

Public Speaking Tutorial

SkillBrief

Public Speaking – Designing Your Presentation

There is a simple structure into which nearly all public speaking and presentations should fit. This comprises three clearly identifiable parts - an introduction, followed by a main body and finally a conclusion.

This is often expressed as: Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you've told them.

A good guide for the breakdown of a public speaking presentation is the 10/80/10 rule - whereby the introduction and conclusion are each allotted 10% of the presentation time, with the main body comprising 80%.

For example, a 30 minute presentation would have a 3 minute introduction and conclusion and main body lasting 24 minutes. This formula can be applied to any length of presentation - as it reflects a good breakdown from the audience's perspective.

If you think of a presentation in terms of a journey designed to take an audience to a pre-planned destination. You can use this analogy to identify the key points of your message, prioritize them and allocate each one an appropriate time slot.

In researching and collating the material that you need and devising your key points you will have been concentrating on the main content of your presentation. This is fine, as the most effective and efficient way to prepare your presentation is to construct it in the following order; Main Body, Introduction, then the Conclusion.

It is usually best to plan your presentation to have a question and answer session at the end. This will enable you to deliver your message and then end strongly with a clear and concise conclusion, before entering the relatively unpredictable area of tackling questions from the floor.

Public Speaking – Identifying Key Points

Think of your aim as the final destination, and your presentation as the journey. In structuring your public speaking presentation you may find it useful to divide your journey into a series of stages. You are then faced with the challenge of deciding how many stages there should be and what should constitute a stage.

You should consider the aim of your presentation and try to develop between three and five key points that you would like to drive home. This represents as much information as most people are able to take on board.

These key point messages can be considered as the intended destination for each stage of your journey. In other words, key points are synonymous with stages in the same way that the aim statement is synonymous with the destination. If you are working in a familiar subject domain the key points may well be apparent; but what if the subject isn't familiar and the key points are not self-evident?

When you are preparing a presentation in an unfamiliar domain the most effective way to identify the key points is to ask other people. The people you should ask should be from a similar group as your intended audience. If they are predominantly directives, as is likely in the scenario of a sales manager making a case for equipping her field sales force with laptop computers then she should ask relatively senior people within the organization.

If she asked a colleague in the training department their comments would probably be heavily biased towards the training implications, whereas technical staff would be preoccupied with the specification and interfacing of IT systems. Neither group is likely to ask the sort of questions that are likely to be of most interest to senior management.

By asking a representative group you should ensure that the key points are properly targeted and that the audience remains focused. You should ask them a question framed around your aim statement. 'What would you need to know which would' . . . followed by your aim statement. In the current example 'What would you need to know which would . . . demonstrate the competitive advantage of equipping the field sales force with laptop computers?' Ask as many people, from as representative a group as you can, and record their comments as potential key points.

The biggest advantage of this approach is its speed. It is quite common for people to spend hours sifting through information, collating it and then editing down into digestible chunks - while still struggling to devise a suitable presentation structure for it. Asking other people is a fast and effective way of devising potential key points and has the added advantage that the key points will be non-egocentric that is they will reflect what your audience wants to hear and not just what you want to tell them.

Public Speaking – Planning the Sequence

Starting with the main body, your first task is to decide on what your key points

will be and order them in a way that will address the needs of your audience. Once again you should be prioritizing what it is that the audience want from the presentation. The key points should be presented in the order that reflects their importance to the audience - with the most important first. If you do not do this you will find it difficult to hold their attention.

It may prove useful to write each key point on a piece of card and shuffle them in a variety of different presentation sequences and consider the effect of each on your audience. Ask yourself, or others, which will have the most impact?

Your next task is to divide the presentation up so that the correct amount of is allocated to each of your key points. This will ensure that the overall time allotted to the main body of your presentation does not overrun. For example if the main body is planned to last 10 minutes and there are three key points, as in this presentation, then you might divide it into two minute and one six minute segments. Alternatively you might create three equal segments. Once again let the requirements of the audience determine this division.

Public Speaking – Body Language Communication

You need to be aware of your body language from the moment you stand up until your presentation is completed. The importance of positive eye contact and the correct use of posture and hand movement to accompany your presentation cannot be overstated.

As audience analysis shows, body language is a very important part of any presentation. Members of your audience will analyze your body language, even if they are unaware of this at the conscious level. A brilliantly prepared presentation delivered in an interesting voice will fall well short of the mark if accompanied by negative, intrusive or hostile body language.

You are probably aware of the concept of personal space - that area around an individual into which other people should not venture uninvited. Audiences, too, are very conscious of this space and when presenting you should not stand within 10 feet of the audience. This distance is known as the 'public zone' and if you violate it you are likely to antagonize those affected. This distance also creates an effective stage area in which you, the presenter, can perform.

Once you are positioned in the correct zone - this will be further away the larger the audience, there are four main aspects of body language that you should consider; what to do with your eyes, what your facial expressions indicate, the positioning and movement of your body and limbs, and your hand gestures.

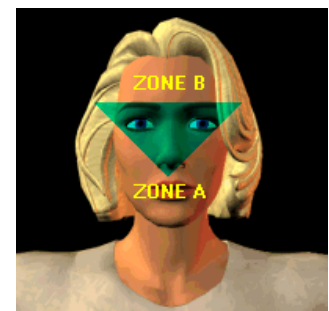
Public Speaking – Body and Limb Movement

The way you use your body and limbs will also have a major influence on how your audience perceives you. When presenting, you will normally be standing, and an ideal stance is with your feet close together and your weight evenly

distributed between them. It is important not to grow roots - don't stand in one position, but try to inject movement as you speak. This helps to add a natural animation to your presentation as the audience will have to adjust their gaze to follow you rather than stay looking at a fixed position. By developing a practiced way of moving you can add a confident and professional air to your presentation style. Precisely how you choose to move is a personal thing - but try to develop and rehearse your style so that you end up moving without conscious effort.

While it is a good thing to be animated don't walk around too much or the audience will find it distracting and annoying. One of the best tactics is to use main features of your presentation as cues for movement, until you have developed this skill it may be worth annotating your cue cards with movement cues or symbols. When conversing socially you probably don't think consciously about what you are doing with your arms, they are just there, moving in support of what you are saying. Somehow in a formal presentation you are constantly aware of them, hanging awkwardly from your shoulders, always seeming to be in the way.

The key point about arms is to ignore them - move them back into your subconscious so that they can support what you are saying in a natural way. That said, there is one movement that you should develop when presenting which will display confidence and openness. This involves moving your arms away from your body and showing open palms to your audience.



Public Speaking – Eye Contact

Eye contact with the audience is an essential part of any presentation. Without it the audience will feel remote from the presenter and are unlikely to relate to them or their message in a meaningful way. Not many presenters realize how important eye contact is, or how sensitive people are to it. Eye contact should be a positive form of body language communication, but if it is not used correctly it can easily become negative.

The face shown has a shaded area that indicates the correct target zone for positive eye contact. That is looking anywhere within this shaded zone represents positive eye contact. Looking at someone's face anywhere outside of the triangular target zone is likely to cause some degree of embarrassment. However, the no-go zones shown are both associated with strong adverse reactions.

Zone A represents the intimate zone and by moving just a fraction below the base of the target triangle you will enter it. When this happens people typically react by feeling that the other person is staring at them, or that the observer looks shifty.

Zone B represents a dominant zone and by looking at the forehead of another person you are likely to invoke a reaction that you appear to be arrogant, that you are staring straight through them or more commonly that you are talking down at them.

As well as understanding how to make positive eye contact with an individual it is also important to ensure that your gaze encompasses your whole audience - including those at the back and the sides. Try to avoid holding eye contact only with audience members who appear enthusiastic and interested. While you may find it more difficult to engage members of the audience who appear neutral, it is important to *try* to involve them.

Public Speaking - Your Posture and Stance

There are further aspects of posture that you should be aware of - as they can easily communicate subconscious messages, some of which you will want to avoid.

The forward sloping stance indicates a wish to dominate other people, often it is accompanied by an over-stressed point. The presenter may be attempting to impose a concept or point of view on their audience. This is made worse by aggressive or intrusive behavior - such as entering the public zone or the use of hostile gestures.

A bent posture is indicative of a person who is saying something without conviction. Saying one thing while meaning another - such as a salesperson giving an exaggerated sales pitch or a customer who wants to say no but has been placed in an awkward position.

The upright posture demonstrates adult, assertive behavior with no hidden meaning or manipulations in the communication. This stance indicates that the person has conviction and confidence in what they are saying. This is the posture you should practice and use when presenting.

Staying in Control

When you are making a presentation the best way of staying in control and keeping your audience with you is to keep them interested in what you are saying. The best strategy is to prepare and then deliver a presentation that your audience find spellbinding. Unfortunately, many business presentations will be based on subject matter that is not that interesting.

Another complication is that audiences are made up of individuals, who will not share the same interests, attention span or boredom threshold. People vary in the way they express disagreement, boredom and frustration and you should be able to read signs of this from the body language demonstrated by your audience. Members of an audience don't usually think of themselves as being

observed, and consequently their guards tend to be down - making their body language relatively easy to read.

Reading Signals from Your Audience

There are a variety of body language signals that you might observe among members of an audience:

A negative posture, with an impassive or slightly hostile expression, arms folded as if to form a barrier and legs crossed with the person leaning back - suggesting resistance to the presenter. However, you should be careful to avoid making judgments based on observing one piece of body language in isolation. For example crossed legs or crossed arms on their own should not be automatically read as a negative reaction.

A neutral and open attitude is often accompanied by a neutral or slightly friendly facial expression and an upright or slightly forward leaning seating position. As these people have not yet decided whether or not they agree with your main message you may observe a mixture of gentle nods and shakes of their head as you make your key points. Neutrals should be viewed as a positive resource - it is after all the job of your presentation to win them over.

Someone interested in what you are saying may be smiling and nodding in agreement or frowning in thought, possibly leaning forward attentively. Hands clasped together may also indicate that a person is carefully considering what you are saying, as may leaning on their chin.

Members of an audience can show signs of disapproval or hostility in a variety of ways. You may observe people pointedly discussing things with a neighbor, looking at the ceiling, out of a window or frowning while looking at you.

If boredom is affecting any members of your audience this may manifest itself in reversion to common habits - such as fidgeting with personal belongings like glasses, watches, pens and earrings. While looking at a watch or clicking a pen may demonstrate boredom don't confuse these signs with such things as the chewing of the end of a pen, which may indicate thoughtfulness. Members of the audience who become bored may also whisper among themselves, rustle papers, scribble aimlessly on notepads, throw back their head between their cupped hands and even make audible sighs.

Adjusting to Signals from Your Audience

Recognizing both positive and negative signals from your audience should not change your planned presentation fundamentally. Your message and the material with which you are communicating it should have been carefully prepared and radical changes will almost certainly not be practical.

The real point of reading signals from your audience is that it can help you to judge who you have on-side, who is opposing your point of view and who has yet to decide. This should help you to focus your message where it can have maximum impact, talking round those that can be swayed, while keeping your supporters with you and trying not to alienate the opposition.

One or more members of your audience may attempt to disrupt your presentation, usually because they strongly disagree with your message. Learn to recognize how this disruption may manifest itself and you will be better equipped to cope with it. The keywords when dealing with disruption are to be polite but firm, never lose your temper or your cool - if you enter into a shouting match with a heckler then they win and you lose.

Coping with Hostility

It is vital that you don't let disruptive members of the audience derail your presentation - you are working to a tight schedule so don't get involved in protracted discussions. Try to approach the point of contention from any common ground that you share, but if this fails to work then politely request that the point is discussed later at the pre-planned question and answer session. If someone denounces something that you have said, avoid getting into an argument with them. If your point was based on fact then make this clear and present the evidence. However, if it was based on your personal opinion then don't attempt to pass this off as factual - it is your presentation and therefore your opinion should be worth expressing.

Always remember that what is underlying the point of contention may be a genuine concern and that if you try to brush it aside it is likely to be taken up by other members of the audience, who may then swing against you. Another point that you should always bear in mind is that any hostility shown by an audience is aimed at your message not at you personally.

Attention seekers may make silly or sarcastic comments simply to get themselves noticed, while other members of your audience may respond unwittingly to a rhetorical question that you pose - simply because they weren't paying full attention. Try to analyze these sort of events as they occur and respond, perhaps with humor or support but don't try to put people down - as this nearly always reflects badly on the presenter.

The information in this free Public Speaking tutorial is taken from "Get Ahead in Business Presentations."