

# SPEAKING GLOBALLY

An Exporter's Guide to Effective Presentations

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# 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 what works in Canada will be effective across language and culture. In the case of language, you might have to speak in a non-native tongue, hire a translator or, at the very least, modify your pace and style. Cultural differences can create even greater challenges because they are often more subtle and difficult to decipher.

## Why Culture Counts

Culture consists of the knowledge, values, beliefs, customs and laws shared by members of a society. Language, protocol, mannerisms and ways of interacting may appear similar in other cultures but mean something very different. It is important to realize that people from other cultures don't necessarily think, communicate, and do things that same way that Canadians do. Understanding the cultural characteristics of a particular market 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 five modules 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 contents, which allows you to easily locate your desired information. Readiness checklists appear at the end of each module to help ensure that you have covered all the bases for 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.

# 1: PREPARE TO PRESENT

## Module 1: Contents Summary

| Page | Topic   |
|------|---|
| 5    | Researching your market.                                  |
| 6    | Conducting an audience analysis.                          |
| 7    | Audience research strategies                              |
| 7    | Setting your presentation objectives.                     |
| 8    | Rehearsing your presentation.                             |
| 9    | Soliciting feedback from colleagues and cultural experts. |

## Start with the 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 pricing. Before developing your presentation it is essential to understand the local culture and business norms in your

target market. This includes researching local:

- history
- religion
- values
- social institutions
- politics
- geography and regional differences
- gender roles
- business ethics and protocol
- social norms
- language
- technology

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

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This knowledge will help you establish a cultural context for your presentation and determine how it should be prepared and delivered to your audience.

### Here are some research suggestions:

- Read books and newspaper and magazine articles on the target market.
- Talk to business people with experience in the market.
- Talk to Canadians who are originally from the country.
- Utilize the knowledge of trade officers at the Canadian Embassy or High Commission in the target country.
- Review government, business and tourism websites, including those listed in the Resource List at the end of this section.

## Understand Your 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 in their worlds, not merely academic and theoretical<sup>1</sup>.

Many Canadians miss opportunities to successfully present their products or services to foreign audiences by not taking their interests into consideration. Companies have also missed the mark by making incorrect

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

assumptions an audience's background level of knowledge. Content that is too simplistic may make an audience feel that they are being talked down to. 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.

### 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.

## AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

To avoid pitfalls, it is necessary to conduct a thorough audience analysis when preparing to present in a foreign market. Determine the answers to the following questions:

- Who will attend?
- Why are they attending?
- What are their job titles and responsibilities?
- What is their mother tongue? Do they have a good grasp of English/French?
- What is their educational background and level of subject knowledge?
- Who are the key individuals or decision-makers in the audience?
- What are their values?
- What are their needs and interests?

- What does the audience expect from me?
- What are their attitudes toward my product or service and company?

## Audience Research Strategies

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:

- Check with trade officers at the Canadian Embassy or High Commission 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.
- Ask your local host company to provide attendee information and objectives.
- Consult with your local joint venture partner or agent if you have one.
- Arrive early to meet people before your presentation. Ask questions such as why they are attending, and what they hope to get out of the presentation. Take note of names, companies, and objectives—information that you can incorporate into your talk to make it more personal.

## Set Objectives

Your presentation objectives will vary significantly depending on your market. Different cultures value different things. For example, in many Asian and Latin American cultures the time and effort one dedicates to developing relationships has a greater influence on success than the price or quality of one's product or service.

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*"Our plans miscarry because they have no aim."*  
SENECA  
(an ancient philosopher)

In many countries it is unrealistic to think that a great presentation will strongly influence the outcome of your marketing efforts. It may take successive presentations and years of personal interaction to achieve your objectives. Being aware of these factors will help you to adapt your expectations as well as your presentation content and approach.

### A CASE OF CULTURE:

In the United States you are more likely to encounter an audience that cares about cost, efficiency and the bottom line. In Mexico or Japan these factors may be less important than presenting the long-term vision for your business relationship.

To ensure that your presentation objectives are appropriate, realistic, and obtainable, consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose of your presentation?

Examples:

To introduce your company as a first step in a relationship?

To inform your audience about your company, product or service?

To persuade your audience to purchase or take specific action?

- 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..."

Examples:

"...agree to a follow-up meeting."

"...approve our proposal for a new wastewater facility."

- What is 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."

- What is the WIFM (What's In It For Me) from the audience's perspective?

List three benefits the audience will derive from your presentation. Ensure these are relevant to the local culture and circumstances.

## Practice Pays Off

Individuals often spend all of their time preparing their presentation and leave no time for practice. The result—such as mentally running through your presentation on the airplane—can be disastrous, particularly when presenting to an audience with a different language and culture.

Make time to do one or more rehearsals using your visual aids. This will help you to streamline your ideas, polish your delivery, and ensure that you are within your allotted time.

Finally, find a businessperson with experience in the market or a cultural interpreter who understands your audience. Ask one or more of these individuals 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 delivery.

## Are You Ready? A Checklist

- Research local history, culture and business environment.
- Conduct an audience analysis.
- Arrange to arrive at venue early to meet audience members.
- Determine appropriate presentation objectives and goal.
- Identify audience WIFM and benefits.
- Be able to state main presentation message or theme in single sentence.
- Rehearse presentation aloud using visual media
- Solicit feedback from colleagues and cultural experts.

## How Can I Learn More? A Resource List

Canadian Trade Commissioner  
Service Website.

[www.infoexport.gc.ca](http://www.infoexport.gc.ca)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade resource providing access to hundreds of sectoral market studies and country-specific reports.

Centre for Intercultural  
Learning E-thologies

[www.e-thologies.com/default.asp](http://www.e-thologies.com/default.asp).

The Canadian Foreign Service Institute's information resource of general and cultural information on countries around the world.

CIA World Factbook

[www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/)

Facts on local government, economics, politics, and religious groups for countries around the world.

ExportSource – Researching  
Countries and Sectors

[www.exportsource.gc.ca](http://www.exportsource.gc.ca)

Team Canada Inc.'s resource for international trade and export information.

Library of Congress Country Studies

[lcweb2loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome](http://lcweb2loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome)

The Library of Congress database on country-specific information.

Marco Polo: Your Cross-Cultural  
Marketing Edge

[strategis.gc.ca/marcopolo](http://strategis.gc.ca/marcopolo)

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

Michigan State University's International  
Resources on the WWW

[ciber.bus.msu.edu/busres](http://ciber.bus.msu.edu/busres)

Regional and country-specific information for markets worldwide.

University of Kansas IBRC  
Country Resource

[www.ibrc.bschool.ukans.edu/country/country](http://www.ibrc.bschool.ukans.edu/country/country)

International business resource site for specific countries and regions of the world.

Take a World View: Export Your Services

[strategis.ic.gc.ca/twv](http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/twv)

A comprehensive, step-by-step guide to exporting your services.

The Web of Culture

[www.webofculture.com](http://www.webofculture.com)

General information on languages, religions, gestures, time zones and currencies around the world.

# 2: ORGANIZING FOR OFFSHORE

## Module 2: Contents Summary

| Page | Topic   |
|------|---|
| 11   | Brainstorming and developing your presentation outline. |
| 12   | Using appropriate supporting data.                      |
| 13   | Creating a successful presentation structure.           |
| 14   | Developing effective openings and endings.              |
| 15   | Using credentials to establish credibility.             |

## Assemble Your Ideas and Outline

### BRAINSTORM

Once you have analyzed your audience and determined your objectives (see Module 1), the next task is to identify the priority topics that you want to present. Brainstorm all ideas that come to mind when answering the questions in your audience analysis and objectives. Place these ideas in order of priority from most to least important.

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

The keep it simple rule also applies across cultures and is especially important when presenting to an audience for whom English or French is not their mother tongue. 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 and of interest to your audience. Realize that you may need several presentations over time to achieve your final objectives.

### DEVELOP YOUR OUTLINE

After you have brainstormed your main ideas, develop your outline:

1. Write down each of your main ideas on a separate page.
2. Under each idea or topic, write out the main message you want to convey.
3. Under each message write key points. These should state:
  - a. Why the message is important to your audience, and
  - b. What benefits it will provide them.
4. Determine what supporting data is required.



## PRESENTATION OUTLINE

|                                   | IDEA 1                             | IDEA 2                             | IDEA 3                             |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>What</b> ➡                     | a. main message                    | a. main message                    | a. main message                    |
| <b>Why</b> ➡<br><b>Benefits</b> ➡ | b. key points<br>i)<br>ii)<br>iii) | b. key points<br>i)<br>ii)<br>iii) | b. key points<br>i)<br>ii)<br>iii) |
| <b>Evidence</b> ➡                 | c. supporting data                 | c. supporting data                 | c. supporting data                 |

### SUPPORTING DATA

The evidence or supporting data you will need to convince your audience will vary depending on where you are presenting. Different cultures respond to different information. It is important to understand these differences and to adapt accordingly.

B. Psychological – ideas and supporting data are feeling-oriented, covert and indirect. (E.g. Latin America, Asia, the Middle East) Your presentation may employ one or a combination of the two based on the culture and audience involved.

### ***Presenting Data***

There are different orientations to the past, present and future in different countries. Countries such as Iran, India, France, and Japan tend to be past oriented. Canada and the United States are more oriented towards the present and short-term future. Knowing these differences will help you determine what to stress and how much detail you should provide.

Here are other tips for presenting data:

- Limit what you present; don't share all facts and figures only the largest, latest or most important.
- Plan to cover less material in international settings.
- Speak slowly to an audience whose mother tongue is not yours.
- Use the rule of three: people remember groups of three ideas or points.
- off large numbers.
- Make information relevant.

### A CASE OF CULTURE:

A soft sell might work better in Britain, and a hard sell in the United States. You might emphasize price when presenting in Mexico and quality when presenting in Venezuela. Northwest European countries tend to utilize more analysis, logic and rationality, whereas South European countries stress relationships, the use of intuition, and sensitivity. Therefore, if presenting to a German audience you might consider using more facts and statistics. For an Italian audience, you might add quotes or testimonials, especially if these are from sources trusted and respected by your audience.

There are two approaches to developing your ideas and data:

A. Logical – ideas and supporting data are rational, clear, direct and overt. (E.g. North America, Northwest Europe)

...of

- When using acronyms or analogies ensure they are meaningful or relevant to the local audience.

## Establish a Successful Structure

Presentation structure, or how we order our ideas and information, is culturally influenced.

### A CASE OF CULTURE:

In North America, presentations are usually structured in a linear way with information proceeding relatively directly from A to Z. We prefer presentations that follow chronological, sequential, geographical, categorical or hierarchical structures. In contrast, many Oriental, Latin, and Middle Eastern cultures take a more diffuse approach to structuring ideas and information. A presentation by a businessperson from one of these cultures may seem to begin in the middle or to proceed in a roundabout fashion without ever reaching a clear conclusion. In the same way that Canadians might feel that such a structure is unfocussed, our approach may seem aggressive or simplistic to other cultures.

### CREATE A ROADMAP

The key to an effective presentation is to make the pattern of organization crystal clear to the audience. Research has shown that audiences hear what they expect to hear not necessarily what the presenter tells them.

You need to create a roadmap for your audience. Adhere to the saying: "Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you've told them." 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 and considerations for structuring your presentation:

- Use the same pattern of organization throughout your presentation.
- Use visual aids to help orient your audience (E.g. overview charts or moving agendas that highlight upcoming topics).
- 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".
- Bridge 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 listener's 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.

### BE FLEXIBLE

Be prepared to adapt and restructure your presentation as you go if necessary. The key member of the team you are presenting to may be called away from the meeting. It may be locally acceptable for an audience to arrive 20 minutes late, leaving you 15 minutes to present instead of 30. Having a clear and flexible structure will help you meet these challenges.

# Invest Time in Your Opening and Ending

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.

## OPENINGS

Effective openings accomplish three things:

1. Secure the audience's attention and establish rapport.
2. Establish expectations by stating the theme and scope of the presentation
3. Establish credibility.

### ***Secure Attention***

A key to securing attention with your presentation opening is to start where the audience is. One way is to begin in their language, even if it is only a simple: "Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen."

Mentally check every possible introductory idea from your audience's perspective. 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.

Be culturally sensitive to what will get your audience on board. An approach that works in Canada may fall flat in Malaysia. In Canada and the United States where communication is direct, you might open your presentation by simply telling your audience why they should listen to you. Asian or Latin 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 France, India and Iran, 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.

### ***Establish 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.

### ***Create Credibility***

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
- gender
- education and professional qualifications
- profession or rank (e.g. 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 what you are director of (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 in your company.

### A CASE OF CULTURE:

A Canadian consultant, who introduced herself to a Korean audience by emphasizing her personal experience and education, failed to maximize her credibility. In countries like Korea and Japan it is important to tie in your status with your company. Her credibility as an individual was unimportant compared to the reputation of her company and her position within it.

Finally, be careful about how much you talk about yourself. Self-promotion is frowned upon in some regions such as Asia.

### ENDINGS

Effective endings accomplish three things:

1. Summarize key points to reinforce your message.
2. Restate your main theme and draw conclusions.
3. Make a call to action.

### **Summary**

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.

### **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. Remain sensitive to the local expectations and style of your audience and be subtle when appropriate.

### **Call to Action**

Effective presentations in Canada frequently end with a call to action. In foreign cultures you may need to modify your call to action. Whereas in the United States 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 his or her 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.

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

## Are You Ready? A Checklist

- Brainstorm and prioritize presentation ideas.
- Develop a clear outline using main points and sub-points.
- Ensure 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 appropriate call to action.

# 3: METHODS & MATERIALS

## Module 3: Contents Summary

| Page | Topic   |
|------|---|
| 18   | Using visual aids in cross-cultural settings. |
| 21   | Preparing speaker notes.                      |
| 22   | Preparing audience handouts.                  |
| 23   | Choosing your presentation medium.            |
| 23   | Overhead Transparencies                       |
| 24   | 35 mm Slides                                  |
| 25   | Computer Projected and Electronic Media       |
| 25   | Presenting in a foreign environment.          |

## Make Visuals Valuable

Visual media, when properly prepared, can be a valuable asset to your presentation. It has been shown to increase communication effectiveness by 40 to 50 percent.

The following chart shows the impact of visual aids on presentations<sup>2</sup>:

| METHOD      | RECALL PERIOD |              |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
|             | After 3 Hours | After 3 Days |
| Tell        | 70%           | 10%          |
| Show        | 72%           | 20%          |
| Tell & Show | 85%           | 65%          |

Visual media is especially important when presenting in foreign settings because it enhances the communication process 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.

## PRINCIPLES FOR VISUALS

While effective visual media can augment your message, poor visuals can harm your presentation. When speaking to an audience where English or French is a second language, you may quickly lose your listeners if you overwhelm them with too many visuals or use visuals crammed with too much information.

Here are some general principles for success<sup>3</sup>:

### ***Pictures are Worth 1000 Words***

Pictures cut across language and cultural differences and are easily understood by

<sup>2</sup> McKenzie, Carole, *Successful Presentations*, Random House, London, UK, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Leech, Thomas, *How to Prepare, Stage and Deliver Winning Presentations*, American Management Association, New York, NY, 1993.

diverse audiences. People the world over remember scenes and dream in pictures. Where possible, use photos and models. Conduct demonstrations of products and equipment. Utilize flow charts and graphs instead of text or columns of numbers.

For example:

- Photos or illustrations help the audience make a concrete association with a product, person or place.
- 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.

***Simplify***

Present only one key idea per visual. This will help focus attention on the message you are trying to send. Your audience has only a few minutes to grasp your message. If your visuals are too numerous or try to deliver too much information, your listener’s minds are more likely to wander or turn off.

***Interpret Visuals, Don’t Just Report Them***

Don’t assume that your data will speak for itself. Audiences from different cultures may not interpret data the same way as you. Verbally point out the message you want your audience to understand. Don’t read your slides verbatim but use them to "trigger" your thoughts.

***Use Titles Effectively***

The most powerful position on your visual is the title. Give each visual a headline title that

helps increase comprehension. As with newspaper headlines, which are similar internationally, headline titles can provide your audience with a quick sense of your main message. Following are examples of ineffective and effective use of titles:

***Highlight Key Information***

Design visuals so that critical factors or key messages visually jump out at the audience. For example, use bold lettering, shading or highlighting to focus attention on important lines of text, columns in tables or pie segments in graphs.

***Vary Your Visuals***

Make sure that text only visuals are interspersed with graphs charts or illustrations. This will help maintain audience interest and make your presentation more engaging to view. However, be sure that you maintain a consistent visual style for your entire presentation. Use the same fonts, colours and graphic elements to maintain continuity.

**WORD AND NUMBER USAGE**

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:

- Limit text to 5 to 6 lines per visual with not more than 7 words per line.
- List key points or phrases only.
- Use large type which can be read at a distance

| Ineffective Titles                                    | Effective Titles  |
|---|---|
| Electric Car<br>Cost vs. Years<br>System Improvements | Electric Cars More Economical<br>Initial Cost Outlay Quickly Covered<br>System Changes Expand Performance |

- Choose a single, san serif font such as Helvetica to increase legibility.
- Avoid using all upper case letters.
- Use landscape as opposed to portrait orientation.
- Use exact phrasing and remove unnecessary detail.
- Use bullets not numbers, which may suggest a priority order.
- Present information in steps to increase comprehension and focus.

## COLOUR

Be aware of colour associations in different countries. Check with a local expert to determine colour schemes that will avoid offence and convey the most professional image to your foreign audience. In Canada, for example, darker blue or green backgrounds with white or yellow lettering are preferential colours for slide presentations. Using what is popular and respected in your host country may give you an advantage.

## Prepare Written Resources

There are two types of written resources to consider preparing for your international presentation:

1. Speaker Notes
2. Audience Handouts

### SPEAKER NOTES

Speaker notes are the bridge between organization and delivery. They provide a clear framework that will help ensure you stay 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 Module 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.

### ***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.
- Force conciseness.
- 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.
- Easily stored in binders, business folios or files.

### ***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 (e.g. efficiency, top-rated).
- Make a photocopy or backup of your notes.
- Use symbols to facilitate delivery (e.g. 'P' for pause, or directional arrows fi)
- Use signpost words to help audience— particularly foreign-language speakers— follow along (e.g. "as a result", in conclusion").
- Mark expected elapsed time beside notes to keep you on schedule.

## AUDIENCE HANDOUTS

Handouts can be beneficial in international settings, particularly when you are not speaking in the country's native language. Letting your audience know that major points are covered in handouts may allow them to more fully focus on you and your message. You can also increase understanding by translating handouts 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 where you are not speaking in the native language—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 own 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.
- Prepare handouts in the audience's language to increase understanding.
- Make handouts clear and self-explanatory; check for cultural nuances.
- 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 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.

# Know Your Equipment and Environment

## PRESENTATION MEDIUMS

It is important to consider the medium you use when presenting in other countries because the acceptability and use of presentation mediums may differ. Use mediums that are appropriate for the audience and venue. For example, the same computer animated 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 in Russia. 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 medium.

### ***Types of Mediums***

There are three types of presentation mediums that are commonly used in international settings:

- 1) Overhead transparencies
- 2) 35 millimeter slides, and
- 3) Computer projected or electronic media.

Following is a list of advantages, disadvantages and tips for using each:

## OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCIES

### ***Advantages***

Quickly generated from computer.

- Provide flexibility to write on.
- Can be presented in lighted room.
- Easy to copy for audience handouts.
- Projector simple, reliable to operate and commonly available.
- Convenient for use in question and answer sessions.
- Portable.
- Encourage a more intimate and less intimidating presentation.
- Sequence and content of presentation easily adjusted at the last moment.

### ***Disadvantages***

- Less suitable for larger audiences (more than 30 people).
- Less professional in formal or prestigious settings.
- Laying on and adjustment of overheads often distracting.
- High risk of losing sequence if shuffling forwards and backwards in presentation.

### ***Tips***

- Overhead screens should be at a 45° 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 distracting.
- Face the audience, not the projector or screen.
- Point at the screen, not the overhead projector.

- Use very large font sizes (minimum 26 pt.).
- Photocopy overheads onto regular paper and insert a copy after each transparency to facilitate review without facing screen. These copies can also be used for speaker notes.
- Don't read your overheads verbatim; use them as thought "triggers".

## 35 MILLIMETER SLIDES

### **Advantages**

- Portable.
- Easily duplicated.
- Easily transferable by email.
- Allow photographs to be well projected.
- Better for colour than overheads.
- 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.

### **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.

## COMPUTER PROJECTED AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

### **Advantages**

- Extremely professional image.
- Minimal expense to produce visuals if equipment available.
- Easy to sort visuals and practice with "slide show" feature of most software.
- Visuals easily edited.
- Allows easy insertion of graphics.
- Expands options through the use of multimedia such as animation, video clips and sound.

### **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.
- As with slides, requires a darkened room.

### **Tips**

- Avoid extreme use of animation or distracting sounds.
- Prepare standard slides or overheads as a backup.

- Obtain a wireless advance or mouse system if possible to allow you to move.

Whatever visual media you choose to use be careful not to let them become the presentation. Remember that visual aids augment your presentation, they don't replace you.

## THE PRESENTATION ENVIRONMENT

There are many factors that presenters need to be aware of and to plan for in international settings. 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. Once at their destination it may be difficult for presenters to test equipment in advance or to influence elements such as lighting, ventilation, or room set-up.

Here are considerations and suggestions:

### ***Check It Out 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, 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.

Questions that you need to consider include:

- 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 mic available to facilitate movement?
- 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.

### ***Have a Back-up Plan in Case of Problems***

It is important to anticipate disasters and have a contingency plan in the event something unexpected happens. 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 with you in case your luggage is lost.

## 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.

Use the following table to help develop a contingency plan:

| WHAT IF?     | CONTINGENCY |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Personal  |             |
| 2. Material  |             |
| 3. Equipment |             |
| 4. Venue     |             |
| 5. Other     |             |

### ***Test and Practice***

When travelling long distances for a major presentation 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 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 like Thailand 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 planned or if equipment doesn't work.

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.

## 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 and visual media.
- Translate visual media and handouts into local language if possible.
- Have visuals available in another form if using computer-generated media.

### ***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: DYNAMICS OF DELIVERY

## Module 4: Contents Summary

| Page | Topic                                 |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| 28   | Understanding international protocol. |
| 30   | Adapting for the local language.      |
| 32   | Working with interpreters.            |
| 34   | Being aware of body language.         |

A well-prepared presentation may fall flat because of what you say or do during your delivery. Many Canadians presenting in foreign countries have experienced a negative reaction to something they have said or done. 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.

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*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 conduct, ways of speaking, and norms of behavior, all of which can be minefields for misinterpretation. Canadians need to be knowledgeable about, as well as sensitive to, these differences.

## Pay Attention to Protocol

Protocol, formalities and etiquette differ according to country and circumstance. 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.

### 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 Module 2, Openings).

### RECOGNIZING VIPS

In many countries it is customary to introduce VIPs at the beginning of your speech or presentation. Know in advance who should be introduced and in what order (e.g. in China introduce highest-ranking individuals first). 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.

## DRESS

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.

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. International business people can diminish their image by trying to emulate local dress and doing it poorly.

## GENDER

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 you are introduced by a highly respected businessperson.

## AGE

In some cultures age is a factor in determining status and authority. In Asian cultures being older has a significant impact on an individual's perceived status and authority.

### A CASE OF CULTURE:

A Canadian woman, who was frustrated by interactions with her Japanese counterparts, 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 with the Japanese.

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.

## Adapt Your Spoken Message

Two distinct styles of cross-cultural communication exist: explicit and implicit. In explicit cultures almost all important information is communicated verbally. These cultures tend to be more direct and frank in what they say. When presenting to them you'll probably want to dispense with the frivolous, be straightforward and get to the bottom line. Canadians, Americans, Germans, Swiss, British, Australians and Scandinavians tend to be explicit communicators.

Implicit cultures rely more on the context to communicate the most important information. Persons from these cultures believe critical information will often not be verbalized, merely implied. Non-verbal behaviors,

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*Ask a Japanese businessman what language he speaks, and he will say the language of the customer<sup>4</sup>.*

therefore, take on greater meaning, while speech patterns are considerably more ambiguous and inexact. Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Latin Americans, Arabs, Africans and French tend to be implicit communicators.

Make sure you research the communication style of your audience and adapt accordingly. Here are other suggestions:

### 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, conversing with native language speakers, and reading local newspapers.

If you can't give your presentation in the native language, at least begin with a few words of it. This sends a message that you don't take the gift of speaking English or French in a non-English or French speaking country for granted. Ask a native speaker to help with pronunciation and don't worry if you stumble. In most cases your local audience will appreciate the effort.

### INTERNATIONALIZE YOUR LANGUAGE

Canadians often have an advantage because English is the language of international business and French is probably the second most useful language in the world<sup>5</sup>. Just because your foreign counterparts speak English or French as their second language, however, doesn't mean you don't have to adapt.

Here are some tips for internationalizing your language:

- the use of jargon, acronyms, slang, colloquialisms, and sport or culture bound analogies (e.g. "rule of thumb", "ballpark estimate").
- Use standard and consistent terminology familiar to your audience or explain terms the first time you use them.

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson, Carl, International Business: Manager's Guide to Strategy in the Age of Globalism, International Thomson Business Press, London, UK, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

- Use active not passive language (e.g. say: "We reviewed our options." not "We have reviewed our options." Use were not have been, etc.)
- Use words that have few alternate meanings (e.g. accurate not right).
- Use action-specific verbs instead of general ones (e.g. "We hope to win the contract." not "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 (e.g. "for all intents and purposes").

## ADAPT YOUR STYLE AND PACE

Speaking styles vary widely from country to country.

### A CASE OF CULTURE:

Iranian and Middle Eastern cultures have a tradition of using eloquent language and quoting revered poets—something Canadians might view as excessive or flowery. Latin cultures speak with a more emotional and varied tone of voice than Canadians do; a style we may feel is exaggerated and unprofessional. Conversely, Oriental cultures tend to have a much more monotonous tone; boring to us, but to them demonstrating self-control and respect.

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 try to emulate it when you speak. Increase your animation and variation in tone when in Latin and Middle Eastern countries; mute it when in Oriental countries.

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 (e.g. 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. (E.g. "Efficiency improved by 50 percent, that's five zero percent.").
- Avoid saying "um", "ah", and "you know" which are very distracting.
- Repeat important sentences.

## USE INTERPRETERS EFFECTIVELY

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 graphics layouts 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 Interpreters<sup>6</sup>***

- 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.
- Address the audience not the interpreter
- If appropriate, acknowledge your interpreter (check with your host regarding local protocol).

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<sup>6</sup> For tips on working with translators see the Website Marco Polo: The Cross Cultural Marketing Edge, [www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/marcopolo](http://www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/marcopolo).

- 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.

## 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 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.

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

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

## Make the Best of Body Language

In many cultures your body language communicates more than what you say. Middle Eastern, Oriental, South European, and Latin American cultures derive significant meaning from your gestures, facial expressions, posture and physical contact, as well as your words.

*At least 75% of all communication is non-verbal<sup>7</sup>.*

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 cautious about these differences.

Here are some tips for effective non-verbal communication:

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

Following are other aspects of non-verbal communication to consider:

### GESTURES

Most Canadians use their hands when speaking to punctuate the flow of conversation, 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. Here are some examples<sup>8</sup>:

- 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.

## BODY LANGUAGE AND EMOTION

How you stand and move your body may set the tone for how you are perceived by your audience. In Indonesia, for example, 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 are more demonstrative when they speak; Oriental cultures are more muted. A formal North American style of presenting might get you branded as dull in Mexico whereas using an animated and emotional style in China, Japan, or Korea might undermine your credibility. Observe your local counterparts and try to adopt a similar body language and level of emotion.

## 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 is considered 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 Asian cultures watch for a widening of the eyes which 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.

## PERSONAL SPACE

People have an invisible bubble of space around them that is a form of personal territory. The size of the 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.

## BE YOURSELF

Being aware of cultural differences is a great start to successful communication. Adapt your style but don't stop being yourself. If you speak naturally and with sincerity, your message is likely to be well received.

## 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 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 implicit and adapt your approach accordingly.
- Internationalize your language.
- Understand acceptable use of eye contact, hand gestures and personal space.

## How Can I Learn More? A Resource List

### WEBSITES

Aquarius Search System for Translators

[news.xs4all.nl/~jumanl](http://news.xs4all.nl/~jumanl)

Provides a place to locate translators all over the world for business needs.

Communication Guide

[www.bena.com/ewinters/preface](http://www.bena.com/ewinters/preface)

A guide to communication, presentation and translation across cultures.

Preparing for International Presentations:  
The Humor Perspective

[www.antion.com/articles/international](http://www.antion.com/articles/international)

Comments and anecdotes about presenting to international audiences.

Web of Culture Languages of the World

[www.webofculture.com/refs/languages](http://www.webofculture.com/refs/languages)

Foreign language resources and dictionaries.

Web of Culture Gestures Around the World

[www.webofculture.com/refs/gestures](http://www.webofculture.com/refs/gestures)

A listing of gestures and suggestions for body language in different countries.

When in Rome

[www.entrepreneurmag.com/page.hts?N=6631](http://www.entrepreneurmag.com/page.hts?N=6631)

A useful article on presentation protocol in different cultures.

### BOOKS & ARTICLES

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Munter, Mary, Cross-Cultural Communication for Managers, Business Horizons, May/June 1993, Vol. 36 Issue 3. p. 69.

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# 5: IMPACT AND AFTER

## Module 5: Contents Summary

| Page | Topic                                     |
|------|---|
| 38   | Monitoring audience response and feedback |
| 39   | Handling question and answer sessions.    |
| 41   | Following up after your presentation.     |

## 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.

### 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 readily show their

emotions (e.g. Latin, Middle Eastern), while others are less demonstrative (e.g. Oriental, Northern European).

Be careful not to interpret other's behavior by your standards. For example, Indians may shake their heads from side to side to indicate positive attention. Africans may nod and smile politely even if they do not understand you. In some cultures it is acceptable for people to come and go during your presentation or to talk among themselves. Don't be distracted or take offence.

### 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 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.

## 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.

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.

### 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?
- 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.

### AUDIENCE INTERACTION

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 in the case in other countries, which do not have the same tradition of public participation as we do, or that shun public disagreement. In parts of Asia, for example, members of the audience might not raise objections for fear of making the presenter lose face. By contrast, you might find Indian audiences eager participants, or questions asked by a German 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.

### ENCOURAGING 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."

If people do not ask questions, you may want to encourage them by<sup>9</sup>:

**Suggesting topics:**☞ "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:**☞ "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:**☞ "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 businessperson or your local counterpart 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.

## ADDRESSING QUESTIONS

When addressing questions from a large audience or in a non-native 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 regions (e.g. Southern France or Italy or where machismo may be a factor), 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.

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Leech, Thomas, *How to Prepare, Stage and Deliver Winning Presentations*, American Management Association, New York, NY, 1993.

- Be patient. Some of your listeners won't grasp the message as quickly as you expect they should. Keep trying to help them.
- 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.

## Follow up

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.

### ADVANCE YOUR AGENDA

The audience interest you receive may be greater after your formal presentation than it was during 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

handouts, brochures, or samples. Follow-up 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.

### 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 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 expert" 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 cultural expert 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.

## 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 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.

# GENERAL RESOURCES

## WEBSITES

Getting Through Customs

[www.getcustoms.com](http://www.getcustoms.com)

A private site with some tips on doing business in other countries.

International Addresses and Salutations

[www.bspage.com/address](http://www.bspage.com/address)

Provides correct address formats and appropriate personal salutations for countries around the world.

Marco Polo: Your Cross-Cultural Marketing Edge

[strategis.gc.ca/marcopolo](http://strategis.gc.ca/marcopolo)

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

Presenting Solutions

[www.presentingsolutions.com/effectivepresentations](http://www.presentingsolutions.com/effectivepresentations)

Tips on various aspects of presentations.

Presenters University

[presentersuniversity.com](http://presentersuniversity.com)

Articles on preparation, your audience, visual aids, delivery and using technology.

The Web of Culture

[webofculture.com](http://webofculture.com)

General information on languages, religions, gestures, time zones and currencies around the world.

Virtual Presentation Assistant

[www.ukans.edu/cwis/unites/coms2/vpa/vpa](http://www.ukans.edu/cwis/unites/coms2/vpa/vpa)

An online tutorial for improving public speaking skills including modules on analyzing your audience and visual aids, plus links to other sites.

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