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The logo graphic features a blue semi-circle containing a stylized white figure of a person with arms outstretched, set against a background of a globe and a stack of stones.

Effective Presentation Skills

Introduction

- Introduction Resource
- This unit introduces the skills necessary to communicate effectively and deliver successful presentations. By taking a systematic approach to giving presentations the unit aims to develop these skills,...

Overview

- Overview Resource
- Have you ever had to stand in front of an audience and give a presentation?

Identifying key issues

- What makes a good presentation? Resource
- The activities in this section are designed to help you recall any previous experiences that may be relevant.
- Understanding the need for presentations Resource
- Before we start practising the various skills that should help you become a better presenter, we need to understand what is meant by 'making a presentation'. Generally, we mean any situation which involves...
- One way of tackling a presentation Resource
- One of the oldest (and probably one of the best!) descriptions of what a speaker should do during a presentation is attributed to an army commander who said that to ensure an effective presentation you...

Planning for your presentation:

- Introduction Resource

- The process of preparing presentations can be time consuming, but you need a plan of some kind in order to understand what your objectives are and how you are going to achieve them. Thorough planning provides...

- Purpose of your presentation Resource

- What is the purpose of your presentation? What are you trying to achieve? You may have been given a very concise brief (or subject) for your talk, but sometimes you will only have a title or a vague description...

- Audience for your presentation Resource

- Types of audiences vary enormously – they could include customers for sales, an interview panel, relatives, work colleagues, peer groups, paying clients, tutorial groups, discussion groups.

- Audience size and seating plans Resource

- The size of the audience might affect several aspects of your planning for the presentation. For example, a small group (say about 10–15) would only need a small room. The seating arrangement could be...

- Location, location, location Resource

- The location of your presentation might seem like a matter of simple common sense, but it can have significant implications for how you plan your content and organise yourself.

- Thinking about the location of your presentation Resource

- Imagine that you have been invited to deliver a presentation at a venue that you've never been to before, about 100 miles from your home. The presentation will be one of six others during the day-long...

Preparing your presentation:

- Gathering your thoughts Resource
- We assume that by now you have clarified the subject and purpose of your talk; you have identified the intended audience; and you have some idea of the situation at the venue. Now you need to focus on...
- Structure of your presentation Resource
- The content of any presentation needs to have a clear structure. This will allow the audience to understand your main themes and leave the presentation feeling that it has been a worthwhile experience....
- Why is the introduction so important? Resource
- It is crucial to be very clear exactly what you are going to say and do in the first few minutes. Your introduction needs to be well structured for several reasons:
- Effective ways to begin your presentation Resource
- Think of a presentation you have attended. Write a list of the sorts of things the presenter put into the introduction. If you can't remember, or haven't ever attended one, think about how a book is laid...
- Why it is important to organise the main body of your presentation Resource
- The main body of your presentation is the 'tell them' part. You have prepared your audience for what is about to happen. Now it's happening! The middle section should contain the images and words that...
- Generating ideas for the main body of your presentation Resource
- The aim of this subsection is to help enable you to generate as many ideas, notes, diagrams and data that could be used in your presentation. Then you will need to ask yourself which of these 'items' will...
- Putting topics into order for the main body of your presentation Resource
- The next task is to put the groups of information, still in note form, into some sensible order. The most common methods are:
- The importance of visual aids in the main body of your presentation Resource
- Once you have a skeleton outline of the main body of your presentation, you can think about how you will actually deliver the material to your audience.
- The main body of your presentation: a summary Resource
- In summary:
- Copyright issues Resource
- Copyright is becoming increasingly important, especially now that all sorts of information are available on the internet. The problem with copyright is that it can become very complicated and the legal...
- The conclusion Resource
- So now we've arrived at the section where you 'Tell them what you just told them', in other words, summarise the presentation. Just as you need to attract the interest of your audience at the beginning...

Visual aids:

- Introduction Resource
- In this section we'll consider what visual aids are available and which are the most practical for you and your presentation. The function of visual aids is to illustrate your talk; you need to be selective...
- What's available? Resource
- How to choose Resource
- For many of us, how we choose visual aids equipment is largely dictated by what is available and how easy it is to produce suitable material to display with the equipment at a reasonable cost. Where selection...
- Presentation packages: pointers and pitfalls Resource
- As you probably know, PowerPoint © is only one of many very popular commercial products that can be used to make presentations rapidly. You may have seen it or some other package for some of your own presentations....
- Create your own visual aid Resource
- Read this statement and sketch out on paper or in words what you think might work (on paper) as a visual aid: 'A typical UK home produces about 2 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) each year.'
- Ten key points to consider for visual aids Resource
- Keep it simple – The audience can't do two completely unrelated things at once. They can't read your visual aid while you talk about something else; and they certainly can't look at your visual,...
- Fonts Resource
- When using written words, you can shorten your sentences to phrases, key words or critical messages. Use a font which is large enough to see in all parts of the audience (say 32 to 44 point size for title...
- The written word Resource
- Just as you have limited the amount of words you are planning to speak, so should you try to limit the amount on each slide. We can't state an exact rule for this, but in general we found that the most...
- Colours Resource
- The use of colour to emphasise text, figures or background can be highly stimulating visually, as long as you stick to a few simple rules. By using colour combinations that complement each other you can...
- Graphics and charts Resource
- A simple picture or line drawing can add great dimension to your presentation, but you need to be careful not to get overwhelmed by the fun it can be to overstress the visual and forget about the content...
- Final thoughts on visual aids Resource
- Above all, success with visual aids relies on being prepared, planning in advance how you are going to use them, and knowing what to do if things go wrong.

Delivering your presentation

- Introduction Resource
- Ideally you should have the opportunity to rehearse at the actual location for your presentation, but it is more likely that you will have to rehearse wherever and whenever you can. This may involve practising...
- Your personal image Resource
- Many of us make judgements (rightly or wrongly) on our first impressions, so your personal image is important when you are giving presentations, even though strictly speaking you will probably not be directly...
- The spoken word Resource
- The activity of speaking is very different from that of writing. Think about this for a moment. It is amazing how often people use 'written English' when making a presentation. Clearly we can speak on...
- Mentored presentation Resource
- If you are undertaking an assessed presentation or viva, you may have the opportunity of developing a presentation with full support of a tutor or supervisor. There is always a risk with closely supervised...
- Using notes Resource
- If you have not made a presentation before, you might feel that you should write out the whole script. This can give you a good idea about the length and how it matches up with the timing you have been...
- Delivery style Resource
- We all have our own delivery style with various idiosyncrasies. It is not within the scope of this unit to try and say which of these personal habits is, or is not, appropriate, but most successful presenters...
- What can you do if you are nervous? Resource
- If you have a nervous habit, it may become distracting to the audience to the point that they no longer listen to your talk but are waiting for you to say 'err' or stroke your chin.
- Starting off Resource
- Learn your first lines.
- Finishing Resource
- When the presentation is over there may be questions which you either need to answer directly, or indirectly if members of the audience come up to you after the talk. Although every presentation is different,...
- Evaluating Resource
- You need to know how well your presentation has been received. Ask yourself some questions – did the slides really work the way I wanted them to? And could they be made clearer? Did the script give me...
- Team or group presentations Resource
- When a team is reporting on a group activity or where pieces of work are related to each other and to the overall presentation, room planning can get complicated. If one speaker is handing over to another...

Further reading and sources of help

- Further reading and sources of help Resource
- Gordon Bell (1987) *The Secrets of Successful Speaking and Business Presentations*, Heinemann.

References and Acknowledgements

- Acknowledgements

Introduction:

This unit introduces the skills necessary to communicate effectively and deliver successful presentations. By taking a systematic approach to giving presentations the unit aims to develop these skills, which you may already possess.

Learning Outcomes

The broad aim of this unit is to provide a framework for learning-based activities and reflective exercises. More specifically, it is designed to offer you the opportunity to:

- understand the need for effective presentations;
- assess your own strengths and weaknesses in meeting this need;
- develop some of the specific skills and practices required;
- create a series of practical checklists and strategies;
- use reflection and feedback to develop further your abilities as a presenter.

Overview:

Have you ever had to stand in front of an audience and give a presentation?

Perhaps it was in an informal setting, such as a tutorial, day-school or residential school, and you stood there, armed with only a flip chart and marker pen. Or you may have had to present data to colleagues during a presentation at work. Even when you reprimand your children, or show them how to do something properly, you are presenting information: it is one of the most basic flows of communication.

In some cases, you may have been anxious about giving a presentation, although the degree of anxiety will have depended not just upon the actual situation, but on your own experience and temperament.

We can call upon many different skills in order to communicate effectively and professionally, and to make a successful presentation. You will already possess many of these skills, even if you are unaware of them; with practice and know-how, they can be developed further.

Although nothing can replace practical presentation experience, working systematically through the activities in this unit will give you a sound framework on which to build both the content and the style of your presentations. The unit can also be a handy reference for future use: you can click in and out of the individual sections and search for help and information as you need it. That is why we have created the checklists and activities.

It is important to understand that effective presentation skills can be practised and learned. It is the content of your presentation, and the simple delivery of clear and reasoned arguments, which will help you to achieve your objectives. This is why the unit places a strong emphasis on **preparation** for the presentation to ensure that everything goes as you have planned.

You may find it worthwhile to click through the sections first to get an overview, and then identify the areas which interest you most. However, you will probably benefit most by working through the material systematically. Once you have completed an activity, reflect on what you have done and consider how the material relates to your own individual needs. The activities have been designed to engage you in the materials, so that you will ultimately present your ideas in a clear and effective manner.

Presentations can be made less threatening and more enjoyable if you confront the issues that cause you anxiety and make an action plan for each. One way of tackling a presentation is to break down the issues into manageable chunks and deal with them one by one: this is our approach in this unit. As the reader, you can be selective and strategic about using this unit and use whichever parts you feel are most beneficial. By working through the exercises (either in their given order or as you see fit), we hope you can increase your confidence in communicating your ideas to a wider audience.

Good luck!

Identifying key issues

What makes a good presentation?

The activities in this section are designed to help you recall any previous experiences that may be relevant.

Activity 1

Can you recall a memorable presentation you've seen? What was it that made the speaker unforgettable? Did a good presenter make dull material come alive? How clear was the message?

Now read the discussion

Discussion

Some things we thought of were the person's appearance, charismatic personality, and a brilliant script or fascinating subject matter.

Try to decide what the most important aspect of the presenter was – what was it about that presentation or presenter that made it come to mind? When we analysed our favourite presenters (and the best presentations) we found that the best performances were the ones which: had a clear and simply presented message usually had some form of visual aid, which helped us in recalling the topic and the context

had a presenter with a strong interest in the topic they were presenting.

We will revisit many of these good presentation traits again throughout the unit.

Identifying key issues

Understanding the need for presentations

Before we start practising the various skills that should help you become a better presenter, we need to understand what is meant by 'making a presentation'. Generally, we mean any situation which involves you speaking (usually alone) either to one individual or to a group of other people in order to make a point or share information. Many presentations also have some form of supporting visual aid such as a whiteboard, projections, or flip charts, and, in some cases, your hand gestures might be a form of visual aid. If you undertake an academic course you may be assessed on a presentation, and this may count towards your overall course grade. You may also find yourself needing to present information in less academic environments: to your work colleagues, or for a local campaign, for example, and we hope that this unit will enable you to develop your presenting skills in all these areas. There are different expectations regarding presentations, and many very different audiences. Here are some examples of the key components of a presentation:

- appropriate visual aids
- evidence of your having practised the talk/delivery
- appropriate timing/length
- a clear story or argument in the text
- appropriate breadth and depth
- understanding of the topic and the audience
- a clear structure: a distinct beginning, middle and end.

All of these are important for a successful presentation, but depending on the situation, some may be more important than others.

Activity 2

When was the last time you had to give a presentation (if ever)? What were the circumstances (e.g. audience size, formality, length) and how did it go overall? What could you have done differently during the presentation to make it clearer or more enjoyable for the audience?

Now read the discussion

Discussion

The last time I presented was to a group of students as a tutor. I had to explain a complex layout used inside a mobile phone. In order to help the students understand, I decided to use visual aids: in this case a simple overhead projection with a three-dimensional picture and a sub-component of the phone. By sharing the 'exploded' view picture of the phone with all the sub-components laid out, I was able to help the students see where and how the pieces of the phone fitted together. Then, by handing around an antenna sub-assembly, I could show them how small and precise some of the fittings for the phone were. Most of us were very surprised at how interesting the components were, and it helped make the point that in many cases we are blasé about the amount of complex technology all around us.

Many of us are diffident about expressing our ideas and feelings. We can feel nervous or embarrassed when speaking in public or working through an idea in front of an audience. Here are some typical reactions we found when we asked other students to respond to Activity 2:

I know exactly the point I want to make, but by the time I get the opportunity to express myself ... all that comes out is a confused babble.

I have a very definite regional accent and need to make a special effort in order to be understood. I am OK just chatting but when I get on my feet in class I can hear my voice in my head, just mumbling away.

English is not my first language and I lose confidence when I have to stand up in front of others in my group ... it is easier with strangers.

I find it difficult to organise my thoughts when speaking to a group or even just to my supervisor ... I feel I must read from my notes directly.

If you have ever felt like this, then you are certainly not alone – I think it is safe to say that we all feel some degree of nervousness in giving a presentation. But this is natural, and without having at least a little bit of anxiety you may find yourself too relaxed. Keep in mind though that a little tension is helpful because it will bring about an adrenaline rush that will get you onto your feet and ready to give your presentation.

Identifying key issues

One way of tackling a presentation

One of the oldest (and probably one of the best!) descriptions of what a speaker should do during a presentation is attributed to an army commander who said that to ensure an effective presentation you simply need to:

Tell them what you are going to tell them.

Tell them.

Tell them what you just told them.

A rather more colloquial piece of advice also often given advises you to:

Stand up.

Speak up.

Shut up.

A bit blunt in the approach and language, but you might find that for certain audiences this simple A, B, C formula works well. The three steps can be thought of as the beginning (A), middle (B) and end (C) of a story. So, as with storytelling, you need to open up the context of the talk in the A section, then present the bulk of your findings in the B section, and within C re-cap on what you have said and reiterate certain key points.

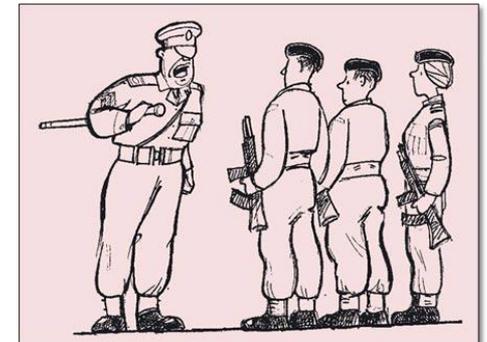
Remember

Presentation-giving skills can be learnt and continually improved through practice. Some tension is necessary in order to produce the adrenaline rush that initially gets you up on your feet and ready to deliver the work that you have put so much effort into.

The next two sections will cover the initial planning for your talk and preparation of suitable material. We will then consider the important use of visual aids, and finally look at your delivery on the day.

The ability to make clear, interesting and relevant presentations is increasingly important in today's world, both in an academic and a professional context.

Figure 1: The main steps towards making a presentation from start to completion



Planning for your presentation

Introduction

The process of preparing presentations can be time consuming, but you need a plan of some kind in order to understand what your objectives are and how you are going to achieve them. Thorough planning provides you with the knowledge that you have done everything you can to ensure a successful presentation, and hence the confidence to stand up in front of a group of people. Don't assume that planning a presentation simply involves sitting down and writing out what you are going to say and show to your audience. In fact, it is a little more complex than that.

You must take three key aspects into account when planning any presentation. These are the:
purpose of your presentation
audience for your presentation
location of your presentation.

There is considerable overlap and linkage between these aspects, but we will now look at them in turn.

Planning for your presentation

Audience for your presentation

Types of audiences vary enormously – they could include customers for sales, an interview panel, relatives, work colleagues, peer groups, paying clients, tutorial groups, discussion groups.

The type of audience might well influence the format of your presentation and its content. A technical presentation to a specialist audience might be more formal than one to a discussion group, though this may depend on the size of the group: a small group technical presentation could easily be quite interactive. On the other hand, an after-dinner speech at a wedding might well be presented to a fairly large audience, but they may not be impressed if you show lots of Overhead Projection Transparencies (OHTs) and lecture to them on a serious topic!

Ask yourself the following questions for your intended audience:

Who are they?

What are their reasons for attending?

How many are likely to be present?

What sort of people – age, education, status?

What do they already know about the subject?

What are their likely attitudes/biases?

The answers to these questions will affect both the style and the content of your talk. You also need to be prepared to adjust to unexpected circumstances, for instance, what happens if you have planned a session involving group work and only one person turns up?

Your audience's response may also be strongly influenced by the conditions at the venue for your talk, and we are going to explore this next.

Planning for your presentation

Audience size and seating plans

The size of the audience might affect several aspects of your planning for the presentation. For example, a small group (say about 10–15) would only need a small room. The seating arrangement could be grouped around the presenter so you might prepare a more interactive approach to your presentation. There would be no need for a sound system to project your voice. You would be able to plan for more questions and answers in your session as people tend to be more willing to ask questions in a smaller room.

For a larger audience it may be harder to achieve informality, and interactive approaches may be less practical.

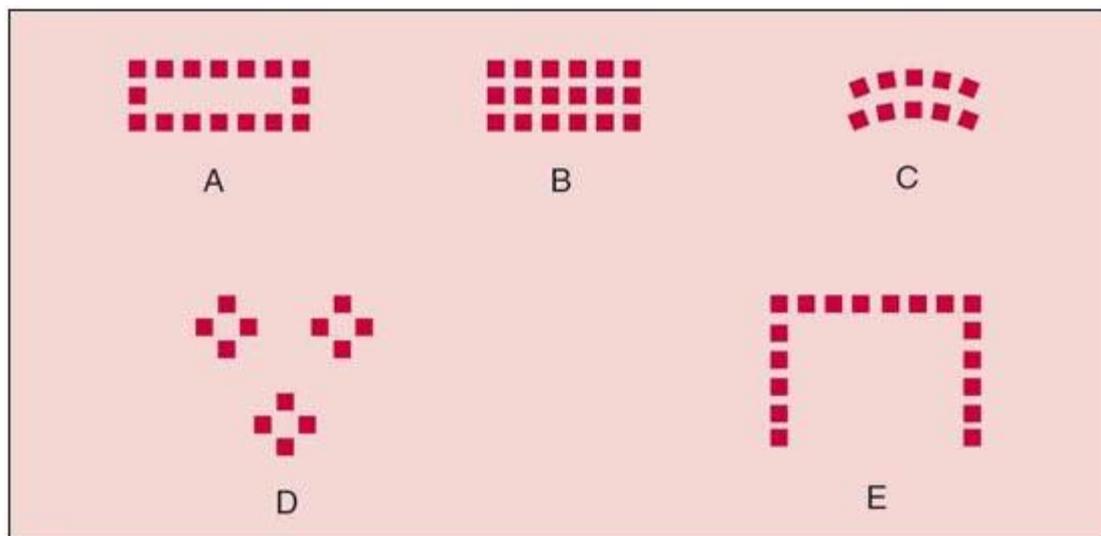
Activity 4

Look at the shapes of the seating plans in Figure 3 below, where each square represents a chair. Decide which seating plan would be most suited to each type of audience.

Figure 3: Various seating plans

You can have different types of audience. They may be in the form of:

- small group work
- large lecture theatre
- discussion group
- formal meeting.



Planning for your presentation

Location, location, location

The **location** of your presentation might seem like a matter of simple common sense, but it can have significant implications for how you plan your content and organize yourself.

If you have access to the venue, it might help to pay an early visit. The aspects you might want to check include: type and size of room seating arrangements – fixed or movable?

lighting – artificial or natural?

acoustics (especially if using amplification)

equipment available, e.g. whiteboard, projector, OHP

location of power points

position of speaker (you!)

facilities for special needs – e.g. induction loop, wheelchair access

safety features – e.g. fire exits.

You might try sitting in the audience area to see how it feels to be one of them. Can they see clearly? You could take along some of your planned visual aids and check they are visible from all parts.

Preparing your presentation

Gathering your thoughts

We assume that by now you have clarified the subject and purpose of your talk; you have identified the intended audience; and you have some idea of the situation at the venue. Now you need to focus on the material and the structure of your presentation.

This is the time to gather your thoughts and assemble material that may be useful. Keep in mind that you may be able to think about the talk even at odd moments – when you are doing other jobs, for instance, or travelling to work. You may find it useful to carry a notebook to jot down ideas as they occur to you. Some of the best ideas occur when you are not actually working on the topic at hand. Sources for material could include books, journals, radio and TV programmes, the internet, discussions with colleagues and friends, and so on. You may want to consider exploring ideas and thoughts in this section as well by using various techniques.

i.e. ideas associated with this are 'Some strong ideas which support your conclusion – or illustrate your points – could be diagrams, text, photos or other'. At the bottom of the activity map there is a statement, which reads 'Further refining in order to fit all the ideas together appropriately, logically and within your time slot.'"/>

Figure 4: A possible activity map for constructing your content and structure in a presentation

The key to organising your material is to have a definite structure. In this section we'll cover a series of exercises which illustrate the importance of having a beginning, middle and end to your talk. We won't go into depth just yet about the delivery of your presentation; we will look at the preparation you need to do to gather and organise all the information you'll be using.

Preparing your presentation

Structure of your presentation

The content of any presentation needs to have a clear structure. This will allow the audience to understand your main themes and leave the presentation feeling that it has been a worthwhile experience.

In Section 1, we suggested that most presentations work well by using 'a Rule of 3'. This is shown below in Figure 5.

Figure 5: The three parts of a presentation

Preparing your presentation

Why is the introduction so important?

It is crucial to be very clear exactly what you are going to say and do in the **first few minutes**. Your introduction needs to be well structured for several reasons:

You may, like most people, be at your most nervous during the first few minutes.

You may be the first or only speaker and have to 'break the ice', and make the audience feel immediately that their attendance is worthwhile.

You may have to follow a speaker who, through the attractiveness or strength of personality or by reason of their subject, has achieved great acceptance by the audience.

You may have to follow some other activity which has been extremely successful; or the 'high-spot' of the occasion. For any of these reasons, you have to create an immediate impression and gain the attention and interest of your audience. To achieve this you need to know exactly what you're going to say.

Planning for your presentation

Thinking about the location of your presentation

Activity 5

Imagine that you have been invited to deliver a presentation at a venue that you've never been to before, about 100 miles from your home. The presentation will be one of six others during the day-long event. It is just too far to be able to make a return trip home on the same day.

Your presentation is due to start at 10.00 am with the audience arriving at about 9.30 am for registration and coffee. The most suitable train would get you there at about 9.15 am and this would mean you would have to start from home at about 5 am!

There is a generous budget for the event and the organisers have asked you to let them know if you have any questions. Write down a list of questions **about the location** which you could send them to help you organise your presentation. Now read the discussion

Discussion

The most obvious question is to ask for a map of how to get there. Many organisations will do this automatically, but it is always safer to check yourself.

In some cases you may want to consider travelling the night before in order to be more refreshed for your presentation. We suggest that asking the organisers if there is a hotel or bed and breakfast nearby where you could stay would be prudent.

You also need to consider the room where you are delivering the presentation. What are the seating arrangements (fixed or movable seats)? Does the size seem to be sufficient for the expected audience? What facilities are there (electricity, lighting, overhead projector (OHP), slide projector, sound system in a large room, digital projector if you are making a presentation from a computer)? Ultimately you need to know the physical location of three critical things – yourself, the audience, and the equipment. The equipment includes what you are projecting with (e.g. an overhead projector) as well as the media you plan to project (your transparencies) and the surface you are projecting onto (screen or blank wall). Obviously, rooms are frequently not designed for the purpose of making presentations. You may need to adjust windows, curtains or blinds to avoid a glare on to your projection screen.

Hopefully, you will have covered most of these questions and probably thought of some additional ones – but remember this was only about the location of the presentation. There will be many other queries you can think of to do with other aspects of the presentation. Some venues will ask you what provision you would prefer and sort everything out beforehand. The point of this activity is to get you to focus on what 'things need to be organised' in order to give your presentation with no technical hitches.

The next section looks at how you gather and organise material for your talk.

Preparing your presentation

Effective ways to begin your presentation

Activity 6

Think of a presentation you have attended. Write a list of the sorts of things the presenter put into the introduction. If you can't remember, or haven't ever attended one, think about how a book is laid out.
Now read the discussion

Discussion

Many presenters use some interesting techniques to start their presentations. We discuss some useful opening strategies for effective presentations below. Not all of these will work in every situation, but by having some choices about how to start, we hope you will find a method which suits your specific presentation.

Statement of subject or title – this may not seem very inspiring to the audience but it can be short, sharp and informative.
Statement of your objective and the plan of your talk – a good, safe way to start if you have adopted a deductive sequence, but if you are trying to persuade you don't want to give the game away too early. Even where it is appropriate to include the objective and structure of your talk in the introduction, don't make this your opening remark – try one of the more interesting ideas which follow.

Question –anticipate the sort of questions your audience might want answered in connection with your subject: 'Are the days of a Great Britain finished for ever?' 'Must we sacrifice the essential quality of life if we are to take full advantage of the benefits that high technology can bestow?' The audience instinctively tries to arrive at an answer and you can go on to give yours.

Mind-reading – similar to the use of the question. Anticipate the audience's preconceived ideas; bring these into the open and correct them if necessary. 'If I were a member of the audience tonight, I might be expecting just another "pep-talk" on safety at work. But this evening I have something more valuable to propose...'

Quotation – perhaps the easiest method to use and often the most effective. The quotation should be from a well-known person or author known to the audience, and strictly relevant to your subject.

Facts and statistics– used sparingly they can get the audience to rise to the occasion. Most business or technical subjects offer many facts which will interest and inform your audience. Choose them carefully, make sure they are accurate and keep them simple. Contrasting facts can be particularly interesting: 'Annually, during the 1970s, the average number of working days lost through strikes was six million, yet the average lost through industrial accidents and sickness was 300 million'. Don't be too detailed – no audience can take in numbers like 6,454,100, without plenty of time and reinforcement from visual aids. Even then, rounded figures and percentages are easier to grasp.

Joke – if your experience tells you that you can do this well, then it may be worth risking it. But people's sense of humour differs radically, and if the joke falls flat you are worse off than before. Again, it must be well told, relevant and brief.

Informal – for informal occasions: for example, 'Only a few days ago Mr Brown and I were discussing the problem of...'. Mr Brown is on your side at once and you have avoided giving the impression of 'making a speech'.

Anecdote – must be well told, relevant to the subject, brief and, if possible, personal (the willingness to laugh at yourself usually wins an audience over).

Shock – not just the gimmicky opening, firing revolvers or letting off explosions, which can often go wrong and is always difficult to sustain. Shock can be created through the effective use of words: ‘training is a waste of time and money...’ pause to allow the shock to take effect, then: ‘unless it is aimed at developing the team rather than the individual.’

Topical story – as opposed to the humorous story. Everyone likes a story – but only if it is skilfully chosen and told. Ideally it should have an intriguing twist and must lead into the subject.

Having a ‘title’ slide – or OHT with the title of the presentation and your name on it. This gives the audience something to look at and takes attention away from you if you are feeling nervous at the start. Here are some other ideas which can help you through the first few minutes of your talk:

Learn the first few minutes off by heart from your script. This will help you get over the ‘stage fright’ of standing in front of an audience, perhaps for the first few times. The fact that you have learned it off by heart means you don't have to think about the first few minutes. After that you will feel more comfortable as you will begin to settle in to the presentation.

Tell people how long you will speak for, when you plan to take questions and if there are any handouts at the end. There may be various elements to your presentation (e.g. after a short while you may want some 'audience participation' in the form of group work). This gives the audience something to look forward to. Telling them when you will take questions is important as you may not want to be interrupted until you have reached certain parts of your presentation or even at the end. There is nothing more off-putting to a speaker than to have the 'flow' of an argument broken by a member of the audience asking a question which you were just about to explain.

Use handouts as the audience may appreciate some notes about your presentation – it saves them work and means they are concentrating more fully on what you are saying. However, it is probably best not to provide notes (particularly a complete set of your slides or OHTs) **before** a presentation. This can bring about the irritation of people turning over pages while you are speaking. Also, you can guarantee that some of the audience will read ahead and miss what you are saying. So, handouts are probably best given out **after** the presentation. Of course, with small group work you may want them to use a handout for a particular purpose during the presentation and these can be given out at the time.

Let the audience know what they will gain from your presentation. Phrases like 'I hope that you will all be able to understand ... when I have finished' can be very useful in directing your audience. If you don't set the scene in this way at the start you can't expect to take the audience along with you. Another useful phrase which might work could be 'If you only remember one thing from this talk it should be...'.

Use a 'table of contents', for example by using a suitably labelled slide with each main section of the talk clearly labelled in order. Then you can use these section labels on the appropriate slide during the talk. The visual listing of the A, B, and C sections can be a bit bland, but by signalling to the audience where they are going you will support them through your presentation with minimal effort.

Preparing your presentation

Why it is important to organise the main body of your presentation

The main body of your presentation is the 'tell them' part. You have prepared your audience for what is about to happen. Now it's happening! The middle section should contain the images and words that are the main part of your topic. Unless you intend to 'ad lib' your way through this part, you will need to assemble and organise your material carefully.

At the beginning of this section we discussed the need to allow time to gather material and thoughts. You may end up with a large assortment of ideas, notes on paper or on a PC, index cards, printed extracts, diagrams and so on. You now need to sort all this out!

You may find you have too much material so you must select only the most essential, relevant information and reject the irrelevant, however much you feel tempted to include it.

How much do I need to write and plan for?

As a rough guide, about 110–120 spoken words per minute can be presented comfortably to an audience. Of course, you will have to allow for things like explaining diagrams and answering any queries. So a 20-minute presentation with about ten slides shouldn't involve speaking more than about 2,000 words. If you take approximately 1½ minutes per slide as an average, you'll complete the slides in 15 minutes and you'll still have about 5 minutes to answer any questions.

The next stage is to look for the links between the various bits of information. When similar topics or issues crop up, they can be grouped together. It is helpful to give each group a heading. These groups may eventually become separate sections of the main body of your presentation. This process is very similar to the approaches used in note-taking and planning an essay.

Preparing your presentation

Generating ideas for the main body of your presentation

The aim of this subsection is to help enable you to generate as many ideas, notes, diagrams and data that could be used in your presentation. Then you will need to ask yourself which of these 'items' will be most appropriate for the final presentation. Particularly interesting are the various ways in which people make notes to produce a plan. Table 2 shows five different ways in which notes can be made and what they can be used for.

Table 2: Types of notes and what they can be used for

Activity 7

Match the number representing the 'Five sorts of notes' shown in Figure 6 to the description and use of the notes in Table 2.

f notes being written inside objects. In this case the objects are bricks within a wall. The fifth set of notes is shown as being written out as a page of linear text. There are paragraphs, but no whole sentences and many words are abbreviated."/>

Figure 6: Five sorts of notes

Now read the discussion

Diagram-style notes can also act as part of your presentation for precisely the reasons above. If they are put on an OHT and partially covered up, you can see the topics and reveal them when you want the audience to see the titles. So they also act as a reminder to yourself about the order in which you are going to deal with a topic – so you may not even need a set of notes or script except as back-up.

Preparing your presentation

Putting topics into order for the main body of your presentation

The next task is to put the groups of information, still in note form, into some sensible order. The most common methods are:

- chronological order
- order of importance
- ascending order of complexity
- descending order of familiarity
- cause and effect
- a narrative sequence.

Preparing your presentation

The importance of visual aids in the main body of your presentation

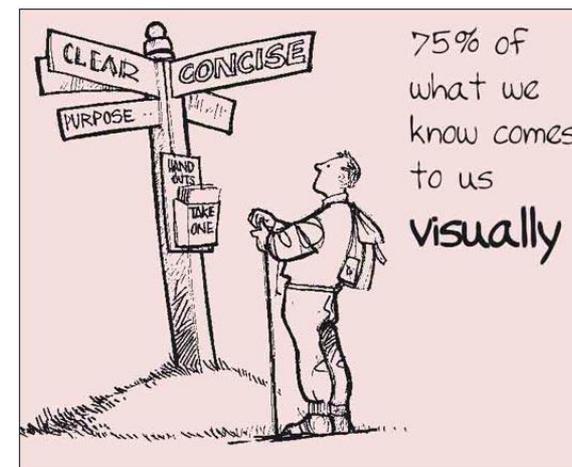
Figure 7: Visual knowledge

Once you have a skeleton outline of the main body of your presentation, you can think about how you will actually deliver the material to your audience.

In other words, make use of visual aids in the main body of your talk. This has several purposes:

- Your audience can see a clear statement of your main points.
- If you cover an OHT with a sheet of thin paper and only reveal a bit at a time, you have a set of notes to expand upon.
- If you are feeling nervous, you can divert attention from yourself by giving the audience something to look at. Your audience can assimilate information from two ways at once – from your slides and from what you say. So, they are being stimulated visually and aurally. People tend to remember things that they see, or things that they have heard when they are stated with emphasis, or in a particular way.
- You have a permanent record of your presentation and may be able to re-use parts of it again.
- You have a ready-made way of producing handouts for your audience at the end of your presentation.

By using some simple graphics, such as short tables, shapes (boxes, ovals, circles, etc.) and some supporting text, you will find it becomes very easy to start building up ideas for visual aids which are effective in your presentation. You may already be starting to think about how you might deliver them, and this is addressed later on in the unit.



Preparing your presentation

The main body of your presentation: a summary

In summary:

Decide which order you are going to present the subsections in – which ones follow naturally on from each other? This is called 'signposting': it tells the audience where you are all going, and makes sure that there is a logical sequence to your material.

Keep reminding yourself of the purpose of your presentation – it is easy to be diverted from this when new ideas occur to you.

Avoid jargon if possible. If not, explain yourself or check that your audience understands. Decide on a symbol to put into your presentation notes to remind you to do this. It is easy in the onrush of events to forget to explain simple concepts and theories – you are the expert, not the audience.

Use personal anecdotes or examples wherever possible to liven up the content and show that you are sharing your experiences with the audience.

Don't be afraid to include a summary as you go along to make sure that you are still carrying your audience with you. There will be an overall conclusion or summary at the end of your presentation, but it doesn't hurt to check and make sure the audience is still following your line of thought.

Preparing your presentation

Copyright issues

A word about copyright

Copyright is becoming increasingly important, especially now that all sorts of information are available on the internet. The problem with copyright is that it can become very complicated and the legal ruling varies from one country to another. Much of the help you can get with copyright on the internet is from the United States and does not always apply in the United Kingdom or Europe.

Copyright might affect your presentation if you decide to use somebody else's pictures or photographs, or even a quote in order to help illustrate your own text.

If you have doubts about using something, you must at the very least acknowledge your source material so that others can also easily find the reference.

Essentially, these are the main points about copyright that you should be clear about:
There is no official register for copyright.

Copyright is what is called an 'unregistered right' whereas patents, registered designs or trade marks are registered with an office via an official legally binding process.

Copyright has immediate effect as soon as something is committed to some sort of media including paper, film, audio recording and electronic record on the internet.

If you want to protect your 'creation' under copyright, then it is a good idea to mark the work with the copyright symbol © followed by your name and the date. This warns others against copying it, although is not a legal requirement in the UK. Copyright does not protect ideas – it protects the way the idea is expressed in the work you have produced. There are exceptions to copyright and if in doubt then check with the intellectual property office in your country. The UK address is:

www.intellectual-property.gov.uk/std/faq/copyright/exceptions.htm, accessed 6 October 2006.

A full list of the works protected by copyright is given on The Patent Office website at:

www.patent.gov.uk/whatis-copy.htm, accessed 6 October 2006.

This website also contains much more detail than is possible in this unit.

Preparing your presentation

The conclusion

So now we've arrived at the section where you 'Tell them what you just told them', in other words, summarise the presentation. Just as you need to attract the interest of your audience at the beginning of the talk, so you must finish on a high note. The effect of the overall presentation, which is otherwise good, can be damaged by its close.

Activity 8

In Activity 6, we asked you to think about a presentation you attended. This time we'd like you to think about how it ended. Did it just fizzle out, did it end with a bang or simply a re-capitulation of the main points? Try to write down some ideas about why the conclusion was memorable and what method the speaker was using to make it so.

Now read the discussion

Discussion

Here is a list of possible strategies for a conclusion:

Summary – a fairly standard way to finish but nevertheless effective. A brief review of the important points leaves no doubts in the minds of your audience.

Questions – send the audience away with a question. 'This then is what we have to do. The question now is, how can we best achieve it?'

Story or anecdote – should be brief and to the point. A story can illustrate how your ideas have worked out in practice.

Quotations – as with the opening, a quotation can indicate wide knowledge, and can therefore lend credibility to your performance. The quotation must be relevant and not just tacked on for its own sake.

Alternative – offer a choice of alternatives, or different solutions. The one you want accepted should be obvious from the way you have constructed your presentation and you can give this one more weight than the others in your summary.

Dramatic – if you carry it off by dramatic use of your voice, or dramatic content, this method can certainly end things on a high note.

Action – you want action now, not later. So ask for it. Many of your audience will respond.

Incentive – if you can suggest ways in which the audience can benefit, or offer some sort of reward or incentive, they are even more likely to respond. An audience is less likely to forget your message if you offer a reason for taking action.

Fear – use of fear to gain reaction is risky because it can alienate the audience. But since it is often difficult to provoke the audience to action, you may be justified in introducing an element of fear if the end result is worthwhile. 'You must act – now! Before it is too late!'

Conscience-pricking – this can have the same effect as fear, but it is less risky. By appealing to their honesty, you may make your audience realise that they have been lazy, apathetic, too busy, or ostrich-like in the past, to do what they know they should do.

The conclusion is the thing that most of your audience will take away with them so it needs to be as well organised as the other parts. It isn't just a winding down of the presentation. Quite a lot of thought is needed to encapsulate the points you have raised during your presentation. However, if you have organised the introduction and main body of the presentation then there won't be too much work to sort out the basic contents of the conclusion.

Here are some pitfalls to avoid:

End on a high note: don't wander towards the end. Make sure that what you say is relevant to all that has gone before.

Don't make a second speech. Even if you suddenly think of something else which is relevant, don't be tempted. It is very easy, as the tension relaxes, to start developing a new line of thought which was not developed in the body of the talk.

Avoid repetition. In summing up the main points you have made, don't repeat details or labour over points again. If you have finished before your allotted finishing time – sit down. Don't pad it out.

It's best not to give too many closing signals, e.g. 'And finally', 'In conclusion, then', 'One other thing before I finish'. In fact, it may be best to avoid a closing signal altogether. Your closing remarks should round off your talk; by implication your audience will know that your talk is complete.

Avoid having to rely on your notes for your final remarks. Learn your closing remarks so that you can look at your audience as you finish.

Form of notes

What they look like

When to use them

linear (most common form of notes)	written along the line, usually several pages for a big topic; lots of words but not whole sentences; use abbreviations and possibly arrows, underlining etc.	for recording a lot of information; possibly to support later essay writing or revision – usually shortened or used as the basis for index cards during revision
flow chart	fewer words than linear notes; more visual; ideas or information in logical flow	to show flow or direction in a process; often associated with science or economics but can be used for any topic; can illustrate connections between ideas to help categorise or analyse; to sort ideas or information in a way that is easier to handle and remember
tabular	in table form – like this	to show connections between ideas, events, theories, etc.; as a working tool while reading, note-taking, assignment planning, and revision
spider or spray diagram	key words and phrases arranged in a branching structure	use like a mind-map (to provide justification as some people may think a diagram is not really a form of notes)
diagrams and other visual presentations	formulae, drawings, pictures, or sets of images with few words	

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

1. Hardware (Machinery)
2. Leadership
3. Capabilities
4. Competitive advantages
5. USP's (unique selling points)
6. Experience, knowledge, data
7. Geographical Location
8. Price, value
9. Accreditations, qualifications, certifications
10. Philosophy and values
11. Competitors' vulnerabilities
12. DIC partnership
13. HSBC recognition
14. Resources, Assets

Weaknesses

1. Software (People)
2. Cultural, attitudinal, behavioural
3. Management
4. Morale, commitment
5. Management cover, succession
6. Lean Management
7. Weather (Extremely hot summer)
8. Gaps in capabilities
9. Processes and systems etc
10. IT developments – Internet marketing

Opportunities

1. Training and Development Academy to bridge the Human gap to reach world-class standards
2. SOP's
3. Best Practices
4. Kizen
5. Communication, responsibility and Accountability
6. Awareness
7. Processes, systems, IT, Media Communications
8. Marketing - reach, distribution,
9. Innovative aspects
10. Financial reserves, likely returns
11. Market developments
12. Industry or lifestyle trends
13. Technology development and innovation
14. Global influences
15. New markets, vertical, horizontal
16. Niche target markets
17. Geographical, export, import
18. New USP's
19. Tactics: eg, surprise, major contracts
20. Business and product development
21. Information and research
22. Partnerships, agencies, distribution
23. Volumes, production, economies

Threats

1. Quality
2. Lack of competitive strength
3. Reputation, presence and reach
4. Financials
5. Own known vulnerabilities
6. Timescales, deadlines and pressures
7. Cashflow, start-up cash-drain
8. Continuity, supply chain robustness
9. Effects on core activities,
10. Distraction
11. Reliability of data, plan
12. Predictability
13. Political effects
14. Legislative effects
15. Environmental effects
16. Competitor intentions - various
17. Market demand
18. New technologies, services, ideas
19. Vital contracts and partners
20. Sustaining internal capabilities
21. Obstacles faced
22. Insurmountable weaknesses
23. Loss of key staff
24. Sustainable financial backing
25. Economy - home, abroad

These objectives should be elaborated upon and studied on an annual basis as part of the Annual Executive Summary along with the Annual Budget submitted by each department head to the CEO.