

Effective Presentations

The thought of making a presentation can provoke a lot of anxiety. From time to time, however, leaders of student groups may be asked to make a presentation of some kind. Some of the suggestions presented in this handout will help you to put together and deliver a presentation with less anxiety. If you are a person who enjoys making presentations, you may find some ideas to help refine your skills.

BE PREPARED

There is nothing worse for an audience than to listen to a presentation that sounds like it was put together at the last minute. There are several things you can do to be prepared.

1. *KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU.* Be sure you know what information the audience wants to hear. Try to talk to some people who will be in the audience and ask them what they are expecting.
2. *TRY TO VISIT THE ROOM IN ADVANCE,* preferably when there is an audience present. Know the set-up of the room in which you will be speaking, and the sound equipment (No sound system? A microphone?).
3. *KNOW WHEN YOU WILL BE MAKING YOUR PRESENTATION.* For example, if you are presenting after a meal, at the end of the day, or after a long list of other presentations, you know you'll have to do something special to catch and hold the attention of the audience.
4. *REHEARSE YOUR PRESENTATION.* Don't memorize it, but do be very familiar with it. Use index cards to remind you of your main points. Try delivering it in front of a mirror or into a tape recorder. Even better, videotape yourself or give the presentation to a group of friends. If you are particularly anxious about the presentation, rehearse it in the room where you will actually be speaking.
5. *USE REHEARSALS TO FINE-TUNE YOUR PRESENTATION.* Try to eliminate extraneous hand movements, inappropriate facial expressions, and nervous body motions. Also work on eliminating "filler words" ("you know", "uhh", "uhm") that detract from your presentation.
6. *KNOW YOUR TIME LIMIT.* If your presentation is long, decide how you will break it up. A question and answer period, visual aids, or a short break are all ways to prevent your audience from becoming bored.

MAKING THE PRESENTATION

Keep your audience in mind throughout the presentation. Here are some messages that your audience would appreciate, as well as techniques for delivering these messages effectively.

1. *"I KNOW YOU ARE OUT THERE"*
Let the audience know that you are paying attention to them. Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard by everyone. Try to establish eye contact with individual members of the audience. Look for signs that the audience is puzzled, bored, or that they can't see or hear you. If you are familiar enough with your presentation, you can address the problem without becoming flustered.
2. *"I KNOW WHO YOU ARE"*
During your preparation, you will have already found out what the audience wants to hear. Now be sure to address the audience's specific needs, supplying them with relevant information. Use examples that the audience can understand. If your audience is a small one, to find out the names of the people who will be present and, if appropriate, use their names during the presentation.

3. *“I WON’T WASTE YOUR TIME”*

Be brief, or the audience may become bored or restless. Get to the point and stick to it. Cover limited material, but cover it well. If you decide to allow questions, don’t let your answers take you too far off track.

4. *“I AM WELL ORGANIZED”*

Make it easy for the audience to understand your message. Begin with a one-minute synopsis of your presentation, and then give the presentation using short, simple sentences. Follow a logical sequence. Alert your audience to important points by use of voice inflection, hand gestures, or repetition. Summarize your presentation at the end.

5. *“I KNOW MY SUBJECT”*

The audience expects an authority, so know your stuff. Be thoroughly prepared, but avoid jargon. Be able to show how the audience can use the information you are giving them.

6. *“I ENJOY WHAT I AM DOING”*

Be upbeat and enthusiastic. The audience won’t be interested in what you are saying if you appear to be bored. Even if you are delivering bad news, try to end on a positive note.

7. *“I WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU”*

Allow time for the audience to ask questions. If you prefer them to hold questions until the end of the presentation, tell them so. Answer the questions directly and without defensiveness. If you don’t know an answer, say so, but offer to help find it.

8. *“I AM HUMAN TOO”*

Use index cards, but don’t read your presentation. Speak naturally. Use personal anecdotes to keep people interested. Forget about being perfect: be yourself and use your own style. Use humor if that seems appropriate.

VISUAL AIDS

Different people process information in different ways. For example, some people understand information best by hearing it, while others prefer a visual presentation. Thus, you may reach more people if you use visual aids such as posters or charts to supplement your presentation.

- Remember that the point of a visual aid is to focus attention on the important parts of your presentation, not to confuse or complicate the issue.
- Keep your materials simple and prepare them in advance.
- Be sure they can be seen from the audience.
- If you decide to use handouts, announce the fact before you begin and tell the audience when they will be given out.

FURTHER IDEAS

There are a variety of ways in which you can continue to improve the quality of your presentations:

1. Analyze speakers you believe are effective and notice the things they do that you might try.
2. If possible, arrange to videotape one of your own presentations and look for ways to improve.
3. Solicit feedback from people who have watched you make a presentation.

Giving effective presentations is a skill that can be learned. All it takes is preparation and practice: the more presentations you give, the better you will become!