

PRESENTATION PREPARATION

The key to any successful presentation is appropriate preparation. Before writing your presentation, answer or consider the following:

1. **Why have I been asked to speak?**

Are you being asked to speak on a subject as the ultimate expert on that subject? Or are you being asked to present a different view or perspective? Careful consideration is needed to address this question. An honest answer will save you hours of inappropriately focused time and preparation.

2. **Who is my audience? What do they need to hear? What are they expecting?**

The approach and organization of material is different when speaking to marketing people as opposed to sales people or even executives. The subject may remain the same but the message and focus will differ.

Try to focus your presentation from the audience's point of view. You are not speaking to impress yourself.

3. **What is my objective? What do I need to achieve?**

There are three types of presentations - persuasive, informative and entertaining. There will also be combinations of all these types.

Decide whether you are persuading your audience or informing them.

The most common mistake, however, is thinking that informative speeches need not have a conclusion or a focus. They **MUST**.

4. **What is my message? What do I want my audience to remember / do?**

The message is what you want the audience to do as a result of your presentation. It is a call to action.

Example: The CEO's opening address to his sales force:

Objective - to inform the sales team of a new product range and encourage them to increase sales

Message - "In these competitive times, we need a broader range of products to maintain success"

5. **How much time do I have?**

Determining this ahead of time will inform you how much detail can be included.

6. **What is the venue for my presentation? Will I have access to audio-visual equipment or technicians? Can I rehearse in the space beforehand? Will I need a microphone? Is a lectern available?**

Being properly armed with these answers will eliminate the possibility of surprise. It also ensures that you prepare the most appropriate material.

Once you have considered all these questions you will be ready to write your presentation.

CONTENT and STRUCTURE

Choose one main message:

- What ONE thing do you want your audience to remember? This is your main message/conclusion.
- Plan your main message first. Write it down. Your whole talk is now focused.
- Write your main message down in a single, simple sentence. If you cannot do that, your subject is too complicated.
- Choose a maximum of three points that directly support this message. These form the body of your presentation.
- If the information in your speech does not relate to this main message or sub-points, discard it.

Golden Rule: *If information does not add to your main message, it takes away from it and should be removed.*

Powerful Beginning:

- State your conclusion first. By writing the close of your speech first, you will be able to quickly determine the message you want the audience to take away. This will help focus your whole speech.
- Alternatively, starting with a quote, illustrative anecdote or description will help grab the audience's attention. It will also help them to get a good sense of your personality while helping to focus your message.
- Your very first words will tell the audience whether they want to listen to you. Don't waste their time by meandering to your message ten or twenty minutes later.

Order of Material:

- Look at the content pyramid. Your talk should start at the top (the conclusion) and work downwards.
- You are not a mystery writer. Do not fall for the "bottom up" approach. We will not know why you are saying what you are saying, unless you go from "top to bottom."
- "Top down" allows you complete flexibility with the length of the message.

Conversational tone:

- Remember that a speech is not an essay.
- Be wary of language written for the reader, not the listener.
- Break up sentences with dots and dashes. Make the language conversational.
- Use contractions: "we're" rather than "we are".
- Be direct as much as possible: use "but" rather than "however".
- Use the simplest word possible to convey your meaning: "car" rather than "transportation".
- Always read your material out loud when developing your presentation. This will allow you to hear what the audience will hear and keep your language conversational and natural.
- Give them your key message in a way that makes the audience want to hear more.

- Beware of jokes and humor - they often set the wrong tone.

Dramatic Finish:

- Recap with your main message and a summary of the key points.
- End with an appeal to the emotions of your audience - such as hope, fear or pride.
- Do not introduce new points in the summary.

Visual Aids:

- Develop the visuals only after you have completed the spoken part of your presentation.
- Do not try to make your words fit a previously produced visual presentation.
- Ensure that each visual reinforces a single point.
- Use tailor-made visuals - not visuals that have irrelevant information.

The 'So What' Test:

After each point you write, keep asking yourself "so what?" Using this technique will help you quickly determine if your point supports a previous point or if it is extraneous information. Using the "so what?" test will keep you focused on the audience's reaction to your material.

The Fire Drill Test:

If a fire alarm were to go off one minute into your presentation - what information would your audience leave with? Organizing your material in this

way allows for great time flexibility. If your time were cut just before you gave your presentation you would be able to get your message across.

The Content Pyramid

