

Speaking Globally

A TEAM CANADA INC ON-LINE GUIDE FOR EXPORTERS



Canada

About this guide

Speaking Globally: An Exporter's Guide to Effective Presentations is best used in its on-line version, which allows users to link directly to Web site references in the guide. This PDF version is intended for users who wish to print the document to read and refer to offline. If you wish to access the Web resources listed in this document, simply use the online version and click on the hot links.

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**Speaking Globally:
A Team Canada Inc On-Line Guide for Exporters**

- Introduction**4
 - The Power of Presentations4
 - Why Culture Counts4
 - Using this Guide4

- Chapter 1: Research Your Presentation**5
 - 1.1 Learn About Your Target Market5
 - 1.2 Understand Your Presentation Audience5
 - 1.2.1 Audience Analysis Questions6
 - 1.2.2 Answering Audience Analysis Questions6
 - 1.3 Set Presentation Objectives6
 - 1.4 Are You Ready? A Checklist8
 - 1.5 How Can I Learn More? A Resource List8
 - 1.5.1 Market Studies and Country-Specific Reports8
 - 1.5.2 Information on Countries Around the World9
 - 1.5.3 International Business/Export Development9

- Chapter 2: Develop Your Presentation**10
 - 2.1 Develop Your Presentation Structure10
 - 2.1.1 Brainstorm Your Main Ideas10
 - 2.1.2 Develop a Presentation Outline10
 - 2.1.3 Sample Presentation Outline11
 - 2.2 Add Supporting Data11
 - 2.3 Ensure Your Presentation Structure is Effective12
 - 2.4 Create a Structural Roadmap12
 - 2.5 Be Flexible13
 - 2.6 Develop Effective Opening and Closing Sections13
 - 2.6.1 Create Effective Openings13
 - 2.6.2 Develop Solid Endings15
 - 2.7 Rehearse Your Presentation16
 - 2.8 Are You Ready? A Checklist16

Chapter 3: Enhancing a Presentation Using Visual Aids17

 3.1 What are visual aids?17

 3.2 Why are visual aids important?17

 3.3 Suggestions for Using Visual Aids18

 3.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Visual Aids21

 3.4.1 Overhead Transparencies21

 3.4.2 35 Millimetre Slides22

 3.4.3 Computer Projected and Electronic Media23

 3.4.4 Flip Charts24

 3.5 Prepare Written Materials24

 3.5.1 Speaker Notes24

 3.5.2 Audience Handouts25

 3.6 Know Your Equipment and Environment26

 3.6.1 Presentation Equipment26

 3.6.2 Presentation Environment26

 3.7 Are You Ready? A Checklist29

Chapter 4: Delivery Dynamics30

 4.1 Pay Attention to Protocol30

 4.1.1 Consider Introductions30

 4.1.2 Recognize VIP's30

 4.1.3 Take Care with Attire31

 4.1.4 Gender Considerations31

 4.1.5 Age Considerations31

 4.2 Adapt Your Spoken Message31

 4.2.1 Learn the Language32

 4.2.2 Internationalize Your Language32

 4.2.3 Adapt Your Style and Pace33

 4.2.4 Use Interpreters Carefully34

 4.2.5 Use Humour Carefully35



4.3 Make the Best of Body Language35

 4.3.1 Gestures36

 4.3.2 Body Language and Emotion36

 4.3.3 Eye Contact36

 4.3.4 Personal Space37

 4.3.5 Be Yourself37

4.4 Are You Ready? A Checklist37

Chapter 5: Impact and After38

5.1 Monitor Audience Response38

 5.1.1 Monitor Visual Feedback38

 5.1.2 Know What to Expect38

5.2 Capitalize on Questions and Answers39

 5.2.1 Prepare for Questions39

 5.2.2 Understand That Audience Reaction Can Vary39

 5.2.3 Encourage Participation40

 5.2.4 Addressing Questions41

5.3 Follow Up After Your Presentation41

 5.3.1 Advance Your Agenda41

 5.3.2 Assess Your Performance42

5.4 Are You Ready? A Checklist42

Chapter 6: Useful Resources43

6.1 Websites43

 6.1.1 Cultural Considerations43

 6.1.2 Presentations44

 6.1.3 Technical/Technology Issues45

6.2 Books45

 6.2.1 Cultural Considerations45

 6.2.2 Presentations46

6.3 Audiocassettes46

Introduction

The Power of Presentations

The ability to make effective presentations is one of the most important skills required in today's business environment. Whether you are speaking to a large group or conducting a small meeting, your oral presentation is a key communication tool. You may be an expert in your field, but if you can't get your ideas across, you're not likely to be successful.

Presentation skills take on an even greater importance when communicating with people from other countries. You can't assume that presentation skills, which work in Canada, will be effective across languages and cultures. In the case of language, you might have to speak in a second language, hire an interpreter or, at the very least, modify your pace and style. Cultural differences can create even greater challenges because they are often subtle and difficult to decipher.

Why Culture Counts

In addition to the easily observed dress, food and folklore, culture also consists of the less easily observed knowledge, values, beliefs, customs and laws shared by members of a society. Although words, protocol, mannerisms and ways of interacting may appear similar in other cultures, they may have an underlying meaning that is very different from yours. It is important to realize that people from other cultures don't necessarily think, communicate, and do things the same way that Canadians do. Understanding the cultural characteristics of a particular market audience will help you to customize what you say and how you say it.

An effective presentation involves two-way communication. It's not just what you say that counts, but how well your message is received and understood. Cultural sensitivity combined with effective presentation skills will help you establish trust and lay the foundation for successful international business.

Using this Guide

This guide provides step-by-step information for creating effective international presentations and understanding the cultural challenges of presenting your product or service internationally. The six chapters that follow contain presentation guidelines as well as cultural considerations and case studies. You can use the modules sequentially, or focus on a specific area of need. Each module begins with a summary of content which allows you to easily locate your desired information. Readiness checklists appear at the end of each chapter to help ensure that you have covered all the components of a successful international presentation. Finally, you may wish to consult the list of websites and written resources provided to further improve your knowledge and skills.

Chapter 1: Research Your Presentation

1.1 Learn About Your Target Market

Knowing your market is a critical first step in effective presentation planning. This doesn't mean simply gathering competitive intelligence, determining market demand or setting your prices. Before developing your presentation it is essential to understand the local culture and business norms in your target market. This includes researching local:

- History
- Current events
- Religion
- Values
- Social institutions and norms
- Politics
- Geography and regional differences
- Gender roles
- Business ethics and protocol
- Language and second language proficiency
- Technology

This knowledge will help you establish a cultural context for the preparation and delivery of your presentation.

Here are some suggestions for ways to begin your research.

- Read books, newspaper and magazine articles about the culture and business norms of the area.
- Talk with others who have worked in the country or worked with your target market. Consider people with this firsthand knowledge as key informants.
- Talk to Canadians who are originally from the country you plan to target.
- Use the services and knowledge of trade officers in the target country. For contacts in the Trade Commissioner Service offices abroad, visit www.infoexport.gc.ca and click on *Our Offices Abroad*.
- Review government, business and tourism websites, including those listed in the Resource List at the end of this section.

1.2 Understand Your Presentation Audience

Business people make one consistent request of presenters, seminar leaders and speakers in the international arena: that the material presented be relevant and useful to them, not merely academic and theoretical.¹

Many Canadians miss opportunities to successfully present their products or services to foreign audiences by not taking audience interests into consideration. Companies have also lost out by making incorrect assumptions about an audience's background level of knowledge. Content that is too simplistic may make an audience feel inferior. Content that is too technical may leave them feeling confused or left out. Without appropriate research into your local audience, you are probably wasting the time and effort you put into your international presentation.

"If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six sharpening my axe."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

¹ Harris, P.R. and Moran, R.T., *Managing Cultural Differences*, Gulf Publishing Co., Houston, TX, 1996. p.19.

1.2.1 Audience Analysis Questions

Conduct a thorough audience analysis when preparing to present in a foreign market. Answer the following questions:

- Who will attend?
- Why are they attending?
- What are their job titles and responsibilities?
- What is their first language?
- Do they have a good understanding of English/French?
- What is their educational background, experience and level of knowledge concerning the subject?
- Who are the key individuals or decision-makers in the audience?
- What are their needs and interests?
- What does the audience expect from me?
- What are their attitudes toward my product or service and company?

1.2.2 Answering Audience Analysis Questions

It is often difficult to find out about your audience in advance when presenting in a foreign country. However, there are strategies that can help. Here are some suggestions:

- Check with Canadian trade commissioners in the host country – particularly if they have made arrangements for you or your delegation. These officers may have RSVP lists or be able to provide background on audience members.
- Contact other businesses that have experience in your target market.
- Request your local host company to provide attendee information and objectives.
- Ask if you may speak with a random sampling of the audience to determine what they would like to know. This will provide you with an opportunity to identify audience needs and assess language comprehension and proficiency.
- Consult with your local joint venture partner or agent if you have one.
- Arrive early to greet and meet people before your presentation. Ask questions such as why people are attending, and what they hope to get out of the presentation. Take note of names, companies, and objectives. Use this information to personalize your presentation.

“Our plans miscarry because they have no aim.”

SENECA
(an ancient philosopher)

1.3 Set Presentation Objectives

Your presentation objectives will vary significantly depending on your market. Different cultures may value different ways of doing things. For example, some cultures establish trust and collaboration on a relationship basis rather than a legal basis. In this case, the time and effort one dedicates to developing genuine relationships has a greater influence on success than the price or quality of one's product or service.

A CASE OF CULTURE

One Canadian spent enormous time and energy on his presentation to a Southeast Asian government agency. His initial excitement over the packed auditorium later turned to disappointment when he discovered that the room was filled with individuals whose attendance was mandatory. The audience had neither expertise in the field or decision-making authority.

In many countries it is unrealistic to think that one great presentation will strongly influence the outcome of your marketing efforts. It may take successive presentations, meetings and years of personal interaction and relationship-building to achieve your goals. Be aware of the impact of cultural factors on the success of your efforts. Adapt your personal expectations as well as your professional presentation content and approach.

Ensure that your presentation's objectives are SMART:

- **Specific:** In a concise and clear statement, what is the purpose of your presentation? (i.e.: To inform the market audience of your company product and service.)
- **Measurable:** Ensure that you have a means to measure or gauge whether your presentation has achieved its anticipated results. (i.e.: Ask the audience to recall the facts they have learned about your company's products and services.)
- **Achievable:** Consider language and cultural challenges as well as your own ease in public presentations. Are your presentation objectives achievable? Are your professional expectations realistic?
- **Results-Oriented:** What is the goal or end product of your presentation? Complete this sentence: As a result of my presentation, the audience/key-decision maker will ... "agree to a follow-up meeting", "approve our proposal", "review our contract", etc.
- **Timely:** Considering potential language and cultural challenges, do you have the time to effectively and appropriately deliver your presentation within the time allotted? Remember, if interpretation services are required you must double the time allowed for your presentation.

Other presentation tips

Know your main message

This is the one thing you want your audience to remember two weeks after your presentation. Try this: If you could say only one sentence to your audience, what would it be?

Example:

"You should use our technology because it will streamline your production processes and significantly reduce costs."

Consider “What’s In It For Me?” (WIFM) from the audience perspective

List three direct benefits the audience will derive from your presentation. Ensure these are relevant to the local culture and circumstances. Early in your presentation, point out your presentation objectives to the audience. As well, inform your audience of the benefits you feel they will derive from your presentation. This will help people stay focused.

In concluding your presentation, repeat the process. Recall your presentation objectives. Repeat what you believe are the benefits your audience derived from the presentation.

A CASE OF CULTURE

In some cultures you may encounter an audience that cares about cost, efficiency and the bottom line. These are cultures that hold a linear view of time – *time is money*, time can be spent, saved, used or wasted, planning is important. In another cultural context the audience may view time as cyclical in nature – *time is plentiful*, there is always enough time. In such cultures, attitudes toward planning and the bottom-line are more long-term. You may need to present a long-term vision for your business initiative to take root.

1.4 Are You Ready? A Checklist

- Research the local history, culture and business environment of your target market
- Understand your presentation audience by conducting an audience analysis
- Set clear, appropriate presentation objectives
- Identify audience WIFM and benefits
- State your main presentation message or theme in a single sentence

1.5 How Can I Learn More? A Resource List**1.5.1 MARKET STUDIES AND COUNTRY-SPECIFIC REPORTS**

International Trade Canada - Market Information

www.infoexport.gc.ca

Industry Canada: Country Specific Market Research Reports

strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc-mrkti/ibinddc/engdoc/1a1.html

Foreign Affairs Canada - Country Profiles

www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/ctry/profiles-en.asp

Industry Canada: Trade Data

strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_mrkti/tdst/engdoc/tr_homep.html

Industry Canada: Researching Markets

www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_x/engdoc/researching_markets.html?guides=e_res

Trade Commissioner Service: Market Reports by Industry Sector

www.infoexport.gc.ca/ie-en/IndustrySector.jsp

Team Canada Inc, Export Source: Identifying your Market

www.exportsource.ca/gol/exportsource/site.nsf/en/es01878.html

1.5.2 INFORMATION ON COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

Centre for Intercultural Learning (from the Canadian Foreign Service Institute)
www.e-thologies.com/default.asp

NewsDirectory--a free guide to all foreign online English-language media.
www.newsdirectory.com/index.php

CIA World Factbook
www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook

The Internationalist: Center for International Business and Travel
www.internationalist.com/travel/
www.internationalist.com/business/

U.S. Library of Congress: Country Studies
lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html

1.5.3 INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS/EXPORT DEVELOPMENT

Marco Polo: A Guide to Cross-Cultural Marketing
strategis.gc.ca/marcopolo

Global Edge Web Portal for International Business (Michigan State University)
ciber.bus.msu.edu/busres

International Business Resource Connection
www.ibrc.business.ku.edu/index.html

Export Your Services... Take a World View
www.exportsource.ca/worldview

Web of Culture: guidance and certification for global business
www.webofculture.com

2

Chapter 2: **Develop Your Presentation**

2

Chapter 2: **Develop Your Presentation**

2.1 Develop Your Presentation Structure

Use these steps and suggestions to clarify and organize the content of your presentation.

2.1.1 Brainstorm Your Main Ideas

By reviewing Chapter 1 you have analyzed your audience and developed your presentation objectives. Now it is time to identify and prioritize the specific topics that you need to present to achieve your objectives. Brainstorm the ideas that came to mind as you analysed your audience and identified objectives. These will guide the content of your presentation. Write them down and prioritize them from most to least important.

2.1.2 Develop a Presentation Outline

After you brainstorm your main ideas, develop your outline. Here are the steps to consider:

1. Write down each of your main ideas/topics leaving space beneath each.
2. Under each idea or topic, write out the main message you want to convey.
3. Under each main message write the key points to include in your presentation. These should state:
 - Why the message is important to your audience.
 - How it will benefit them.
4. Determine what supporting data is required to emphasize or communicate your messages.

Remember to *keep things simple*. This is especially important when presenting to an audience for whom English or French is not their first language. Aim for greater organizational simplicity than used for standard presentations. Focus on your top three to four ideas only. This will help ensure that your message comes through with clarity and is remembered by your audience. Don't try to cover the entire territory, only what is essential to achieve the stated objectives and of interest to your audience. Realize that you may need several presentations over time to achieve your final goal.



2.1.3 Sample Presentation Outline

Following is a simple outline that may be used to guide your presentation. It will ensure that your presentation message is concise and clear.

| |
|---|
| Name your main idea/topic: |
| 1. Define key message: |
| 1.1 State why this message should be important for your audience: |
| 1.2 State the benefits of your product or service: |
| 1.3 Identify data (reports, evaluations, testimonials, etc.) to support your message: |

2.2 Add Supporting Data

Supporting data will enhance the strength and credibility of your presentation. The evidence or supporting data you will need to convince your audience will vary depending on your audience. Different cultures respond to different information. It is important to understand these differences and to adapt your presentation accordingly.

A CASE OF CULTURE

It is important to acknowledge that in any country or culture your market audience will be composed of participants with a variety of learning styles. Some will respond to your presentation based on "gut feeling", others will be gathering and storing a wide range of information, while others still, may be searching for data synthesized into a concise, logical form. Your presentation should deliver content in a variety of formats to appeal to a variety of learning styles. You should consider using anecdotes, supporting quotations and testimonials as well as known facts and reported statistics.

There are therefore two approaches to developing your ideas and data:

1. **Logical** – ideas and supporting data are rational, clear, direct and overt.
2. **Psychological** – ideas and supporting data are feeling-oriented, covert and indirect.

Your presentation should incorporate both approaches to appeal to a variety of learning styles.

Tips for presenting supporting data:

- Limit what you present; don't share all the facts and figures. Choose to include only the largest, latest or most important.
- Plan to cover less material in international settings.
- Speak slowly to an audience whose first language is not your own.
- Raising your voice does not increase comprehension. Use concise, complete sentences.
- Use the rule of three: people remember groups of three ideas or points.
- Make information relevant to the listening audience.
- When using acronyms or analogies ensure they are meaningful or relevant to the local audience.

2.3 Ensure Your Presentation Structure is Effective

The order of ideas and information in your presentation is crucial to ensuring the audience understands what you are talking about. Create a clear roadmap for the audience by paying special attention to the structure of the presentation. In addition keep in mind that presentation structure can be influenced by culture.

A CASE OF CULTURE

In some cultures, such as mainstream North American business culture, presentations are usually structured in a linear format with information proceeding directly from beginning to end. Presentations usually begin with some rationale or theory followed by a summary of facts and data to build a case in support of the rationale or theory. Presentations end with a summary and conclusion, often restating the opening position. Presentations of this nature follow chronological, sequential or categorical structures.

In contrast, other cultures may take a more diffused approach to structuring ideas and information in preparing a public presentation. A presentation by a businessperson from such a culture may seem to begin in what appears to you to be the middle or to proceed in a roundabout fashion without ever reaching a clear conclusion. The presentation is made "relative" to the audience, the season or perhaps even the presenter. In the same way that some Canadians might feel that such a structure is unfocused, the linear approach may seem aggressive or simplistic to other cultures.

2.4 Create a Structural Roadmap

The key to an effective presentation is to make the pattern of organization crystal clear to the audience – to create a roadmap for the audience. Research has shown that audiences hear what they expect to hear, not necessarily what is presented. Adhere to this expression: “Tell them what you’re going to tell them. Then tell them. Then tell them what you’ve told them.” Thus even if your presentation does not follow a structure that is familiar to your audience, they will know where you are going.

Here are some tips for structuring your presentation:

- Use the same pattern of organization throughout your presentation.
- Use visual aids to help orient your audience. Include a written handout outlining the presentation objectives and agenda.
- Imply or state what is to come next.
- Make clear transitions between sections or phases.
- Use enumeration: “Five reasons why....” or use enumeration combined with alliteration: “The Four P’s of Marketing: Product, Price, Place, Promotions”.
- Build bridges from familiar territory to unknown, from simple ideas to complex.
- Present accepted ideas before controversial ones.
- Provide frequent summaries to help cement key points in your listeners’ minds.
- Repeat key points at the beginning, middle, and end of your presentation to accommodate differing cultures: some expect big ideas to be presented first, others, last.

2.5 Be Flexible

Be prepared to adapt and restructure your presentation before or as you deliver it if necessary. What could happen? For example, a key member of your audience may be called away from the presentation. Or, it may be locally acceptable for an audience to arrive 20 minutes late, leaving you just 15 minutes to present instead of 30. Having a clear and flexible structure will help you meet these challenges.

Finally, whether you are presenting new material or modifying an old presentation, it is essential that you customize your material for the local culture. A good rule of thumb is to modify one fifth of your presentation to suit a particular situation or audience.

2.6 Develop Effective Opening and Closing Sections

Presentation openings and endings put the head and tail on your presentation. They are where first impressions are created and lasting ones are reinforced. Openings and endings are also when your audience's attention level is often highest. Therefore it is important to invest time and effort to make them successful.

2.6.1 Create Effective Openings

Effective openings accomplish three things:

- Secure audience attention and establish rapport.
- Set clear expectations by stating the theme and scope of the presentation.
- Establish your credibility.

Secure Audience Attention

Know your audience. Start your presentation by connecting with them. One way is to begin in their language, even if all you can manage is a simple: "Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen." Mentally check every possible introductory idea from the perspective of your audience. Is there a significant current local event that you can mention? Can you tell a personal story or describe an incident that relates your theme or topic to the audience or their country? Stories, if told properly, can be universal. They also help establish a personal connection with your audience and can create intimacy.

Choose carefully, however – be culturally aware and sensitive as to what will get your audience on board without offence. Sharing an observation you have made since arriving in the country may be a unique entry point for the opening of your presentation. You may ask the audience to assist you in "understanding" the rationale behind the action you have observed. This approach has a number of benefits: it establishes the fact that you are genuinely interested in the country and people you are with, it demonstrates your openness to learning and it establishes a "two-way" communication relationship. Remember though, you are sharing an observation, not judging an action.

Keep in mind that an approach that works in Canada may fall flat in another country. In Canada and the United States, where communication can be direct, you might open your presentation by simply telling your audience why they should listen to you. Other audiences might see this as arrogant. Whatever your approach, your audience is more likely to respond if they know you've taken time to learn something about them or their country.

A CASE OF CULTURE

In a country where history is particularly valued, one successful international presenter captured the audience's attention by talking about past successes. In contrast, when in the United States, the same presenter emphasized prospects and future potential.

Set Clear Expectations

Your opening should create clear audience expectations. Early on, tell the audience what you plan to talk about and introduce the theme and scope of your presentation. State the essence of your presentation in one clear sentence. It will also help to provide a visual outline of your presentation.

Establish your Credibility

Carefully crafted openings help establish your credibility. What makes an individual credible in one culture may not in another. Audiences in different countries accord status based on different criteria. These include:

- Achievements
- Track record
- Age and experience
- Social connections
- Family
- Gender
- Education and professional qualifications
- Profession or rank (i.e., engineer, CEO)
- Company or personal reputation

Know which of these is most valued where you are presenting and emphasize the qualities about you or your organization that will be most respected by your audience. Don't merely say that you are the director, but explain which department you direct (i.e., finance, marketing, operations). How well your presentation is received may depend on whether your audience feels that you have a high enough status within your company.

A CASE OF CULTURE

A Canadian consultant introducing herself to an audience overseas emphasized her personal experience and education. In doing so, she failed to maximize her professional credibility. In some cultures, it is important to tie your status with your company. Her credibility as an individual was less important as compared to the reputation of her company and the role she played within it.

Finally, be careful about how much you talk about yourself. Self-promotion is frowned upon in some cultures.

2.6.2 Develop Solid Endings

Effective endings accomplish three main things:

- Summarize key points to reinforce your message.
- Help the audience draw specific conclusions.
- Offer a call to action.

Summarize key points

A summary gives you one final opportunity to convey your key message. Restatement is often a fundamental aspect of learning and becomes even more critical across cultural and language barriers. Use your ending to reiterate your main points and theme. An effective way to do this, particularly with a foreign audience, is to use a visual summary chart.

Help the audience draw conclusions

After restating key ideas, successful presenters often close by providing their audiences with specific conclusions. Be aware that some cultures may be uncomfortable with your synthesis or bottom line and will want to draw their own conclusions. During the conclusion to your presentation, consider asking an audience, “What stood out from the presentation?” or “What did you learn?” This provides you with an opportunity to engage your audience and to measure the impact of your presentation. Remain sensitive to the local expectations and style of your audience and be subtle when appropriate.

Offer a Call to Action

Effective presentations in Canada frequently end with a call to action. This means asking something specific of the audience, such as their support or their business. In foreign cultures you may need to modify your call to action. Whereas in Canada you might simply ask your audience to give you the business, in countries where communication is less direct this may be viewed as too aggressive. In countries where business relationships are established over months and years, such a statement would be considered both presumptuous and premature unless the presenter was extremely well known to the audience. Whether your call to action is direct or subtle, it is important that you try to move your audience to a next step or objective. This may involve simply getting them to consider the information you have presented and to discuss it at a future meeting.

2.7 Rehearse your Presentation

People often spend all of their time preparing their presentation and leave no time for practice. The result – if your rehearsal was simply a mental “dry run” during your flight – can be disastrous, particularly when presenting to an audience with a language and culture different from your own.

Rehearse your presentation several times using your visual aids. This will streamline your ideas, polish your delivery, and ensure that you are within your allotted time.

Find a key informant, a businessperson with experience in the market or a cultural interpreter who understands your audience. Ask one or more of these people to observe your presentation in its final form and to provide feedback. Although a challenge and time consuming, this is the best way to ensure your presentation is culturally appropriate in content and is effective in delivery.

2.8 Are You Ready? A Checklist

- Brainstorm and prioritize presentation ideas.
- Develop a clear outline using main points and sub-points.
- Ensure your supporting data is culturally appropriate.
- Limit presentation content and simplify data.
- Create a clear roadmap that the audience can easily follow.
- Develop an opening that incorporates relevant current events or a personal story to get the audience on board.
- Use appropriate credentials and company title to establish credibility.
- Summarize key points after each section and at end of presentation.
- Ensure ending contains an appropriate call to action.
- Rehearse your presentation using your visual aids. Practice before a small, informed audience.

3

Chapter 3: Enhancing a Presentation Using Visual Aids

3.1 What Are Visual Aids?

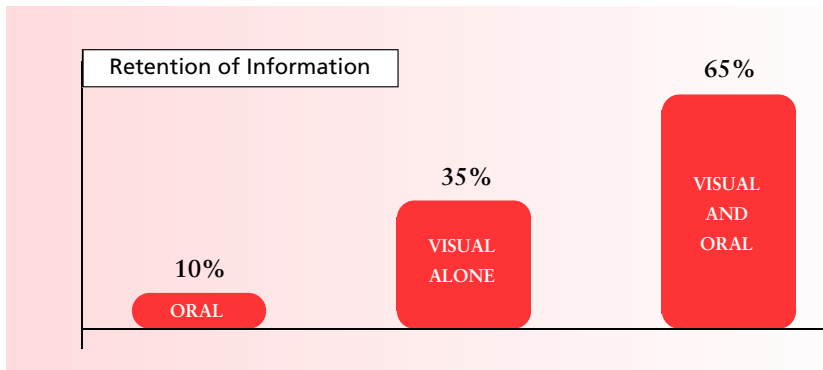
The most common visual aids used by successful speakers in international settings are handouts, flipcharts, and LCD slide shows.² Overhead transparencies and 35 mm slide shows are also used, although less frequently with the emergence of advanced computer technologies.

3.2 Why Are visual Aids Important?

“Of all of our sense receptors, the human eye is by far the most powerful information conduit to the brain.”³ This makes using visual aids central to communication. Visual aids, when properly prepared, can be a valuable asset to your presentation. They are useful for gaining attention, helping audience members retain key points and better understand your message. Visuals can also be used to keep you organized and add polish and professionalism to your presentation.⁴

Using visual aids has been shown to increase communication effectiveness by over 50 percent.

The following chart shows the impact of visuals aids on presentations. According to the chart, when no visual aids are used, the audience remembers only 10% of the information. When visual aids are used in combination with oral presentations, retention rates rise to more than 65%.⁵



2 Sherman, Robert. 2003. “For a Powerful Presentation, Add Visual Impact”. *Business Credit*. New York: Vol. 105, Issue 6, page 38.

3 Lindstrom, Robert. 2000. “1000 and Counting: How Pictures are Taking Over the Word.” *Presentations*, Volume 14, Issue 6, page 44.

4 Chaney, Lillian and Catherine Green. 2004. *Key Business Skills*. SuperVision. Burlington. Volume 65, Issue 9, page 17.

5 United States Department of Labor: Occupational Safety & Health Administration. 2005. *Presenting Effective Presentations with Visual Aids*. Online: <www.osha.gov/doc/outreachtraining/htmlfiles/traintec.html>. Accessed March 2005.

Visual aids are especially important when presenting in foreign settings because they enhance communication beyond the spoken word.

Effective visual media:

- Communicates ideas faster and more clearly.
- Arouses and holds audience interest.
- Cuts across language barriers.
- Reinforces your spoken message.
- Increases audience understanding.
- Helps your audience retain information.
- Enhances your professional image.
- Helps your audience visualize your spoken message.

3.3 Suggestions for Using Visual Aids

While effective visual media can augment your message, poor visuals can harm your presentation. The essence of a good presentation is the communication and connection between you and your audience. When used poorly, visual aids can interfere with this communication, detracting audience attention from you, and/or taking your focus away from the audience. This is especially true when speaking to an audience where English or French is a second language. In particular, you may quickly lose your listeners if you overwhelm them with too many visuals or use visuals crammed with too much information. Use them with discretion and, when used, make sure they meaningfully contribute to your presentation.⁶ The lowered cost of, and access to presentation technology such as LCD projectors means they have become increasingly popular for presentations. However, remember that the graphics you use should illustrate your point, not steal the show.⁷

Here are some general principles for success:

Less is more

Your visual aids should enhance your communication of the topic to the audience, not take it over. People can read much faster than you can talk – make sure they are listening to you instead of trying to read the text on your visuals. To do this, don't print large blocks of text on a slide. Present only one key idea per visual. This will help focus attention on the message you are trying to send. Having an excessive number of visuals aids also reduces the effectiveness of the presentation.⁸

6 Chaney, Lillian and Catherine Green. 2004. "Key Business Skills." *SuperVision*, Burlington, Volume 65, Issue 9, page 19.

7 Sherman, Robert. 2003. "For a Powerful Presentation, Add Visual Impact". *Business Credit*, New York, Volume 105, Issue 6, page 38.

8 Chaney, Lillian and Catherine Green. 2004. "Key Business Skills." *SuperVision*, Burlington, Volume 65, issue 9, page 19.

A Picture is Worth 1000 Words

Humans are visual beings who, overwhelmingly, perceive the world through visual images. Across languages and cultures, people think and dream in pictures and symbolic images.⁹ Thus pictures are crucial for communicating with diverse audiences. Here are some suggestions for using pictures in your presentations:

- Think of your message from a graphic perspective. Can you use a diagram instead of text? Can you show the product or idea with images instead of text?
- Use flow charts and graphs instead of text or columns of numbers. Bar graphs effectively show trends between data. Pie charts help convey percentage relationships. Flow charts help clarify a complex concept, arrangement of ideas or sequence of events.
- Where possible, use photographs and models. Photos or illustrations help the audience make a concrete association with a product, person or place.
- Vary your use of pictures with text and diagrams to make it more interesting for the audience.

Use the real thing

If you are talking about a product, have one there for your audience to touch, feel and try out. Even if they can't touch it, at least find a way for them to see it early on in your presentation. Consider demonstrations of products and equipment if possible.

Interpret Visuals, Don't Just Report Them

Don't assume that your visual aids will speak for themselves. You still need to communicate and orient the listener through your presentation. In addition, audiences from different cultures may not interpret your visuals the same way as you. Verbally point out the message you want your audience to understand.

Be Well Prepared

Be prepared so that you do not have to read off your slides and transparencies. This implies a lack of confidence or lack of knowledge in your subject. Use your visuals as a way to trigger your thoughts. Many presenters use note cards (4x6 or 5x7 inches) to keep them on topic. These are easier to handle and less visible than large sheets of paper.¹⁰

Use Headings Effectively

The most powerful position on your visual is the heading. Give each visual a headline title that helps increase comprehension. As with newspaper headlines, which are similar internationally, headings give your audience a quick sense of your main message.

⁹ Lindstrom, Robert. 2000. "1000 and Counting: How Pictures are Taking Over the Word." *Presentations*, Volume 14, Issue 6, page 44.

¹⁰ Chaney, Lillian and Catherine Green. 2004. "Key Business Skills." *SuperVision*, Burlington, Volume 65, issue 9, page 19.

Here are some examples of ineffective and effective use of headings.

Ineffective Headings:

Electric Car
Cost vs. Years
System Improvements

Effective Headings:

Electric Cars More Economical
Initial Cost Outlay Quickly Covered
System Changes Expand Performance

Consider style

Maintain a consistent visual style for your entire presentation. Use the same fonts, colours and graphic elements to maintain continuity. Consider hiring a graphic designer to develop polished and professional visual aids.

Choose words and numbers with care

The words you choose influence the effectiveness of your message across language and culture. You can increase understanding by using the following guidelines for written visuals:

- Observe the 6 x 6 rule—no more than 6 lines of copy with a maximum of six words per line on each visual.
- List key points or phrases only.
- Use large type which can be seen even in the back of the room.
- Choose a single, san serif font such as Helvetica to increase legibility.
- Avoid using all upper case letters.
- Width is better than height as it makes it easier to scan the text. Use the horizontal, landscape orientation.
- Use exact phrasing and remove unnecessary detail.
- Avoid the overuse of bulleted text.

Consider colour...carefully

Increase audience attention with the use of colour. Attention span per visual increases from an average of 8 seconds to 11 seconds if colour is added.¹¹ However, use colour sparingly. Consider no more than two colours for a presentation graphic. In addition, be aware of colour associations in different countries. Check with a key informant to choose colour schemes that will avoid offence and convey the most professional image to your foreign audience. Using what is popular and respected in your host country may give you an advantage.

Test before using

Test your presentation visuals out before using them with an unknown audience. Are they easy to read? Are they simple to follow? Do they illustrate your point? Make sure every visual aid has a purpose. Test the visuals with a key informant with knowledge of the culture of your target audience. Also make sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors on your visuals – these cause an instant loss of credibility.

¹¹ Robbins, Jo. 1997. *High-Impact Presentations: A Multimedia Approach*. John Wiley and Sons.

3.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Visual Aids

The following is a list of advantages, disadvantages and tips for using each form of visual aid.

3.4.1 Overhead Transparencies

Advantages:

- Quickly generated from a computer.
- Flexible – can write on them.
- Do not need a darkened room.
- Easy to copy for audience handouts.
- Projector is simple, reliable to operate and often commonly available.
- Convenient for use in question and answer sessions.
- Portable.
- Encourages a more intimate and less intimidating presentation.
- Sequence and content of presentation is easily adjusted at the last moment.

Disadvantages:

- Less suitable for larger audiences (more than 30 people).
- May be seen as less professional/credible if LCD/computer slide shows seen frequently.
- Laying on and adjusting of overheads often distracting.
- High risk of losing sequence if shuffling forwards and backwards in presentation.
- Projector is not conveniently portable.
- Presenter must rely on projection equipment "on-site".

Tips:

- Cover each transparency with a clear sheet. Use a dry erase marker to highlight key items as you speak.
- Overhead screens should be at a 45-degree angle to the audience and to the side of the room so that you are centre stage.
- Consider shutting off the projector during lengthy explanations, as the fan is often noisy.
- Face the audience, not the projector or screen.
- Point at the screen, not the overhead projector.
- Use very large font sizes (minimum 26 pt.).
- Make copies of transparencies for speaker notes.

3.4.2 35 Millimetre Slides

Advantages:

- Portable.
- Easily duplicated.
- Can be sent by mail.
- Enhanced image detail and colour.
- No need for presenter to manually change visuals.

Disadvantages:

- Room must be adequately darkened to ensure good visibility.
- Without remote advance, device presenter is tied to machine.
- Slide carousel standards may vary according to country.
- Can lead to a less intimate presenter/audience interaction.
- Difficult to make changes at the last minute.
- Projection equipment becoming obsolete and may be difficult to find.
- Difficult to make eye contact with key individuals during presentation.

Tips:

- Turn off projector during lengthy explanations.
- Avoid a completely darkened room if possible.
- If no remote is available to advance slides, be sure you identify someone who can do it for you and devise a system for cueing them.
- Consider use of blank slides or no slides between sections if needed.
- Ensure a desk or lectern light is available so you can read your speaker notes.
- Ensure a pointer is available if needed.

3.4.3 Computer Projected and Electronic Media

Advantages:

- Projects a professional image.
- Minimal expense to create a slide show if equipment available.
- Affordable to purchase production and projection equipment.
- Compact and portable.
- Slide shows are easy to email.
- Easy to sort visuals and practice with good software.
- Visuals easily edited.
- Allows easy insertion of graphics.
- Expands options through the use of multimedia such as animation, video clips and sound.
- Design and production of presentation may easily be shared amongst colleagues.
- Presentation may be efficiently distributed to potential clients as follow-up.
- Slide show can be printed, copied and provided as handout material during presentation.

Disadvantages;

- Requires equipment not always available in foreign countries.
- Runs the risk of technology being the focus rather than the content or presenter.
- “High tech” aspect can potentially alienate audience.
- Projector can be noisy—distracting.
- As with slides, requires a slightly darkened room.

Tips:

- Avoid extreme use of animation or distracting sounds.
- Prepare standard slides or overheads as a backup.
- Hire a graphic designer for a professional look.
- Bring an extra bulb for your LCD projector when overseas.
- Check electricity cycles and voltage requirements and arrange for adaptors.
- Use a wireless advance or mouse system to allow you to present at a distance from your laptop.

3.4.4 Flip Charts

Advantages:

- Low cost, low tech.
- Easy to create.
- Eliminate cluttered handouts.
- Excellent for small groups.
- Encourage group interaction and involvement.

Disadvantages:

- Don't hold up well over time.
- May be hard for all audience members to see.
- Hard to transport.
- Can be illegible if not created with care.

Tips:

- Use keywords only (less than 10 words per page).
- No more than 5 lines of text.
- Keep letters at least 2 inches tall.
- Use bullets.
- Use colour to highlight.
- Leave lots of white space.
- Leave a blank sheet between pages.
- Bring your own markers.

Whatever visual aids you choose, be careful they do not dominate your presentation. Visual aids are meant to enhance your presentation, not to replace you.

3.5 Prepare Written Materials

Written materials are another form of visual aid. There are two types of written materials to consider preparing for your international presentation:

- Speaker Notes.
- Audience Handouts.

3.5.1 Speaker Notes

Speaker notes provide a clear framework that will keep you on track during your presentation. Speaking from concise notes rather than a written speech will also facilitate a more natural delivery and increase the likelihood of maintaining audience interest and attention.

Preparing Your Notes

If you have done a thorough job of preparing your outline (see Chapter 2) then your speaker notes should develop naturally from this. Your visuals will also serve as thought triggers during your presentation. When your outline and visuals are complete, develop your presentation script by adding the spoken words that match each point or visual. Create a short form of that script on your speaker notes.

Types of Notes

The format for speaker notes is determined both by individual preference and by your presentation environment. The two most common formats are 3"x5" or 4"x 6" note (index) cards or standard (8 1/2" x 11") sheets. There are advantages to using each:

Note Cards:

- Easy to handle.
- Requires you to be exact.
- Less cumbersome than 8 1/2" x 11" sheets.
- Easy to quickly condense or eliminate items.
- More professional looking if no lectern available.
- Facilitate easy changing of order or content.

Standard Sheets:

- Convenient to prepare.
- Can take advantage of software features such as PowerPoint's Speaker Notes option.
- Allow greater room for detail.

Tips for Speaker Notes:

- Print notes in large font (minimum 14 point) to increase legibility.
- Use colour and highlighting to emphasize key points.
- Number note cards or pages so order is maintained.
- Use high prompt words (i.e., efficiency, top-rated).
- Make a photocopy or backup of your notes.
- Use symbols to facilitate delivery (i.e., 'P' for pause, or directional arrows).
- Use signpost words to help audience—particularly foreign-language speakers – follow along (i.e., as a result, in conclusion).
- Mark expected elapsed time beside notes to keep you on schedule.

3.5.2 Audience Handouts

Handouts can be beneficial to all presentations. This is especially true in international settings.

Letting your audience know that major points are covered in handouts may allow them to clearly focus on you and your message. You can also increase understanding by having handouts translated into your audience's language. In Canada it is more common to provide handouts at the end of the presentation to avoid diverting the audience's attention.

However, in international settings—particularly if you cannot speak the language of your audience—it may be useful to distribute copies of your visuals at the beginning of your presentation. This allows members of your audience to make notes on them in their language. Tools such as PowerPoint's Handout Master are especially useful for this.

Handouts reinforce your message and are often retained for future reference. If they are both polished and professional, handouts can also enhance your image. Therefore, if you provide audience handouts, make sure you do it right.

Here are some tips:

- Tell audiences in advance that handouts will be available.
- Include a lexicon of frequently used technical terms, company brand names and acronyms.
- Prepare handouts in the audience's language to increase understanding.
- Make handouts clear and self-explanatory.
- Check for cultural appropriateness.
- Ensure handouts contribute to your presentation objectives.
- Use fewer handouts to increase the likelihood they will be read.
- Print more handouts than you will need, as taking additional copies to share with colleagues is common in some countries.
- Ensure that your company name, logo, contact details and Website address are printed on your handouts.
- Maintain a consistent style and colour scheme to enhance your professional image.

3.6 Know Your Equipment and Environment

3.6.1 Presentation Equipment

The vehicle through which you communicate your messages during a presentation is called your presentation medium. As previously outlined, your medium can include a computer-generated slide show, a flipchart, an overhead projector and so on. It is important to consider the medium you use when presenting in other countries because the acceptability and use of presentation media may differ. Use media that are appropriate for the audience and venue. For example, the same computer equipment and presentation that is the standard in Boston may provide technological challenges in Bolivia.

A CASE OF CULTURE

A presenter's slide presentation was perfect for a large Canadian audience who knew him. However, because using slides meant presenting in a darkened room, that same presentation was not his optimal choice overseas. The presenter discovered that making eye contact with key individuals and ensuring the audience was later able to pick him out of the crowd at a networking function were key to his success.

Check with the Canadian Embassy or High Commission, business colleagues familiar with the market, or with your local partner or host company to determine local preferences and technology capabilities when choosing a presentation medium.

3.6.2 Presentation Environment

Your presentation location, from the country to the venue itself, will create planning and preparation considerations. Technology, equipment, power requirements, and facility standards vary according to country. Seating arrangements may convey status or be a form of non-verbal communication. Presenters often do not know what the presentation environment will be until they arrive – instead, try to find out some specific details beforehand. Once at your presentation location, it may be difficult for you to test equipment in advance or to influence elements such as lighting, ventilation, or room set-up.

Here are considerations and suggestions:

Research Before You Leave Home

The best approach to planning for an international presentation is to prepare in advance by doing your homework before you leave Canada. Research technological standards, electricity specifications, equipment preferences and the nature of the venue where you will be presenting. Draw on the experience of other business people who live, or have presented in the country. Communicate early with local organizers so that you both know what is required.

Consider these questions:

- Do you or the organizers have back-up projector bulbs, microphones, etc.?
- Do you know how to dim lighting or have someone who can?
- Is a cordless microphone as opposed to a standing microphone available to facilitate movement?
- Do you need special plugs or current adaptors to plug in your technology?
- Can your technology cope with unfamiliar electrical cycles?
- Is the seating arrangement culturally influenced? Is it suitable for your presentation and if not what can be done about it?
- Are you able to operate the equipment or will this be done by a technician?
- If you do not know people with business experience in the country, or have an established, reliable contact there, consider engaging local experts. International meeting planners, destination management companies, or meeting coordinators at international hotel chains can provide valuable advice and handle local arrangements.

A CASE OF CULTURE

A Canadian consultant ask his locally engaged assistant if the seating arrangement was 'culturally appropriate'. He was assured that, 'Yes, it is fine'. Upon the arrival of the invited Ministerial Under-Secretary, the consultant noticed a "head table" quickly being set-up in the front of the room. The table would interfere with the presentation projection plane. It was impossible to re-negotiate the room set-up at this point. Learning to work effectively across cultures is a learned skill, knowledge and value set that requires time, patience and experience to master. One skill is learning the art of asking appropriate and effective questions in another culture. Learning to ask questions that get you the answer you require rather than the answer the respondent believes you need to hear.

In the above case, the consultant may have shared the invitation list with the locally engaged assistant and asked "considering the people on this list, how should seating be arranged?" This open-ended question solicits a "culturally informed" response.

Have a Back-up Plan in Case of Problems

It is important to anticipate potential problems and have a back-up plan. Anticipate worst case scenarios and be ready to deal with them. For example, be prepared to project your voice and be heard without a microphone. Plan to improvise with handout material if your projector fails. Always carry your visual aids and presentation materials in your carry-on luggage in the event your other baggage is lost. Make two copies of your presentation and keep them in two different places.

A CASE OF CULTURE

One Canadian presenter encountered electricity brownouts during his presentation in a developing country. Lights would dim, the microphone volume would drop and his slides would fade to blackness. With no contingency plan to deal with the situation, his presentation was ruined.

Reflect upon the following questions to help develop a contingency plan:

What If?

1. Personal. Consider your own well-being.
2. Material. Consider handouts, language used, sample products.
3. Equipment. Consider it not working as anticipated.
4. Venue. Consider venue set-up, lighting, ventilation, temperature, and acoustics.
5. Other.

Contingency:

What would you do if any of the above went differently than expected?

Test and Practice

When travelling long distances for a major presentation, plan to arrive a day early. This may allow you to see the venue, test the equipment and perhaps even do a dry run. At the very least, it will help you overcome jetlag and be rested on presentation day.

Try to meet with local organizers and technicians. Test equipment to ensure laptops and projectors are in working order, slide carousels are compatible, remote controls work, microphones are available, etc. If possible, do a rehearsal so you know how things will work on presentation day.

Step Lightly when Taking Control

Whereas in Canada you might take charge of arrangements and make changes at the last minute, this may be deemed pushy or inappropriate in some countries. For example, moving chairs or projectors in status-conscious countries is not something done by senior people and may diminish your image.

Be sensitive to local protocol by finding out who is in charge and what behavior is appropriate. In countries where interaction is direct and informal, by all means, make necessary changes. After all, you are ultimately responsible for ensuring that your presentation environment is the best it can be.

Be Flexible

It may be culturally acceptable for members of your audience to come and go during your presentation. You may have to give your presentation through a haze of cigarette smoke. Your presentation room may be stifling hot or freezing cold. Try not to get flustered or angry if things don't go as expected or if equipment does not work as anticipated. Remember that physical standards and environments differ across cultures. Your best approach to dealing with differences and difficulties is to keep an open mind and a sense of humour, and to be flexible. And always remind yourself, if your presentation did not run as smoothly as anticipated, no one else in the room knew what you anticipated!

3.7 Are You Ready? A Checklist

Visual Media & Speaker Notes

- Optimize the use of visual aids in cross-cultural settings.
- Ensure visuals are simple and visible.
- Proofread visuals and handouts for clarity, simplicity, cultural nuances, and typos.
- Use key words, highlighting, symbols, and elapsed speaking time on speaker notes.
- Create backups of speaker notes, handouts and visual media.
- Translate visual media and handouts into local language if possible.
- Have visuals available in another format if computer-generated.

Presentation Environment

- Research local preferences and technology capabilities before choosing visual media.
- Develop contingency plan in case of problems.
- Arrange to arrive a day early to check out equipment, and to rehearse your presentation.
- Travel with visual media and other presentation materials in carry-on luggage.
- Know how to operate equipment or identify a resource person who can help.
- Ensure that appropriate lectern lighting, spare projector bulbs, compatible slide carousels, etc., are available.

4

Chapter 4: Delivery Dynamics

A well-prepared presentation may fall flat because of what you say or do during your delivery. Both verbal and non-verbal elements are keys to success, including dress, body language, vocal characteristics, posture, eye contact and use of time. Subtle cultural differences may also lead to unexpected negative audience reactions. Perhaps it was an inappropriate comment or an offensive gesture. Most people never know what went wrong, only that business relations were damaged, often irreparably.

The 20/80 rule for presentations is spend 20% of your preparation time on content and 80% on delivery.

Different cultures have different rules of social conduct, ways of communicating, and norms of behavior. All of these represent opportunities for misinterpretation. Canadians need to be knowledgeable about, as well as sensitive to, these differences.

4.1 Pay Attention to Protocol

Protocol, formalities and etiquette differ according to country and circumstance. In cultures with a high degree of formality, formal speech and conduct is valued. Titles and academic degrees are highlighted. Prescribed “parameters” exist around dress, hospitality and seating arrangements. On the contrary, in cultures valuing a high degree of informality, people conduct themselves in a friendly and familiar manner. Personality and achievement are more important than titles. Spontaneity is exercised.

The degree to which you understand and adhere to local protocol may have as much impact on your credibility and success as what you say. Take a conservative approach when presenting in new or unfamiliar settings. You will be safest if you aim to be more formal than in Canada. You can always ease off when you feel more comfortable.

4.1.1 Consider Introductions

In many cultures the person who introduces you does much to establish your credibility – the more senior the person, the greater your status. Check with a local business expert or cultural interpreter about whether you should be introduced and by whom. It’s best to write out your introduction in full for someone else to read. Emphasize qualifications that are relevant in the local culture (see Chapter 2, Effective Openings).

4.1.2 Recognize VIP’s

In many countries it is customary to introduce VIP’s at the beginning of your speech or presentation. Know in advance who should be introduced and in what order. There is also extensive use of titles in some cultures, which shows recognition and respect for superiors.

Check with your hosts regarding proper pronunciation, titles, and order of introduction. Write names and titles clearly on a card. Spell names phonetically and practice saying them. In status conscious cultures, use your own company title to your best advantage and in a way that demonstrates your authority or influence in your organization.

4.1.3 Take Care with Attire

You have seven to 15 seconds to establish credibility and how you dress is one of the first factors to have an impact. It communicates something about your stature and your sensitivity to local norms. Presentation attire also includes hair, grooming and shoes. The international business community is becoming more Westernized in terms of dress. The standard uniform is a conservative suit and tie for men and a suit or dress for women. Dress for the occasion as well as the audience. Subdued colours are usually best for men. Women have more latitude in terms of colour and style. Women, however, must be careful to observe norms regarding the acceptability of pants versus skirts, skirt length, and bare arms and legs. If you're in doubt, dress more conservatively. Men, for example, can always remove their jackets. Both men and women should avoid anything that is flashy or detracts from their spoken message such as large jewelry. Finally, if you are going to adapt the local norms of dress, get it right. This is not a decision to be taken lightly. Consult with a local key informant before deciding whether or not this is appropriate. International business people can diminish their image by trying to emulate local dress and doing it poorly.

4.1.4 Gender Considerations

Although women are becoming increasingly accepted as equals throughout the international business community, there are still countries where women may have to work harder to establish credibility. Employ more conservative dress and deportment, and ensure a highly respected businessperson introduces you.

4.1.5 Age Considerations

In some cultures age is a factor in determining status and authority. In Asian cultures, being older has a significant impact on your perceived status and authority.

A CASE OF CULTURE

A Canadian woman, frustrated by interactions with her host country colleagues, rectified the situation by asking the males on her team to publicly defer to her on key issues. This immediately established her senior role and authority.

Obviously you can't control your age, but in countries where age has an influence, maintain a dignified bearing and way of speaking. Age is also a factor to consider when choosing the appropriate individual to make a presentation on behalf of your company.

4.2 Adapt Your Spoken Message

Culturally speaking, there are two distinct styles of communication: implicit and explicit. With implicit communication, much of the meaning is carried by the context. Who says it, how it is said, and in what setting are more important than the words. The ability of the audience to "read" the context is expected. Words only restate the obvious. Silence communicates a variety of meanings.

With explicit communication, the context is unnoticed and unimportant. Words carry the meaning and are used to ensure understanding and clarification. Silence is seen as a lack of engagement or comprehension.

Generally speaking, Western and European cultures tend toward explicit communication, while Eastern and Asian cultures gravitate to implicit. However you must be aware that there are always exceptions to these generalizations.

Make sure you research the communication style of your audience and adapt accordingly.

Here are other suggestions:

4.2.1 Learn the Language

Speaking in the customer's language is the gold standard for international business. There is no better window to understanding another culture than to learn the language. However, this may be difficult if presenting in a number of different countries. When speaking a second language, aim for a connection rather than perfection. Write out what you are going to say in detail then practice, practice, practice. The more comfortable you are with the words and language, the more natural you will sound. For your actual presentation, prepare speaker notes using key words and prompts. Submerge yourself in the local language prior to your presentation by watching T.V., listening to the radio, practicing with those who are fluent in your newly acquired language, and reading local newspapers.

If you can't give your presentation in the language spoken by your market audience, at least begin with a few opening words. Be certain that what you have learned is appropriate for the setting and you haven't simply picked up a colloquialism or, even worse, "street slang". This sends a powerful message that you are willing to learn about the people, language and culture of the country hosting you. Ask someone fluent in your newly acquired language to help with pronunciation and don't worry if you stumble. In most cases your local audience will appreciate the effort.

4.2.2 Internationalize Your Language

Just because your foreign counterparts may speak English or French as their second language, doesn't mean you don't have to adapt your presentation. Instead, work to ensure your presentation will be understood as clearly as possible by second language speakers.

Here are some tips:

- Do not use jargon, acronyms, slang, colloquialisms, and sport or culture bound analogies (i.e., rule of thumb, ballpark estimate). These will be meaningless to a foreign audience.
- Use standard and consistent terminology familiar to your audience.
- Explain key terms the first time you use them.
- Slow down. Pause after each main point.
- Meet with an interpreter or key informant to review key words and expressions. Ask what language will make the presentation more effective.
- Use the active voice, not passive language. For example, say, "We reviewed our options" instead of, "The options have been reviewed."
- Use words that have few alternate meanings. For example, choose "accurate" instead of "right".
- Use action-specific verbs instead of general ones. For example, say, "We hope to win the contract" instead of, "We hope to get the contract."

- Avoid words such as do, make, have, be, and go.
- Simplify your language by using shorter words and sentences. If you have to take a breath, your sentence is too long to be easily understood.
- Omit words or phrases that do not add meaning (i.e., for all intents and purposes).
- Try to refrain from using the word “not”. Rearrange your sentences to omit the word.
- Simplify your visuals and don’t overload them with text.

A CASE OF CULTURE

Some cultures and individuals have a tradition of using eloquent language and quoting revered poets – something Canadians might view as excessive or flowery. Other cultures may speak with a more emotionally ranging and varied tone of voice than Canadians do; a style we may feel is exaggerated and perhaps unprofessional. Conversely, other cultures may tend to have a much more monotonous tone; boring to us, but to them demonstrating self-control and respect.

4.2.3 Adapt Your Style and Pace

Speaking styles vary widely from country to country and from individual to individual.

Familiar language builds trust and rapport so it is critical to adapt to the local style of speaking. Study the tone and cadence of the local language and you may consider increasing your animation and variation in tone or, on the contrary, you may consider muting it. It is also essential to adapt your pace of speech. More than 80 percent of speakers begin too quickly. Slow down 10 percent at the beginning of your presentation. This will give your audience a chance to become accustomed to your voice and manner of speaking. Continue at a deliberately slower pace throughout your presentation to increase audience retention and understanding.

Here are some additional tips for adapting your speaking style:

- Include only one thought or action per sentence.
- Hear yourself say the last word of each sentence before starting a new one.
- Use frequent pauses to add emphasis and to let your audience assimilate what you say, and don’t be afraid of silences.
- Articulate clearly by pronouncing final consonants (i.e., going not goin’).
- Exaggerate slightly if you need to.
- Use proper pronunciation: get words, names and places right.
- Link your words closely to your visual aids and use a pointer if necessary to help the audience track what you are saying.
- Rephrase to increase understanding (i.e., Efficiency improved by 50 percent, that’s five zero percent.).
- Avoid saying “um”, “ah”, and “you know”. These are very distracting.
- Repeat important sentences.

Remember to raise your volume and tone to expand voice projection, not increase comprehension!

4.2.4 Use Interpreters Carefully

It is important to know the degree to which English or French is accepted or understood in your host country. In multi-lingual countries such as Switzerland, for example, don't assume you can use French because it is one of the official languages. You run the risk of offending a certain group if you use the wrong language or assume your audience is conversant in your language when they are not. Know what the language preference and proficiency is in your host country and arrange for an interpreter if necessary. For example, speaking Spanish or having an interpreter is highly advisable throughout much of South America.

When utilizing an interpreter, it is also important to be aware of how their role is perceived in the local culture. Canadians, along with Americans, Germans, British, Scandinavians, and Dutch, view an interpreter's role as providing an accurate, unbiased account of what you say to your audience. This is different in other cultures.

A CASE OF CULTURE

The role of a Japanese interpreter is not only to translate but also to interpret the language, gestures, context and meanings. Rather than a neutral participant, Japanese interpreters are seen as part of the team. Whereas in Germany, you would be fine using an interpreter provided by your host, in Japan you would likely consider engaging your own.

If an interpreter is required then you should also consider translating your visuals and handouts. This may mean changing graphic layout as well as words. In the Middle East, for example, English-language graph axes and flowcharts don't directly transform into Arabic, which moves from right to left. Be sure to check out credentials thoroughly and to engage someone who is culturally as well as linguistically fluent.

Tips for Working with Interpreters¹²

- Provide your interpreter with the text of your presentation or speaker notes in advance.
- Create a vocabulary list of all acronyms and technical terms.
- Provide the interpreter with background information such as a magazine article about your company or subject matter.
- Allow time to meet your interpreter (even if it means visiting the translation booth).
- Go over your presentation in advance or at least introduce yourself prior to your presentation and ask if there are any questions.
- When speaking, break up material into clear sections so that one idea or thought can be translated at a time.
- Since word-for-word speech is more difficult to translate, speak from your notes.
- Use frequent pauses to give the interpreter time to catch up.
- Plan your words carefully to avoid ambiguities and jargon that does not translate well.

¹² For tips on working with translators see the Website MarcoPolo: The Cross Cultural Marketing Edge, www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/marcopolo.

- Address the audience not the interpreter.
- If appropriate, acknowledge your interpreter (check with your host regarding local protocol).
- When fielding questions from the audience repeat what has been asked so the interpreter can hear.
- Consider having a capable individual in the audience monitor your interpreter's translation and provide feedback.

4.2.5 Use Humour Carefully

Poet Robert Frost referred to humour as the thing that usually gets lost in the translation.

Humour is culture-specific so don't assume that what is funny in Canada will be funny in other countries. In Canada, the U.S. and Britain, effective speeches and presentations often open cleverly with a joke, cartoon, or humorous anecdote. This can be risky in other countries.

A CASE OF CULTURE

When a North American businessman opened his speech in Beijing with a joke, the Chinese interpreter faithfully translated each line of the joke, with one exception. After the speaker delivered the punch line, the interpreter added in Chinese: "Please laugh now."

The safest approach to using humour in cross-cultural settings is to not use it. Avoid jokes, humorous references and sarcasm unless you are well acquainted with your audience. If you wish to use humour in your presentation, test your material in advance with someone who understands the nuances of local culture and who can give you honest feedback.

4.3 Make the Best of Body Language

In many cultures your body language communicates more than what you say. Individuals in every culture derive significant meaning from gestures, facial expressions, posture and physical contact, as well as spoken words. Canadian presenters encounter problems in other countries because behavior that means one thing to them has a different meaning in another culture. Canadian presenters who want to succeed internationally need to be aware of these differences. Consider implicit and explicit cultural communication styles referenced earlier. With individuals or cultures that exercise an implicit communication style, non-verbal communication or signals replace words. In the case of individuals or cultures exhibiting an explicit communication style, non-verbal signals supplement words.

Here are some tips for effectively exercising non-verbal communication:

- Know the local communication style and adapt accordingly.
- Actively watch for non-verbal cues. Observation is your best learning skill.
- Don't judge non-verbal behavior by Canadian standards.
- Mirror—don't mimic—non-verbal behaviors to increase rapport.

4.3.1 Gestures

Most Canadians use their hands when speaking to punctuate the flow of conversation, to refer to objects or people and to illustrate ideas. However, certain hand gestures can cause serious offence if you use them inadvertently or assume they mean the same thing in another country.

At least 75% of all communication is non-verbal¹³

Here are some examples: ¹⁴

- Crossing your fingers in Turkey may signal the end of a relationship.
- Pursing your fingers and thumb together to emphasize a point may be interpreted as a sign of fear or cowardice in Belgium.
- Making the “O.K.” sign by forming a ring with your thumb and forefinger is obscene in Brazil and a threat in Tunisia. It may mean “zero” or “worthless” in France, “orifice” in Malta, and “money” in Japan.
- Stroking your cheeks with the thumb and forefinger of one hand may mean “thin and ill” in Holland.
- Giving the thumb up sign may mean a sexual insult in Northern Greece.
- Know which hand gestures are acceptable in the local culture and be cautious about using your hands to communicate specific messages, or to point, or beckon.

4.3.2 Body Language and Emotion

How you stand and move your body may set the tone for how you are perceived by your audience. In some countries and with some individuals, standing with your hands on your hips may be interpreted as condescending or aggressive. The accepted degree of gesticulation and emotion also varies widely across cultures. Latin and Middle Eastern cultures may be more demonstrative when they speak; Asian cultures may be more muted. Observe your local counterparts and try to adopt a similar body language and level of emotion.

4.3.3 Eye Contact

In Canada, we expect others to maintain eye contact as a show of interest. This may not be so in other cultures. Japanese, for example, may close their eyes when listening as a sign of attention or respect. In some African and Latin American cultures prolonged eye contact from an individual of lower status might be interpreted as disrespectful.

If in an intimate setting, beware of what is appropriate and don't be put off by, or suspicious of, those who do not maintain direct eye contact. In some cultures, perhaps a widening of the eyes may be a sign of politely suppressed anger rather than surprise. When presenting to a large audience it is best to sweep the room with your eyes, focusing briefly (one to three seconds) on individuals. In cultures where eye contact is indirect, you may want to focus your gaze on the bridge of the nose or the chin.

¹³ Trompenaars, Fons, and Hampden Turner, Charles, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global, Business*, McGraw Hill, New York, NY, 1998.

¹⁴ Morris, Desmond, *Gestures, their origins and distribution*, Stein and Day, NY, 1979.

4.3.4 Personal Space

Consider personal space as an invisible bubble of territory. The size of this space expands or contracts depending on level of intimacy, situation, and cultural background. When a foreigner appears aggressive and pushy, or remote and cold, it may mean only that her or his personal space is different from yours. Canadians, for example, feel comfortable with a distance of about two feet between them and their business counterparts. Northern Europeans maintain a greater distance, while Latin American or Mediterranean people tend to converse and interact at much closer range and with more physical contact.

To avoid offence, be cautious about moving into the space of others or reacting defensively to those who you feel may be too close to you.

4.3.5 Be Yourself

Being aware of culture is a great start to successful communication. Acknowledging cultural variance without judgment is a learned skill that comes with time and experience. Adapt your style but don't stop being yourself. If you speak naturally and with sincerity, your message is likely to be well received.

4.4 Are You Ready? A Checklist

- Understand the appropriate local protocol and degree of formality.
- Write appropriate “suggested” introductory remarks and provide to the person who will be introducing you.
- Know whether VIP's should be introduced and learn proper names, titles and pronunciation.
- Prepare to begin your delivery in the local language.
- Explain technical terms and acronyms and clarify definitions for the audience.
- Prepare a list of technical terms and acronyms for your interpreter.
- Meet your interpreter beforehand to answer questions and review your presentation.
- Understand whether the local communication style is more explicit or more implicit and adapt your approach accordingly.
- Internationalize your language.
- Understand acceptable use of eye contact, hand gestures and personal space.

Chapter 5: **Impact and After**

5.1 Monitor Audience Response

Presentation is two-way communication. Although a verbal exchange may occur only during question period, your audience is communicating with you throughout the presentation. It is important to be aware of how your audience is responding to you and to continually make adjustments. If you are losing, confusing, or offending your audience you may be doing more damage than good.

5.1.1 Monitor Visual Feedback

Continually monitor the response of your audience as you are speaking. Try to determine what signals they are sending you. Be alert for a range of feedback and non-verbal cues including irritation, surprise, annoyance, restlessness, glancing at the clock, or a change in demeanor such as stiffening. In some countries it is difficult to be sure what impact your presentation is having on your audience. Some cultures and individuals readily show their emotions, while others are less demonstrative.

Be careful not to interpret other's behavior by your standards. In some cultures it is acceptable for people to come and go during a presentation or to talk among themselves. Don't be distracted or take offence.

5.1.2 Know What to Expect

Your best approach is to know in advance what to expect. Learn the communication style of your audience. Talk to business colleagues with experience in the market or with local key informant contacts. In situations where you know your audience well or where the communication style is explicit, you might simply ask your audience if they understand you. In countries where communication is implicit, however, this may not be suitable as people may say "yes" when they mean "no", or may take offense.

Consider the following questions as you are presenting:

- Are they interested?
- Do they understand?
- Are they convinced?

Be sensitive and stay attuned to the impact of your words and actions, and to what your audience is telling you.

5.2 Capitalize on Questions and Answers

Questions and answers are part of most business presentations. Depending on the country and situation, they may occur throughout the presentation or as a separate session after it. At the onset of the presentation, explain to your audience how questions will be managed. When working with an audience of mixed spoken languages, it is appropriate to inform your audience that questions of clarity will be taken during the presentation. This ensures if a member of your audience has not understood something you have said, they might ask you to repeat or re-phrase it. In addition, take care to fully understand the question. Repeat or rephrase the question back to the audience member to ensure clarity.

Audiences from certain cultures may not respond to your request for questions – they may greet your presentation with silence or just a few questions. This may be no reflection on you, but simply that it is not polite in that culture to ask many questions.

Audience questions can cement your message, or throw you off and irreparably damage your reputation. Therefore, successfully handling questions and answers is extremely important to the impact you have on your audience.

5.2.1 Prepare for Questions

Question and answer sessions usually fail when speakers are not prepared. Find out in advance what is customary and acceptable in the local market. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is participation customary?
- Are questions asked throughout the presentation or is there a set question period?
- Are there special rules or a local protocol for Q&A sessions?
- What are the time constraints?
- Will there be a moderator?

Anticipate questions and objections. As you put your presentation notes together or rehearse your presentation, think about every conceivable type of question or objection your audience could raise. Consider each of these an opportunity and preplan responses that further advance your message. Prepare supplemental data or visuals to present in response to questions or objections. This will significantly increase your credibility and perceived professionalism. Then, if possible, rehearse your answers with someone who understands your subject and your audience.

5.2.2 Understand that Audience Reaction Can Vary

The level of audience interaction varies across cultures. In Canada and the United States audiences can be expected to ask questions or raise objections during or following a presentation. This may not be the case in other countries, which do not have the same tradition of public participation as we do, or that shun public disagreement. In some cultures, members of the audience might not raise objections for fear of making the presenter lose face. By contrast, you might find another audience eager to participate in question period, or in yet another cultural context, questions asked by the audience surprisingly direct and frank.

It is important to know what type of audience interaction you can expect. This will depend not only on culture, but language, situation, and audience makeup. You might, for example, expect less participation from audience members who must ask questions in a foreign language.

If speaking as part of a panel or conference, observe the degree and style of audience participation during previous presentations. If the preceding speaker is inundated with questions and you receive a stony silence, it's probably a good indication that your presentation needs serious improvement.

5.2.3 Encourage Participation

When you are finished your presentation it is important to clearly signal to the audience that you are accepting questions. Adopt a positive attitude and provide a statement that promotes participation: "We've covered a lot of information. I'd be happy to provide detail on any areas you wish."

How you ask for questions will also influence the degree of participation amongst participants. For instance, a closed ended question, such as "Does anyone have any questions?" may be met with silence, which is often interpreted as "no". An open-ended question structured to encourage participation might be, "Thank you for your attention. You have heard my presentation. What stood out for you?" From this launching point you may inquire as to whether there are further questions.

One of the most difficult things for a participant in a large audience to do is to find their voice. It is especially difficult if the participant is expected to ask their question in their second or third language. You might consider the following technique; say, "Thank you for your attention. You have heard my presentation, now I would like you to turn to someone beside you and share the most important message you heard during the presentation. Discuss whether you have further questions. After five minutes, I will ask you to share what you have heard and any questions you may have."

This approach allows each audience participant to find their voice and validate what they have heard. It encourages large group discussion. Finally, it allows you to measure what participant's took from your presentation and answer any remaining questions.

If people do not ask questions, you may want to encourage them in the following ways:

- Suggesting topics. For example, say, "One area I did not cover in detail was our safety record. I'd be pleased to elaborate on that if you like."
- Referring to a potential question. For example, say, "A question that has come up in the past is how many of these systems have we installed internationally. The answer is twenty-nine, seven of which were in Eastern European countries with standards similar to your own."
- Inviting their input. For example, say, "Something I'm interested in hearing more about is the experience any of you have had with this type of training program."

Check with an experienced business person or your local key informant on whether it is appropriate to encourage participation. If there is no response to your questions, summarize and thank your audience. Avoid pressing people for comments and never single out audience members, especially in countries like China where individuals are uncomfortable standing out from a group.

5.2.4 Addressing Questions

When addressing questions from a large audience or in a second language, it is important to listen seriously and carefully to each question, then to restate what you have heard. This helps to ensure:

- You have heard the question correctly.
- You understand the question.
- The audience hears and understands the question.
- Your interpreter hears and understands the question.

Answer all questions positively and without apology. Don't be critical, defensive or personal. Even if you are being attacked or an audience member is objecting to what you have said, thank them for raising the issue and counter with a considered response backed by fact, testimonial, or supporting information that is meaningful to your audience. You should always respond honestly. However, depending on the country and audience, you may wish to modify your approach. In Canada, for example, it is acceptable to admit you do not know the answer to a question and to tell the audience member you will find out and get back to them. However, in some cultural groups or with certain individuals, it may be less acceptable and diminish your stature to publicly admit a lack of knowledge. Know what is appropriate and determine your response in advance.

Here are some additional tips for effectively addressing questions:

- Be brief. You may destroy the positive impression created during a succinct presentation by giving rambling answers.
- Address the entire audience, not just the questioner.
- If one person is monopolizing the question period, invite that person to speak to you further after the presentation.
- Avoid expressing negative reactions, verbally or non-verbally, to questions asked.

Respect the time limit or know what is acceptable in terms of going overtime. Finally, when your time is up or the question period is starting to drag, summarize and restate your key theme. This allows you to retake control, end on a positive note, and reinforce your message one final time.

5.3 Follow Up After Your Presentation

Your presentation is often just one part of your overall marketing program. In fact, what happens after the presentation may be more important than the presentation itself.

5.3.1 Advance Your Agenda

The audience interest you receive may be greater after your formal presentation than it was during the question period, particularly in cultures or situations where individuals may not feel comfortable speaking publicly. Take advantage of these situations to ask questions, solicit feedback, and obtain business cards. Ask yourself what the next step in your business development process might be. This might range from a thank you letter to a formal written proposal. Review issues that were left unanswered or where more information was requested.

Find creative ways to keep you and your company forefront in your audience's mind. Give them something tangible to further reinforce your presentation. This may be by tracking down articles that might be of interest to prospective clients. Send additional corporate material to those who expressed interest or to key decision-makers.

5.3.2 Assess Your Performance

The best way to improve your future performance is to do a self-assessment of your presentation and to solicit feedback from others. Your self-assessment should cover all aspects of your presentation from planning through delivery including:

- **Organization:** How well was the material organized. Can it be streamlined?
- **Visuals:** How effective were they? Any changes, additions, omissions?
- **Delivery:** Did your message flow? Did it move the audience?
- **Q&A:** How effective were you at answering questions? Were there questions or objections you did not anticipate? Could have answered differently?
- **Audience:** Were there notable audience reactions? What caused them?
- **Overall:** What worked? What didn't? Were you successful? Why or why not?

If possible, you should also ask both a colleague from your company and a “cultural key informant” to provide feedback on your presentation. Your colleague will be able to give you another perspective on your subject matter and how it was presented. The key informant can provide valuable information on how your message was delivered to, and received by, your audience.

Finally, ensure that any important lessons you learn are not lost. Incorporate suggestions into your presentation planning and delivery process. Document the cross-cultural knowledge you acquire so others in your company may use it. This will contribute significantly to your international corporate intelligence and help ensure that future presentations by you or your colleagues are a success.

5.4 Are You Ready? A Checklist

- Continually monitor audience response and watch for non-verbal feedback.
- Know what the audience's listening style and expected level of participation is.
- Prepare answers to anticipated questions and practice responses.
- Listen carefully to the questioner and positively acknowledge all questions.
- Repeat questions to ensure audience and interpreter understanding.
- Be available after the presentation to answer questions and network.
- Send thank-you notes or additional information to audience members.
- Evaluate your performance and incorporate lessons learned into future presentations.

6

Chapter 6: Useful Resources

6.1 Websites

6.1.1 Cultural Considerations

- Marco Polo: Your Cross-Cultural Marketing Edge
strategis.gc.ca/marcopolo

A comprehensive guide to cross-cultural competency in the international marketplace – part of Industry Canada’s Strategis Website.

- Team Canada Inc, Market Strategies: Cultural Considerations
exportsource.ca/gol/exportsource/site.nsf/en/es02592.html

General information on cultural etiquette and direct links to on-line sites that provide commonly used greetings and phrases translated into foreign languages.

- Destination Success: Consular and Canadian Trade Commission Services for Business Travellers
www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/dest_success-en.asp

- Centre for Inter-Cultural Learning: E-thologies
www.e-thologies.com/menu-en.asp

- Michigan State University: Centre for International Business Education and Research
globaleledge.msu.edu/

- International Business Card Etiquette
ciber.msu.edu/busres/channel/businesscard.htm

- International Addresses and Salutations
www.bspage.com/address.html

- Business Netiquette International
www.bspage.com/1netiq/Netiq.html

- Cross Cultural Issues in Business Communication: Improving Communication Across Cultures
www.bena.com/ewinters/preface.html

- Business Culture: Information on International Business
www.businessculture.com/

- Executive Planet: International Business Culture and Etiquette
www.executiveplanet.com/

- Aquarius Translators Services
www.aquarius.net/
- Culture Savvy: Working with interpreters and translators
www.culturalsavvy.com/interpreters.htm
- Languages of the World
www.123world.com/languages/
- Earth Calendar: Holidays and Celebrations Around the World
www.earthcalendar.net/index.php

6.1.2 Presentations

- Presenters University: Articles on preparation, your audience, visual aids, delivery and using technology
presentersuniversity.com
- Virtual Presentation Assistant: An online tutorial for improving public speaking skills including modules on analyzing your audience and visual aids
www.ku.edu/~coms/virtual_assistant/vpa/vpa.htm
- E-How: Using Visual Aids
www.ehow.com/how_3477_visual-aids-during.html

Gender-specific information

- Foreign Affairs Canada publication—Her Own Way: Advice for the Woman Traveller
www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/her_own_way-en.asp

French Site:

www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/her_own_way-fr.asp

6.1.3 Technical/Technology Issues

Electricity Conversion

www.independenttraveler.com/resources/article.cfm?AID=95&category=9

Computer Accessories

www.independenttraveler.com/resources/article.cfm?AID=74&category=3

Presentation Technology

www.communicateusingtechnology.com/articles/why_use_presn_tech_.htm

www.communicateusingtechnology.com/presenting_using_technology_articles.htm

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6.2.1 Cultural Considerations

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Nelson, C. 1998. *Protocol for Profit: A Manager's Guide to Competing Worldwide*, International Thomson Business Press, London, UK.

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6.2.2 Presentations

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- Henninger-Chiang, T. and J. Reel. 1998. *Professional Presentations: How to Succeed in International Business*, The University of Michigan Press.
- Jeary, T. 2005. *Life Is a Series of Presentations: Eight Ways to Inspire, Inform and Influence Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime*, Fireside Publications.
- Kaye, E. 2002. *Maximize Your Presentation Skills: How to Speak, Look, and Act on Your Way to the Top*, Prima Lifestyles.
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- McKenzie, C. 1993. *Successful Presentations*, Random House, London.
- Tisdale, J. 2004. *Effective Business Presentations*, NetEffect Series: Prentice Hall.
- Urech, E. 2005. *Speaking Globally: Effective Presentations Across International and Cultural Boundaries*, Second Edition, Book Network International.
- Timm, R. 1997. *How to Make Winning Presentations: 30 Action Tips for Getting Your Ideas Across with Clarity and Impact*, Career Press Inc.

6.3 Audiocassettes

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