and prove eloquent and articulate.
- The speaker must show energy, enthusiasm, conviction, and power.
- When the speaker adds emotion, humor, and audience participation, the audience not only will enjoy the present performance but also will retain more of the message in the future.

As you go through these guidelines and suggestions, bring to mind a speaker whom you admire and find effective and magnetic, one whom you remember for substantive content, a natural style, and earnestness in presentation.

AUDIENCE STRATEGY

An ill-prepared speaker is insulting, and the audience will respond in a personal and hostile manner.

So, first, know the essential information and content of your message before you begin writing or talking.

Develop a thesis or mission statement which, by repeating three to six times during the speech, will increase the likelihood of audience retention to 90%.

Ask what do you want to accomplish and how can you help the audience understand a topic or solve a problem.

Then, tailor the message to the specific concerns of that population and focus on a “you-message.”

Do the research on audience needs and know the makeup of your audience. Research the audience, research their industry, and research key players on the team. Do not rely on your assumptions.

Ask questions:

- Who is in the audience? Who is your primary audience? Who is the hidden or secondary audience who might hear about your topic or message or might be affected by it?
- Were you invited to speak or is your talk unsolicited?
- What does this audience already know about the topic?
- What do they need to learn?
- What do they expect?
- What do they feel?
- Is this audience a mixture of novices and experts in the subject? If so, make sure your message is clear and understandable for everyone, and use examples and cases which will appeal to the more sophisticated audience members.
- How does this material apply directly to this audience?

- Does the audience need to know background?
- Do they know the jargon or technical language of the content?
- How much detail and evidence should you include?
- What is the audience expectation about the format and style of your presentation?
What is their corporate culture? You do not want to irritate or insult the audience.

CREDIBILITY

In the first 30-60 seconds the audience will size you up and make a judgment about the worth of spending its time and/or money with you.

Immediately in the introduction, establish your identity in relationship to this audience and determine what the audience needs to know about you and what you represent.

At the beginning and throughout your talk:

- Refer to your own rank or to someone whom the audience will respect.
- Explain your expertise and your experiences.
- Establish your shared values and your common ground.
- Show a polished and positive image.
- Create goodwill, showing you are fair and trustworthy.

Perception is everything: your enthusiasm for your subject, your proof of your knowledge and competence, and your thorough and accurate content will stay with the audience much longer than the specific facts you present.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

1. Do your research and know your subject.
2. Organize your information.
3. Decide what to say.

Goal-set: what do you want your audience to remember, to feel, or to do? Make sure your goals are specific, attainable, and worthwhile.

- Be mindful of the **audience memory curve** in which attention is more focused and tuned to the speaker at the beginning and the end of the communication.

Your task, of course, is to keep the audience interested and engaged at all points, especially the middle of your presentation when restlessness is likely to occur. Repeat key ideas at the beginning and the end.

Categorize or chunk your points. Use five to seven points maximum. Give a preview of these points. Then flag or identify the points each time that you say them.

- **Head, Heart, and Feet:**

Anita Roddick, founder of the international corporation, The Body Shop, defines entrepreneurs as those with their heads in the clouds, feet on the ground, and heart in the business.

Just so, every communication

- Should have content knowledge with solid information and logical analysis.
- Is human to human: people are driven by feelings and their biases, so emotional connections are powerful conveyors of the message.
- Must ask the audience to remember, to feel, and/or to do something.

Be memorable! Provoke the audience's attention and energy. To influence, motivate, and persuade, you must show your own feelings and passions.

Are you asking the audience for a measured response or for a big commitment?

The direct, timesaving, bottom-line approach will work 90% of the time. State your conclusions or recommendations at the beginning and make a case by logical analysis, while pointing out the value as you go along.

Your goal with this approach is that your audience will follow your reasoning and work through the problem to mutual agreement.

Use **the indirect, mystery-story approach** if your audience is hostile or negative, if your message is sensitive or negative, and if your credibility is low.

Carefully build your case in small steps in a thoughtful progression, trying to find areas of mutual agreement; then, give your recommendations at the end.

Do not tax your audience with complex, large requests.

Use **David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory** to organize your message in the natural progression human beings learn any subject:

- **Why**: show why the audience should care personally about the subject matter and want to solve the problem.
- **What**: gather, order, and analyze the right amount of content information to solve the problem.

You should prepare four times the amount of material and research you will actually use in the presentation.

Mark Twain said you have got to know 75% more about your subject than your audience does.

Winston Churchill suggested that you plan on 45-60 minutes of preparation for each minute of speaking time.

Brian Tracy says you need to know 100 words for every word you use in your talk.

- **How does it work**: give the audience a plan or a process to use to manage the information and solve the problem when you are not around to coach them.
- **Benefits**: link your closing to the message goal. Help your audience personalize the rewards and advantages that will ensue from your message and recommendations.

Yet, another technique to help your audience remember your talk comes from Brian Tracy, a leading authority on the development of human potential and personal

effectiveness, the “windshield wiper method of speaking”: left brain, right brain, left brain, right brain, etc. Fact, story/anecdote, fact, story/anecdote...practical, illustration, practical, illustration...

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL HOW-TO’S TO PRACTICE, PRACTICE, AND PRACTICE MORE!

Plan on an hour of practice for each minute of talk. Rehearse with real people.

1. Do not write out your entire talk because you will be tempted to read the script, and, if you lose your place, you will panic and stop or you, more likely, will begin to drone.

If you try to memorize the entire speech, you might clutch if you forget any part. Also, most likely you will begin to sound robotic in the sound and rhythm of your words.

However, know the gist of your opening, mission statement, transitions, and closing. You want unhindered, direct contact with your audience at these critical moments. Making this connection at these points will give you confidence and sell your message.

- Write out an outline, so that you speak from notes.
- Decide on paper, note cards, or PowerPoint slide commentaries.
- Practice and rehearse for content and timing.
- Practice with the visual aids and technology you will use.
- Rehearse until your talk is literally second nature. You want to be in the “zone” as you speak.

2. In general, keep close to your audience; try not to use a podium because a physical barrier can become an emotional barrier between you and the audience.

The more formal the presentation, the higher and farther you stand from your audience.

In a less formal delivery, the speaker stands while the audience sits, but both are on the same level and in closer proximity.

Seating also denotes how formal the presentation: straight-line chairs resist interaction while a horseshoe formation encourages discussion.

Do not play with your notes or the microphone.

3. Speakers make their impact with audiences through **eye contact**. Do not hide behind your notes or script. Your eyes must connect and never let go.

Learn to sweep and pan the entire audience, slowly and deliberately, being careful not to favor any one group or side of the room.

Keep moving your eyes and thus your head in a natural, evenly paced fashion, not darting about in a random pattern. Use your body to make eye contact—simply moving your head looks weird!

As you make your tour of the room, hold your eye contact with an individual glance for a three-four second connection and finish your thought or statement before you move on.

Your bonded concentration on even one person helps you bond with the entire audience.

Jack Canfield talks about going into “a state of communion with my audience.”

At first, you will be tempted to relate to friendly faces. Eventually learn to meet every face, no matter how hostile. You can turn around many people who are negative by your open and pleasant manner: your goal is to sell your message to as much of your audience as possible.

Do not go longer than ten seconds without eye contact with someone in your audience, and do not give your speech to the ceiling or to the floor.

In large audiences, even if you cannot see distinct eyes, pretend that you do see each face clearly, so that you make an emotional contact with each person. You can capture the entire audience by catching them one-at-a-time.

Think of giant upside-down pyramids at random places in the large audience. As you look at a face in the bottom point of the pyramid, all others in the triangle will think you are looking at them directly.

4. Choose your **facial expressions** purposefully and appropriately, whether you want to be serious or smiling, intense, or playful.

Make sure your face is moving and not a death mask! Most speakers forget to smile; a smile both humanizes you and draws your audience toward you. Remember that you are having a conversation with the audience.

5. Choose your **body language and gestures** intentionally.

Remember, when you appear on the speaking platform (and even before the presentation), you are stepping into a “fish bowl” and will be scrutinized and judged.

Paying attention to your behavior and demeanor is important at all times. The actual speech is really your second connection—the first is when you walk in to the room.

Everyone is nervous giving a speech and generally the audience appreciates that fact; however, if you call attention to your anxiety, the audience will ignore the content of your message and watch and wait for you to get sick or faint!

If your hands shake uncontrollably, put them beside your back **for a moment**.

You want to turn that fear and sour stomach into composure and calm, then into energy and excitement for your message. Doing so, you will experience a rush of endorphins, which give you a feeling of well being and happiness.

Knowing how to translate stress into positive energy will result in an effective speech--and a longer life.

- Pay attention to your **posture**. Stand up straight. Distribute your weight evenly on both **feet**, which should be shoulder-width apart.

You should not rock back and forth from your toes to your heels, and do not lock your knees into a rigid position.

Do not lean, sway, or jut out your hip; do not pace.

- Discover your own natural gesturing style. You want to connect with the audience in a friendly, open manner, losing any nervous habits.

Ask your friends to describe how you move and act when you are relaxed. Then practice your speech by mimicking that informal behavior.

Use a variety of movements to keep the audience interested.

Do not make quick, jerky motions with your **arms and hands**. Have your hands comfortably at your sides, and, when appropriate, gesture with an open hand and your arms away from your body.

Most of your gestures should be below your face and above your waist.

Do not point or jab at your audience with a finger or a closed fist, a hostile gesture. If you must use this tactic from habit, try holding your pointer and middle finger together to soften the gesture or showing the open palm of your hand.

Do not clutch the podium or put your hands on your hips, behind your back (except for a moment in a whiff of anxiety), in your pockets, across your chest, or clasped in front.

- Do not scratch or tug anywhere.
 - Do not play with your hair or toss your head back to get your hair out of your face; choose a short hairstyle or one that ties your hair back or up.
 - You can create your own security blanket by surreptitiously touching your index finger to your thumb to keep you calm. This relaxation technique works!
6. Your **voice** has a critical effect on your presentation.
- Stand tall and relaxed, which puts your vocal chords, lungs, and diaphragm in line to send your voice easily across the room.

- Consider your **inflection** and **pitch**, keeping your voice even and not too high or too low. Use a positive and expressive **tone** for a pleasant rhythm; avoid a lilt or a monotone. Be relaxed and conversational.
 - Vary your **volume** to gain attention. However, avoid a booming, offensive sound level by projecting your voice naturally to those in the back of the room. Be aware that your volume usually drops at the end of a sentence or when you use visual aids. Practice with the microphone if you have access to one; you speak in a different way with a lavalier, hand-held, or speaker-mounted mike.
 - Vary your **rate**; watch your audience for signs that you are going too slow or too fast. Try to use a conversational tempo; most people go too fast and then overcompensate by speaking in an exaggerated slow pace.
 - Be careful not to mumble, slur, or trail off; enunciate each word, especially including the consonants at the end of every word. Pause when the grammar calls for it and when you change major thoughts. Avoid words which give you trouble in ordinary speech.
 - Beware of “**upending**,” the valley-girl sound, which turns a declarative sentence into one that sounds like a question.
 - Watch out for **pause-fillers**, “ah, oh, um, ok, er, tch, like, you know...” These sounds interrupt the flow and show nervousness or uncertainty about your next words. To eliminate fillers from your speech, first identify your personal habit; then, become aware every time you insert the filler; finally, pause before you make the sound. In a short time, you will be able to speak filler-free.
 - Be careful about repeated clearing your throat, swallowing, or wetting your lips.
7. Pay attention to your **word choice**.
- Use simple, straightforward language, “spoken-style” with shorter sentences. Have an ear for rhythm and flow. Use correct grammar.
 - Use emotional words for power and “heart” and metaphors for visual imagery. Take the time to study the beauty and power of words, so that your word choice is exact and compelling.
 - Avoid clichés, euphemisms, bland language, and inappropriate jargon.
8. Develop your personal style and presence, your charisma.
- Your energy and enthusiasm can be contagious and will encourage your audience to listen and participate; be a cheerleader for your message.
 - Use your warmth and your smile when you say at the beginning of your presentation, “how delighted I am to be with you in this particular place at this particular time to talk about this particular subject,” and at the close of your presentation with your “thank-you’s.”
 - Take note of your attire.
 - Dress to project the image you want to create, one which will help sell your message.
 - Be meticulously groomed—scrubbed and shined. Your physical presence contributes to your charisma and allure.
 - Choose clothes which are one level of formality above the dress of your audience, and if you do not know how your audience will be dressed, select conservative wardrobe and accessories.

- Avoid jewelry, other than a watch or wedding ring, especially any piece which can jangle and distract.
 - Dress for the audience on the far side of the room; while many subtle patterns are fine, some make the eyes blink and distract the audience from listening.
 - Try out your clothes and shoes ahead of your performance. You do not want to tug at your suit or shirt or flinch from the pain of too-tight shoes.
9. With each presentation, take the time to give yourself a mini-evaluation:
- Set three realistic goals for each performance.
 - Assess your presentation with three positive achievements and three suggestions for improvement in your next assignment.

TEAM POISE AND PRACTICE

The success of any group presentation depends on the cooperation and smooth, seamless performance of all members. This effort calls for organization, patience and a lot of practice.

1. Except for the speaker, have all members sit, if possible; otherwise, all stand in an attentive, yet relaxed manner.

Do not fidget, slouch, or sit with your knees open or crossed at the knee. Women may cross their ankles; men keep their feet flat on the floor.

2. Always introduce all team members before you begin.

When not speaking, team members should divide eye contact between looking at the speaker with interest and support and scanning the audience for reactions, agreement, confusion, or restlessness.

Make sure all your team faces look alive and intelligent; be careful not to look grim, angry, bored, or confused because if your faces are such, why should the audience be engaged?

Your responsibility, whether speaking or supporting the speaker, is always to read the faces and respond to your audience.

3. Keep focused and consistent as a team and maintain a high energy level throughout your entire presentation: **this is an acting job!**

Your team members' performances must be uniform; individual, standout presenters actually hurt your overall presentation by highlighting the weaknesses in others.

Never allow any one individual to speak too long.

To avoid monotony of topic and of any one member's voice, vary and recycle your group members.

A single speaker will have a difficult time sustaining the appropriate energy, and the group will have a difficult time maintaining natural, wholehearted support for the speaker and connection with the audience.

Always be prepared for audience interruptions throughout your presentation. This practice is common in academia and in business. Do not take it personally and/or show your frustration.

4. Practice your transitions, both content and physical, over and over until your words and motions are seamless.

Rehearse moving team members from place to place. Think of this routine as choreography: the dance should be smooth and subtle. Any logistical complexity should not be obvious to the audience.

If the person in charge of the visual aids/technology is presenting as a group member, this person, too, must stay connected with the audience.

Also, include the technology you use as a well-integrated team member.

5. At the end of your formal presentation, when answering questions, respond in a unified way as a team; together concentrate on the questioner and the audience.

Decide whether you will sit or stand and who will moderate the questions.

When answering a question, devote 25% of your attention to the actual questioner and 75% of your time to the entire audience.

First, paraphrase the question to see if you are accurate.

If you cannot respond with a good answer at that moment, make sure you get the proper contact information from the questioner, so you can transmit an answer as soon as possible after the presentation.

6. Plan your team's appearance so you look coordinated and professional.

7. Timing is crucial; stick to the assigned or agreed-upon time limit. In business, this critical commitment can mean the difference between success and failure.