

1. Advance Preparation

Consider the 5 Ws

Who is your audience?

What are the needs and limitations of the audience, based on their occupation, age, interests, and past experiences (if applicable) with corrections? What are their concerns?

What is the purpose of the presentation?

Determine the most important facts to convey. In what way do you want to inspire your audience?

When is the presentation?

If preparation time is short:

- “stick with what you know” (i.e., focus on areas in which you have direct experience and concrete facts);
- enlist help for the actual presentation (e.g., have experts join you on stage either to deliver a portion of the presentation, if possible or to help answer questions);
- provide your audience with a way to obtain any information you were unable to prepare for them; you may also want to schedule another session if the missing material requires discussion or cannot easily be obtained.

In general, audiences are unable to absorb large amounts of information over the course of a full-day session; attendees often have other priorities and typically, one’s attention span wanes as the day progresses.

Where is your presentation taking place?

Characteristics of the venue (e.g. size, atmosphere) usually dictate the level of formality of a presentation (i.e. whether or not to use a microphone or audio-visual aids, what to wear).

Informal presentations usually encourage participants to engage in one-on-one dialogue and small group discussions.

Formal presentations generally convey more information to more people.

Why is this presentation necessary?

Whether it is a scheduled event, a response to a crisis, or an impromptu response to a “teachable moment,” all presentations require different approaches.

Audience’s expectation of “having all the facts at the tip of your tongue” varies; honesty and willingness to co-operate will be expected, as it will also enhance your presentation.

2. Planning Your Presentation

Determine your exact topic

Regardless of whether your topic is broad or very precise, you should be able to express it in a single, simple sentence. Always speak about a subject in which you have a strong core of knowledge and experience.

If the amount and complexity of the material is inappropriate for your audience and/or for the time available, refocus your topic accordingly.

Determine your overall purpose

There are many reasons for giving a presentation:

- to inform;
- to educate;
- to entertain;
- to inspire;
- to convince.

The purpose of a presentation governs its topics, construction and delivery. Although it is possible to combine two or three of the reasons listed above, one purpose must dominate.

For example, you may wish to inform your audience of new developments in a situation and convince them that appropriate measures are being taken to assure their safety. However, you must decide what your primary purpose is: getting the correct information out or reassuring them. It may help to consider that if your presentation time were drastically reduced, which single message needs to reach your audience at this time?

Analyze the audience and the situation

Every audience is different. To ensure a successful presentation, you should always consider the character and expectations of your audience. Failure to address the needs and level of interest and understanding of an audience spells disaster for a speaker.

If you do not have personal knowledge of the audience, contact someone who can give you some in-sight into their nature, attitudes and expectations.

3. Choosing the Presentation Style and Method

Style

Informal presentations are best for:

- small audiences;
- audiences of your peers, youth (under 18 years old);
- conveying affective (emotional, attitudinal) messages;
- communicating one main point or a small amount of information.

Formal presentations are best for:

- large audiences;
- conveying complex arguments;
- multiple sets of information.

Affective messages can be fostered within a formal presentation by giving the audience problems and exercises to be discussed and role-playing scenarios (e.g. Ethics 101 — You move into a new neighborhood and find out that the apartment block behind you is being converted into a half-way house. What is your reaction?)

Work to your strengths

If you are better at relaxed, personal encounters, you may want to skew your presentation to reflect an informal feeling. However, if you excel at organizing and conveying facts, a polished, formal approach will be the best way to achieve your objectives.

Method

Note: Two or more methods may be combined if time and resources allow.

Speech only (without audiovisual aids):

- effective when speaker is comfortable and a good communicator;
- inexpensive and relatively quick to prepare;
- less vulnerable to Murphy's Law of Technology;
- allows for more personal speaker–audience interaction: lights can be left on, speaker may be able to move around, which fosters a closer relationship with the audience.

Speech with audience participation

- Enjoyable for most audiences, especially in long presentations;
- promotes a greater degree of learning and understanding;
- useful when purpose is to entertain, inform and/or convince;
- wide variety of options: asking questions, solving puzzles, sharing experiences, learning a physical skill, individually or in a group.

Storytelling

- Entertaining and relaxing method of opening a presentation, for both speaker and audience;
- allows for a greater range of expression than conventional speechmaking (e.g., humour, props, vast assortment of visuals);
- helps form a personal bond between speaker and audience, especially if story is from speaker's own experience.

Section 1 ■ Tips for Effective Presentations

Humor and drama

- Makes a presentation more entertaining and memorable;
- practice! — a joke or dramatic performance can easily lose its effectiveness with poor delivery;
- as with all other styles, use these elements only if appropriate to your topic;
- humor can be extremely effective (Note: the Internet is a gold mine for jokes, one-liners and funny stories on any topic);
- drama (e.g., re-enactments, demonstrations) offers a pleasant diversion to an audience expecting a dry speech.

Audiovisual aids

If properly and appropriately used, audiovisual aids can be extremely effective. They engage more of the senses (most people are better visual than aural learners), thereby increasing the audience's attention and retentiveness.

Audiovisual aids can also offset a speaker's nervousness by diverting the audience's attention to "the show."

Audiovisual aids should be chosen with the following factors in mind:

- the information you want to convey;
- size of audience;
- physical environment/venue;
- equipment available;
- time available to prepare;
- budget.

a. Microphones

The best single piece of advice concerning microphones is to speak in a normal voice, as if talking to a good friend who is standing about two meters away from you. Other hints:

- Stand straight, and then angle the microphone so it points upwards toward your mouth (the angle varies with the type of microphone);
- Many "pops" and other mouth noises (e.g., popping P's, hissing S's) can usually be solved by adjusting the microphone so that your voice will be directed more to its side rather than head-on;
- It never hurts to ask, "Can you hear me at the back?"; be sure to watch and listen for the audience's response and adjust accordingly.

b. Flip charts

Flip charts are useful for displaying graphs and emphasizing details when speaking to a small group. This low-tech visual aid has several advantages:

- pages can be prepared in advance;
- displays can be creative and colorful;
- flip chart pads are inexpensive;
- the pads and easel are portable;
- set up doesn't require an outlet or extension cord;
- you can add details or new pages during the presentation.

Here are handy tips for flip chart users:

- Remember to bring an easel and extra markers;
- To prevent marker bleed-through, write only on every second or third page;
- A good rule of thumb for letter size is 2.5 cm for every 6-metres distance from the farthest audience member;
- Avoid turning your back to the audience when referring to or writing on the flip chart.

Section 1 ■ Tips for Effective Presentations

c. Marker boards (white boards)

Marker boards also allow a speaker to visually reinforce important points. Because they are constantly being written on and erased, they focus the audience's attention, which helps them to remember the information on the boards.

- Marker boards are particularly effective if used for only a few words or simple diagrams.
- Group ideas and items in no more than threes.
- As with flip charts, keep your lettering big, turn your back to the audience as little as possible.
- Bring your own supply of markers and erasers.

d. Overhead projectors

Overheads are more expensive and complicated than the previous aids, but vital if you need to get facts and ideas across to a large group.

Transparencies for conventional projectors can easily be produced with a computer and laser printer. Another option is a laptop/overhead combination, which allows you to project text, images, graphs and charts either as a series of stills or partially animated visuals.

- Limit text on transparencies to seven lines and seven words per line;
- Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) Web site and many of its links' Web sites contain slides, graphs and other material to download and convert to transparencies;
- If you have limited computer resources or time, many full-service print shops can prepare professional-looking color transparencies for you;
- Practice with both conventional and laptop projectors before your presentation, preferably in the venue;
- Familiarize yourself with the layout of the venue if you are responsible for set up of the equipment (i.e., where are the outlets and light switches? Will you need extension cords? where is the screen?);
- Visibility is crucial; the rule-of-thumb for letter size is the same as mentioned above for flip charts;

- "Animate" your presentation by writing on your transparencies with colored markers.

There are two disadvantages to using an overhead projector:

- 1) It necessitates dimming the lights, which reduces your connection to the audience;
 - Consider leaving as many lights on as possible so you can see your listeners and gauge reactions, respond immediately to questions, etc.;
 - Stand near the screen or projector light so you don't "disappear".
- 2) It elevates the noise level in the room, which may drown out the sound of your voice or distract audience members.
 - Try raising your voice while the machine is on and talk to your audience, not the screen.

Section 1 ■ Tips for Effective Presentations

e. PowerPoint presentations

PowerPoint presentations provide a much richer visual experience than overheads. Shows can be easily adapted to show a variety of visual images such as video clips, graphic designs, and animated objects. The sequence of the images can also be timed. PowerPoint presentations have a great emotional impact and can range from simple to fancy — creativity is your only limitation.

- Carefully organize and coordinate PowerPoint slides to reinforce your presentation;
- As with all audiovisual aids, make sure the right equipment — computer, proper screen, cart for the projector, extension cords — is available and in working order;
- Arrive early to set up your presentation and check equipment;
- Most audiovisual production houses can help you produce your presentation;
- Clipart graphs and written information can be converted into handouts;
- As with overheads, dim rather than turn off the lights to keep your connection with the audience.

f. Props and displays

Props use two or more of audience's senses to reinforce your message, particularly if props can be passed around, used by a "volunteer" from audience, etc.

- excellent way to make a "dry" subject entertaining and memorable;
- can be utilized for audience participation during the presentation;
- produce prop during Q&A to inspire and focus questions;
- display item(s) after presentation; audience members can "get a closer look", ask questions; you can get informal feedback.

g. Video presentations

Most people enjoy watching television, and video cameras and recorders are now commonplace, so most of us have mastered the technology. As well, a professionally made video is almost unequalled in its powers of persuasion. It is, however, expensive and its effect is often diluted in large venues.

- Keep the lights on so the audience stays alert and you can observe their reactions;
- Make sure all audience members have a clear, unobstructed view of the set and can hear the sound track;
- Pause, stop and rewind the video to emphasize points;
- Ask the audience questions or give them background information before and/or after the video;
- Consider replaying the video once you have discussed it so the audience can view it more analytically.

4. Writing Your Presentation

Opening

Your opening words capture the audience's attention and lead them into the presentation.

Introduce the speaker

If you are not going to be introduced, introduce yourself. Your audience will be more receptive if they feel they “know” you a bit and if they realize you are speaking from a background of preparation, knowledge and experience.

- Tell your audience your name and position/title; you may want to use audiovisual aids for reinforcement;
- Mention your academic and professional qualifications to reinforce your credibility and to offset stereotypes — which are sometimes negative — of CSC personnel;
- Describe yourself quickly, listing any outstanding or interesting qualifications, particularly if they are related to your topic (an audience will more readily listen to someone who has had practical experience with the subject at hand);
- Use humor, but only if it is possible and appropriate to the situation.

Introduce the topic

Always begin with the exact title of your presentation. Draw the audience in by clarifying *why* you are speaking to *them* about this subject *at this time*.

- Relay that you understand the audience's particular interest for more information on the subject;
- If you can promise them new or surprising facts, apprise them of this;
- You may also have to define the perimeters of your subject so you don't disappoint or mislead your audience (e.g., state areas in which there is no new information; acknowledge that the subject is vast and that you can address only a certain area during your presentation).

Body

- Contains main points (three to five points are optimal);
- each point is followed by a statement of fact and supporting material.

Conclusion

- Reviews or summarizes main points;
- memorable (inspirational, reassuring, most important fact) statement based on central purpose of presentation.

5. Practice Your Presentation

Practice your presentation before you deliver it — several times if possible. This is particularly important if you are using visual aids.

- If possible, practice in front of one or more person;
- If you will be using a microphone or any audiovisual equipment, practice with it at least once;
- If at all possible, try out the equipment in the venue beforehand;
- If you have several AV items to juggle or are unfamiliar with any of the technology, bring someone to help you set it up, run it, and/or troubleshoot for you.

6. Before You're "On": Overcoming the Jitters

Numerous studies have proven that most people fear speaking in public more than they fear dying. Every speaker experiences some degree of stage fright and every speaker can benefit from remembering a few “home truths” about public speaking:

- Feeling nervous before — even during — a speech is normal and actually helpful: adrenaline energizes you;
- Interpret your nerves as a sign that you care about your topic, your audience and doing well;
- Recognize that you're not alone; most or all of your audience wants you to succeed in informing, reassuring and/or convincing them;
- Remind yourself that you are better prepared than anyone else in the room to handle the topic;
- Think of the information and expertise from the audience as useful, not threatening; if they hand you a lemon, make lemonade;

- Focus on your purpose for speaking, not on the words you say;
- Give your audience, and yourself, time to make the connection, entertain new ideas, and learn the information;
- All public speaking experiences (bad or good) make you better prepared for your next venture;
- As actors say, “you're only as good as your last film”; a good conclusion, Q&A period, or wrap-up can redeem an otherwise disappointing presentation.

Above all: prepare, prepare, prepare — and then rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! With practice and preparation, you can deliver a winning presentation.

7. After Your Presentation

Improve your odds

Question and Answer sessions may seem daunting, but in fact they are invaluable for clarifying or correcting wrong impressions the audience may have inadvertently picked up during your presentation. Just as with presentations, preparation is a vital tool to help you perform with ease and confidence in a question and answer session. It may seem impossible to prepare for questions but if you think about it, you do have a fair idea as to:

- what questions might be raised about your presentation;
- material the audience is interested in but was outside the focus of your presentation;
- the expected attitude of the audience (e.g. hostile, friendly, curious or confused).

The best way to prepare yourself and build your confidence is to take the time to write down as many possible questions as you can think of, and then practice answering them prior to the event.

To get more ideas of possible questions, you can ask others to think of likely queries and practice answering them. You can also prepare by:

- bringing print material (pamphlets and other handouts), business cards, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and Internet addresses for the audience's further information
- practicing answers to what you consider to be difficult questions
- bearing in mind that although there will be some surprises, most of the questions will be less difficult than those you would ask yourself
- preparing a single "wrap-up" statement to close the Q&A session, reinforcing your main point and thanking the audience (and any other participants) for their input.

Additional tips for Q&A sessions

If you don't hear the question or understand it, ask the person to repeat it.

Try to keep calm, even if your audience is hostile or upset.

Always respect the questioner, even if you do not like the question or the manner in which it is posed; he or she may have a very good reason for being upset.

Don't react negatively if someone asks you a question that you feel you already answered during your presentation or in response to a previous question; they may not have heard or understood the information previously presented.

Honesty is the best policy; if you don't know the answer to something, admit it and offer to contact the person later with the information.

8. End on a High Note

Even in a Q&A session, you will usually have the last word. Use the opportunity to summarize your position or stress what you think is your most important point of your presentation. This will be your last chance to impress, persuade or inform your audience — use it to your advantage. Be positive, concise, and clear.

9. After the Session

Following the event, take the time to review your performance to identify what you did well and what could be improved next time. If possible, get feedback from the audience or observers. Many speakers request that the audience fill out evaluation forms, which provide the speaker with anonymous (usually) comments, ideas and suggestions. These are especially useful if the speaker will present the same topic again to a different audience or to the same group in the future on another topic.