

**Section 14**  
**Presentation Skills**

## 14.1 Introduction

During this presentation skills workshop we will be looking at different aspects of how to plan, prepare and deliver an effective presentation.

The learning outcomes from the workshop are:

- Participants will know how to plan and prepare a presentation
- You will learn how to structure and deliver a presentation, and
- You will learn the need to perform so that your audience understands and remembers key messages.

We will also look at some aspects of doing a presentation as a team.

### What makes an effective presentation?

*Form into small groups and write down what you think makes for an effective presentation.*

Types of responses could be:

- Clear delivery of presentation
- Confident presenter
- Enthusiastic presenter
- Good eye contact
- Topic of interest to the audience
- Structured, logical presentation

An effective presentation is due not only to the content – what is said or shown - but also the way it is said – the presenter’s style and approach.

This module is going to take you through **seven** key stages of preparing and delivering a presentation

### Summary:

- Objective
- Preparation
- Structure
- Delivery
- Summary
- Follow-up

## 14.2 Desired Outcome

- Why are you here?
- What's in it for the audience?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Set "desired outcomes"

The single most important thing you can think about for your presentation is the **desired outcome**. What is the idea you are trying to sell to your audience? What is the context of the presentation? What is your objective?

Do you want to inform, inspire, persuade or elicit a response? An example of a clear concise objective might be:

*"to persuade a client to include our company on a select list for a new contract"*

Once you have decided on the desired outcome of your presentation, write it down and keep returning to it.

This is the touchstone for the rest of the preparation. Your research, information gathered, handouts, visual aids and so on must all act in support of and not distract from, your primary objective.

### 14.3 Preparation

The point of a presentation is to bring the audience round to your point of view and well researched and well prepared arguments with supporting data, are a key part of this. You will need to research your audience too.

Good preparation is the key to confidence and it will reduce nerves. Presenting or speaking in public regularly tops the list in surveys of people's greatest fears in life. It usually appears before flying or dying.

Good preparation and rehearsal will reduce nerves by 75% and increase the likelihood of avoiding errors by 95%.

Remember we need both knowledge and conviction not just information and logic. Presentation is about winning over an audience. You will need to entertain as well as convey information. People learn better and retain more if they are enjoying themselves and feeling relaxed.

You might try using creative techniques such as brainstorming or mind mapping to help you plan for the presentation.

*Prior proper preparation prevents poor performance!*

#### **Areas for preparation are:**

1. Terms of Reference
2. Audience and other stakeholders
3. Desired outcome
4. Environment
5. Type of presentation (lecture/facilitative)
6. Facts , examples, audio-visuals to support your case.

A presentation is all about persuasion. It is about bringing the audience around to your way of thinking. The best thing you could have is a set of **hard facts**. The more facts you have, the harder it is for your audience to disagree with you. You will need to think about previous experience, statistics, costs, timescales, competition etc.

Create your own prompts and notes, maybe using cue cards. Remember to number them and tie them together. (Why? You might drop them!). They are a great safety net and help with nerves.

#### **Audience:**

- Who are they?
- What is the occasion?
- What do they need to know?
- How much do they know already?
- How long have they got to listen?

## 14.4 Structure

One of the most convincing ways of appearing practiced and professional is to use a clear structure for your presentation. When you are pushed for time, a good structure will help you prepare your presentation more easily and to keep a clear mind while you do it.

There's a simple structure you can use for all project related presentations. It divides into the following sections:

- Introduction
- Main Body
- Summary.

### It's About Communication

Research<sup>1</sup> has established that for effective spoken communication:

- 7% of meaning is in the words that are spoken
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way the words are said)
- 55% of meaning is in facial expression

Style, expression, tone, facial expression and body language account for 93% of meaning. We also know that **what we see accounts for 75% of the information we receive** and hearing accounts for around 15% only.

The average attention span of an average listener is only 6-8 minutes, so intersperse your material with 'spice' and a variety of stimuli to maintain and even at times regain attention and interest.

Be daring and bold and have appropriate fun. You might use props and pass them around. The more senses you can stimulate the more likely the audience is to look, listen and learn.

A classic method for keeping an audience interested is to periodically **summarise and signpost** as you go through the presentation. Whatever the structure of the main body, make sure it flow with some logical sequence.

As you do this, use different methods of keeping the audience interested and the best way is make use of all the communication senses available. We already know that the use of visual aids heightens retention of the spoken word by up to 70%.

Tony Buzan's research on information retention shows:

- |                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| • Read           | 10% |
| • Heard          | 20% |
| • Seen           | 30% |
| • Heard and Seen | 50% |
| • Said           | 70% |
| • Said and Done  | 90% |

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<sup>1</sup> Prof Albert Mehrabian

The structure of an opening, middle (with sub sections) and close (with opportunity for questions, if relevant) is good but it is a flat '2D' script. **We need to give it a 3<sup>rd</sup> Dimension.** This is where the stories, case studies, visuals come into play. This is not just about gimmicks, it is about pace and timing. It is about posture, movement and body language. **This is a performance.** The more you can appeal to emotions, the more attention you will get and the more interest and retention you will achieve.

## 14.5 Delivery

The ground work for your presentation is now laid. The next step is to find the words and techniques best suited to make your point.

So start with as much script as you have time for:

- In an ideal world you would write out your full presentation and then reduce it to note form
- Failing that, write only notes, but script any important areas (those you might need to make specific or detailed reference to) along with the opening and closing of the presentation
- Whatever happens, at least try to script the opening and the close of the presentation.

Write your notes out on index cards. Include all of the key points, phrases, analogies you have identified. Don't make your notes too detailed. Giving a presentation from notes is a good way of showing your audience that you have prepared thoroughly. It actually looks more professional and polished than working without notes.

### Introduction

You have around 5 seconds to make a positive impact and a good opening impression, so make sure you have a good, strong, solid introduction, well rehearsed. Try to build your credibility and create a safe, comfortable environment for your audience. Smiling helps. Beware starting with a joke and try not to start with an apology.

- Pause, say nothing and make eye contact (5 seconds)
- Hello, thanks for inviting me
- Introduce yourself
- Begin with a story, quote or anecdote that will grab the attention of the audience and illustrate your main theme/objective
- Explain length of presentation, and what form it will take
- Tell your audience what you want to do about questions
- **Start with the end in mind.**

*Tell them what you are going to tell them. Tell them why it is important. Tell them why you are telling them. Tell them how long it will take and how you intend to handle questions.*

### Strategy for Persuasion

- There is a problem
- It is your problem
- Background to the problem
- Criteria for solving the problem
- Possible solutions
- Best solution

- Action step
- Visualisation
- Recommendations
- Conclusion and Challenge

## **Main Body**

You will need a strong opening and a strong close but you will need a strategy for persuasion as part of the main body of the presentation.

## **Summarise and Signpost**

It can be difficult for audiences to follow presentations. Therefore you have to signpost the audience throughout the presentation so they are repeatedly reminded of what has been said and what is coming up next. This will help keep people interested.

A good rule of thumb is to **plan things in 3's** i.e. three main sub sections or three main points in each section. Audiences appear to remember things better when structured in this way,

Listed below are some useful hints and tips for getting attention, creating interest and winning over an audience to your way of thinking.

## **Appearance**

The most important rule is to dress appropriately. All organisations have their own dress codes; a large firm of management accountants will dress very differently from a small company of record producers. People like people who look like them, so adapt your outfit to tone in with your audience's style. You want people to remember you for your presentation, not your appearance, so avoid extremes in:

- Fashion
- Smell (strong perfume or aftershave)
- Jewellery and accessories
- Large patterns and bright or even lurid colours.

For your own comfort you should also avoid:

- New shoes or clothes that haven't been worn in
- Tight clothes which inhibit your movement or gestures.

You may feel that you want to give yourself an additional air of authority, especially if you've had to prepare in a rush and are less confident underneath than you'd like to be. You can do this by wearing or carrying certain items:

- A jacket
- The darkest neutral colours that suit you, such as charcoal or navy
- Good-quality clothes and accessories
- A good pen
- Smart earrings for women
- Heels on women's shoes – not totally flat, but not too high.

## **Language**

Use language that your audience will understand. In a presentation you are offering a structured series of arguments, and it requires some effort from the audience to follow. The easier you make it for them, the more likely they are to listen attentively and take it in.

- Use short words and short sentences
- Avoid abstract words e.g. try “bus” instead of “transportation”
- Use active verbs (“doing words”) e.g. “we need your help” rather than “your help is needed by us”
- Avoid jargon and technical terms (unless you are sure everyone will know them)

## **Speech**

Talk naturally and involve the audience. Use “I”, “we” and “You” a lot. Make it personal to the audience. Use pauses and silence. Allow the audience time to take in what you are saying. Allow ‘pause for thought’ for you and for the audience. Create anticipation in the audience and keep them listening.

## **Eye Contact**

Maintain good eye contact especially at the start and end of significant points e.g. as you pause to summarise and signpost. Use eye contact to read the audience. Are they with you? Do they nod in agreement or do they look confused? Pauses, with eye contact, add drama.

## **Add Spice**

Explain things using interesting information. Above all, tell stories and use analogies to help people visualise and understand in a way that creates meaning for them. This is why researching the audience is so critical:- to find out what they are likely to respond to. Things that add ‘spice’ to a presentation include:

- Stories
- Analogies
- Statistics
- Examples
- Endorsements/Testimonials
- Questions/Straw Polls
- Audio visuals

Metaphors and analogies convert abstract or difficult ideas into concrete images which the audience can grasp. Be aware of the audience’s needs and use techniques such as rhetorical questions to get them to think. Above all, make the subject relevant to the audience and get straight to the point.

## **Audio-Visuals**

A verbal message which is reinforced with a visual one is much stronger than a verbal message alone. This is why audio-visual aids are an important part of most presentations.

The first question when you plan your presentation shouldn't be "What visuals do I need?" but "**Do I need visuals at all?**"

Some reasons not to use visuals?

- Take time and thought to design
- Can divert your attention away from what you want to say and on how you want to say it
- Diminish your flexibility during the presentation
- Cost money.

Some reasons in favour of visual aids?

- A picture is worth a thousand words
- Can portray vividly and instantly things that are impossible to convey verbally
- They can save time
- Create interest
- Lend variety
- Add impact.

Keep visuals simple. A popular error with visuals is to make them too complicated. It is just about impossible to put too little information on a visual, while including too much is very easy.

### **Handouts**

A handout makes it much harder for your audience to forget your presentation after you have left. If time is short, providing just one handout will make a big difference. Point out the key points on a single sheet. Hand this around at the end of the presentation as an aide-memoir for your audience.

### **Rehearsal**

Rehearsal is essential for several key reasons:

- It shows up whether there are parts of your presentation which don't work, are too long, or don't make sense
- It gives you a chance to practise your delivery
- It means you can time your presentation (but bear in mind that you almost always go faster in the real thing)
- It helps reduce your nerves - once you know what you're doing your fears subside
- It gives you a chance to make sure that any technical equipment such as PowerPoint will work smoothly and slot into the presentation easily.

### **Be Realistic**

Almost all of us suffer from nerves to some degree. But if you are one of those who reacts very strongly, to the point of being sick or passing out, design a presentation where there is as little as possible to go wrong. Given plenty of preparation time, copious rehearsal will help you. But if this isn't possible, cut out anything nerve-racking that you can. For example:

- Devise just one visual with plenty of impact
- Keep the presentation as short as you can and fill out the time with a question and answer session
- Bring in a colleague to do part of the presentation for you (the moral support alone is a big help)
- Don't distribute handouts – put them on the table in advance and invite the audience to help themselves later.

Analyse what it is that worries you most, and eliminate or minimise it. You should really notice the difference in your stress levels.

## 14.6 Summary

The summary is your chance to re-engage the audience and make it absolutely clear what messages you want them to understand and what action you want from them.

The close of a presentation is too important to be left to chance. It is vital to have a planned and strong close to your presentation. The conclusion should normally include:

- A summary of the facts
- Your conclusion
- Your recommendation
- End with an appeal to an emotion such as hope, fear or pride
- Call for action
- Thanks.

Memorise the close so that you have a confident and memorable finale that leaves the audience in no doubt about what you want them to remember and/or do next. Don't make them guess at your conclusion and recommendation.

## 14.7 Follow-up

You might have to follow-up on aspects of the presentation, or reaction to it later, but immediately, you may want to take questions and feedback.

If you are going to take questions after your talk, try to anticipate what your audience will want to ask. List these issues, and the key points you want to include in your answers. Then decide how you want to make each of these points through reference to specific concrete examples. Prepare these answers in the same way that you prepared the points of your talk.

### Stimulating Audience Reaction/Interaction

If your presentation has been relevant to the audience and if you have predicted typical questions accurately, you may not need to stimulate further interaction. But if you do, this is how to go about it.

Summarise the key issues in your presentation and ask the audience specific questions, like 'Have you come across examples of this in your situation? Tell me these examples and how they were handled?' General invitations like 'Any comments on this?' stimulate less interaction.

### Answering Questions

You can't stop your audience asking you questions, nor should you want to. Without that opportunity, any doubts will continue to fester in the minds of your audience.

It is a good idea to think through what questions you are likely to be asked. Two particularly good ways of spotting likely questions are:

- Run through the job titles of your audience – people tend to ask questions related to their own specific field
- Contact someone who knows something about the subject of your presentation. Ask them to give you a quick run down of anything they think you are likely to be asked.

When you answer a question, paraphrase what you've been asked. At large gatherings where only the speaker has a microphone, paraphrasing ensures that everyone hears what has been asked. Also questions containing bland language can be made more graphic. Belligerent questions can be made more benign, by replacing emotive words with neutral ones.

Questions are opportunities for you to reinforce points that you have already made, and to make new points that you have prepared in addition to your presentation. Answer each question, then expand on your answer so that you build a bridge that allows you to include your prepared point. The rule is:

- Paraphrase
- Answer
- Expand your answer to build a bridge to your new point (if you have one).

If you don't know the answer to a question you can simply say you don't know it and promise to find out.

### **Presenting as a Team**

It is always more difficult to deliver a presentation as a team, it takes more planning and it presents more opportunities for problems. Listed below are some basic guidelines.

- Clarify everyone's role
- Agree a party line
- Delegate questions through Chair
- Don't contradict others
- Practice as a team
- Look like a team

Problems encountered when presenting as a team:

- Co-ordination
- Control
- Variable Quality
- Consistency
- Maintaining Structure
- Appearing as a team
- Timescale

### **Checklists**

We all know things can go wrong at presentations, and we've all seen it happen to other people. There are five main areas to consider:

- Interruptions
- Staging
- Equipment
- Appearance;
- Last-minute checks.

### **Interruptions**

- Arrange for phones to be diverted during the presentation
- Make sure someone is briefed to prevent anyone barging into the room, and put a sign on the door
- If anyone else regularly uses the room, check they know it will be out of bounds. Include in this not only colleagues but also cleaners, window cleaners, catering staff, postal staff, and so on
- Check there are no regular interruptions such as fire alarm testing, or break time in the school playground just outside the window. If there are, try to reschedule the presentation
- You cannot prevent every possible interruption. The golden rule if you are interrupted is to acknowledge the fact. Don't try to talk through the fire alarm test – wait for it to stop.

## **Staging**

- Make sure you have enough chairs, including a couple extra in case someone else decides to come along too. Arrange the chairs in an arc or U-shape facing you
- Check there will be a table for your papers, handouts, briefcase and anything else you have. You may also need another table for equipment, such as a working model or your computer
- Don't put any barrier, such as a table or desk, between yourself and your audience, unless you are obliged to present around a large boardroom-style table
- Don't stand with your back to a window or you will appear in silhouette to your audience
- Sit in each of the chairs in turn to make sure that the view of you or any visuals is not obscured
- Make sure you know how to dim or black out the room if you need to
- Try to make sure that if there is a clock in the room, you can see it but the audience can't
- Except for the most informal presentation, it is better for you to stand. It looks more professional and is a mark of respect to your audience.

## **Equipment**

- Test all your equipment in advance
- Test it all again in situ immediately before the presentation
- Make sure you know exactly how to operate your equipment and are confident with it
- Find out - if you don't already know – what is most likely to go wrong with the OHP, PowerPoint, demonstration model or whatever you are using. And make sure you know what to when it does
- Make sure you have spares of everything you could need – backup disks, spare bulbs, spare batteries, handouts, pens and so on
- If necessary get another person to assist with operating equipment although some people prefer to retain control of this.

## **Last-Minute Checks**

### *Venue*

- Check all equipment is working
- Make sure it is set up and ready to go
- Check the position of the screen for maximum visibility
- If you are using any kind of lectern or stand, check it is at the right height
- If you are using any sound effects, check the sound levels
- Have a list of props, equipment, handouts, your notes etc., and check off everything on the list
- Get a glass of water if you want one
- Check you can locate and operate: lights, air conditioning, heating and windows
- Check the phone is diverted and any likely interruptions have been forestalled
- If you are on unfamiliar territory, check you know your way to the reception, lavatories, coffee machine and phone – not only for you, but also because one of your audience members may ask you for directions.

### *Yourself*

- Check hair, jewellery, clothes etc.
- Turn off your mobile or PDA alarm function

Have a spare set of notes, for peace of mind, if you can possibly find the time to write them out or copy them. And armed with all the preparation and advice in this manual, you should be more than ready to go out there and “knock ‘em dead”.

### *And finally...*

Go through a checklist:

- Who is the precise audience?
- What is their starting point?
- By the time I’ve finished what do I want them thinking, saying or doing?
- How much time do I have and how many ideas can people absorb?
- Is the linkage between the separate elements clear to the listener?
- Is each separate element clearly illustrated from case histories, anecdotes, personal experience?
- Is the language simple, direct and geared for this audience?
- Is there sufficient summary or reinforcement to allow people time to absorb the material?
- How well do the audio-visuals develop the material and help the listeners understand?
- What hand-outs if any do I plan to use and what else do I want the audience to do?