

Good presentation skills are an extension of good communication skills. In everyday life we need to be able to present our case – to our colleagues, to our bosses, in interviews, when running a meeting and selling ideas. Whether at work or at home, the same principles apply. Communication is a two-way process: the message has to be delivered clearly but the process is only complete when you have heard that your message has been received successfully and understood.

Initially, presenting to an audience seems more complex than a discussion between two or three people. However, like any conversation, public speaking is a process of building connections with the audience and avoiding setting up barriers that may prevent clear communication between both parties.

The following points are taken from a training course that *Facilitate* runs for physicians and pharmaceutical marketing personnel. Our course includes practice with video cameras to improve performance; but simply by adopting some of the tips in the checklist below, you should find that the process of preparing for a presentation will become less intimidating.

1 Preparing for a presentation

The brief

You may be in the position where you are asked to speak frequently. The following is a checklist to help you decide whether to accept a speaking engagement:

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- What is the brief and context for my talk?
- How long should my presentation last?
- Will there be time for questions?
- Who is the audience?
- How large is the auditorium/meeting room?
- How much do they already know about the topic?
- Do they speak English?
- Who else is speaking and on what subjects?
- Where is the meeting?
- What written materials are required pre/post event?

Additional points for physicians are:

- What is the honorarium?
- Is travel/accommodation/registration for the meeting included?

Developing the content

Thorough preparation is the key to a successful presentation. When you have agreed to give a presentation you will need to set aside time to develop your talk. Allow time to prepare the presentation content, visual support, rehearse and develop any handouts that may be required. Start by outlining the structure of your presentation:

Introduction

- How will you create a rapport with the audience?
- Will you use an ice-breaker?
- What is the theme/purpose of your presentation?

Main body of presentation

- What are the 3 key points?
- What is the logical sequence for the topics you want to cover?
- Can you develop a “road map” to help the audience navigate the presentation with you?
- How will you make transitions/connections between different sections of the presentation?
- What data do you need to illustrate your talk?

Summary

- Recap key points
- “Call to action”.

Preparing your equipment and yourself

- Consider whether you will have a full script for your presentation or whether you prefer to use prompt cards.
- Will you use slides/video/PowerPoint/overhead transparencies (acetates)?
- What other equipment will be needed and who will provide it?
- Would a rehearsal with a colleague be helpful?
- Ask your rehearsal audience to give you constructive feedback, suggest revisions and check whether they have understood the main points of your presentation
- Consider what difficult questions you could be asked and think about how you would answer them
- Don't leave everything to the last minute!

2 The day of the presentation

When the day of the presentation arrives, you can improve your performance by following these simple recommendations:

- Arrive early so that you don't feel flustered and have time to make final checks. If anything isn't right, you can make some changes
- Familiarise yourself with the venue – stand at the podium to get the “feel” of the place and listen to your voice to become familiar with how it sounds
- Familiarise yourself with the equipment – how to advance the slides, cue the video, test the laser pointer

- Practice looking down at your notes, looking at the screen and making contact with ALL parts of the audience
- Have a final check in the mirror to ensure that your appearance does not detract from your message.

3 Overcoming nervousness/improving delivery

- Harness the adrenalin – it can give you an “edge” if you channel the energy into your talk
- Learn techniques to reduce tension and put you into a positive frame of mind
- Use mental visualisation to remember what you’re going to do and say
- Memorise your first sentence
- Imagine yourself doing well
- Think about your delivery – use light and shade, vary your volume, pace and pitch
- Make eye contact with the audience
- Use facial and body expressions to emphasise your commitment to specific points in the presentation
- In the first few moments establish your presence and gain the audience’s attention
- Create a rapport to win the audience to your side
- Think about how you want to present yourself – friend/expert/teacher?
- Use plain speech to make the presentation easy to understand
- Use relevant anecdotes or humour
- Use repetition to emphasise key points
- Use visuals and word pictures to improve the memorability of your talk.

4 Handling difficult questions

There are two types of difficult questions – those you don’t want to answer and those you can’t answer. Either way, they can be an opportunity to clarify points and to reinforce your key messages and purpose. You may prefer to take questions throughout your presentation – this gives you the opportunity to ensure that the audience isn’t lost as your argument progresses. Alternatively you may prefer to take questions at the end of the talk when the audience has been able to hear your presentation in its entirety.

If you don’t know the answer to a question, honesty is the best policy: “I don’t know” or “Can I get back to you on that one?” is better than attempting to bluff your way through. The person asking the question may be an expert, so ask their view too.

When asked a question, listen carefully and check that you have understood it correctly. The question may be irrelevant to your presentation or too technical. Don’t get side-tracked. Evaluate the nature of the question and work out whether this is an expression of deeper interest, or challenging your point of view or the robustness of your arguments.

It can be useful to repeat the question to confirm that you have understood it correctly and for the benefit of members of the audience who may not have heard the question clearly. Keep responses short and consider the tone of your response: avoid “put-downs” or a lecturing tone; instead aim for a genuine and confident approach. As mentioned

earlier, it helps to be prepared for questions and role-play them in advance. Speak to the whole audience, not just the person who asked the question. This is your opportunity to relate your answer back to the key points of your presentation.

If there's a real difference of opinion, try to find some area of agreement before reinforcing your point of view. Think about who's in the audience – there may be another expert in the audience who can help with the answer.

5 Presenting data effectively

Visuals increase the retention of messages – studies show that presentations using words and visuals are about a third more effective. The following are points to consider when designing the visual support for a presentation:

- Use visuals to support your message, not distract attention away from the key points; to this end, don't overuse PowerPoint effects
- Use a variety of visual types in your presentation – photos, graphs, bullet point slides, charts and cartoons
- An ideal size for body text is 24–28 point, the minimum is 20 point
- Use a sans serif font (eg, Arial) rather than a serif font, which is not as clear when projected in PowerPoint
- Choose a font color that contrasts well with the background (eg, white or yellow on blue; never red or green on blue); bear in mind that what looks good on your PC may not project well
- You don't have to use a dark background; a light background can work well too
- If you don't have a great flair for design, consider using one of PowerPoint's own backgrounds
- Decide what point each slide will illustrate and be ruthless in eliminating unnecessary slides
- Consider what part of the slide is most important and whether this is reflected in the layout
- Think about how you will transition from one slide to the next
- Simplify charts and graphs as much as possible
- Work out your color scheme and use it consistently throughout the presentation – allocate specific colors to specific products.

6 Presenting to inspire action!

You've covered the basics of creating a good presentation, but want to go one step further and build a bridge to the hearts and minds of your audience. Think about the effect that you want to have on the audience and what you want them to do as a result of listening to you.

- You need to have a clear sense of purpose:
 - Why I am telling them this?
 - What effect do I want to have?
 - What result do I want to have?
 - What do I want the audience to do differently?

- Look for signs of audience engagement – attentiveness, nods, questions
- Gain audience interaction – take a poll of hands on an issue
- Remember that changing gear helps to give pace to a talk
- Bring something of yourself to the presentation – eg, personal anecdotes
- Maintain your presence on the podium – keep your energy level high, be alert, communicate your passion for the subject

What makes a good or a bad presentation?

GOOD	BAD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy and passion • Eye contact with audience • Speaking clearly and audibly • Pitching at the appropriate level for the audience • Well-structured arguments • Personal commitment to topic • Legible slides • Varied slide types • No more than 1 slide per minute • Use of other technology; eg, video • Finish on time and allow for questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of purpose • Poor body posture • Unnecessary repetition (within presentation or of previous speaker) • Lack of preparation • Off brief • Too complex/simple for audience or misjudge the level of interest • Too many slides • Illegible font on slides • Over-use of PowerPoint technical effects • Poor use of color in slides • Incorrect use of technical equipment • Over-running on time

**If you have any comments on this fact sheet, please contact
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