

Communication Skills: Planning and Giving a Presentation

Description

A presentation is an important event for both the presenter and the audience. Presentations require the presenter to consider and organize the knowledge he or she possesses. In addition, classroom presentations are opportunities to practice a skill that will be useful throughout life in a variety of professional, community, and personal circumstances. Audience members also benefit through the acquisition of the information disseminated through the presentation.

Learners

Although presentations may be given on an impromptu basis (See “Communication Skills: Briefing”), they are typically events that occur with advance notice and advance preparation. This type of presentation is often referred to as an “extemporaneous” presentation. “Extemporaneous” means “from the time” and refers to a presentation that has been prepared and practiced in advance while allowing the speaker to be responsive to the needs of the audience.

Equipment

No equipment is needed; however, depending on the nature of the presentation, if students are expected to incorporate visual aids, they may need equipment for power point presentations or other equipment to present visual information.

Facilitator

The facilitator plays several roles during presentations, as necessitated by the situation. Time keeping, managing question and answer periods, encouraging audience feedback, providing transitions between presentations, and directing audience attention to pertinent areas of the presentation are all possible facilitator roles. Depending on the experience of the presenters, facilitators may also find themselves teaching the process of preparing a presentation. A “Presentation Planning Checklist” is included at the end of this lesson to assist in preparing students for their presentations.

Instructions

Planning, organizing, and giving a presentation requires thinking and decision making regarding these critical points:

- I. Planning the presentation. In advance of the presentation, speakers should be able to write in one or two sentences the goal they wish to accomplish by giving their presentation. That is, after the presentation is completed, what is it the speaker wants the audience to know, do, or believe as a result of the presentation? After writing the goal statement, the speaker determines what

the audience already knows about the topic. Assessing listeners' knowledge assists the speaker in making decisions about the need to define terms, to include background information, to determine the level of complexity of information, and other planning presentation issues.

- II. Organizing the presentation. Writing a speaking goal also assists the speaker to focus on the general area of information that will be covered in the presentation.

The Body. Once the speaker identifies the general area, it is helpful to categorize the information into smaller areas, or points, that will be supported and developed. For example if the speaker's purpose is to describe a method of developing a hydroponic system for growing plants in space, all of the details involved in developing that system should be sorted into categories. This is called chunking.

Once the categories or chunks of information are identified, the speaker determines the best arrangement for these chunks to facilitate audience understanding. For example if the speaker is discussing a process for setting up a hydroponic system, chronologically ordering the chunks of information might make the most sense. If the speaker is discussing the advantages and disadvantages of growing crops hydroponically in space, there will probably be two chunks of information and the speaker should decide which order of presentation will be most effective with a particular audience.

The Introduction. Once the chunks are ordered, the speaker develops an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction should preview the topic and major points the speaker will discuss in the presentation. In addition, with some audiences the speaker must inform the audience of the benefit or relevance of the information to them. For example:

“Today I will discuss a method for growing plants that works in space and on earth: hydroponic plant systems. I will briefly explain the nature of an hydroponic system and discuss advantages and disadvantages of growing crops in hydroponic systems.”

The Conclusion. The conclusion gives the speaker one last opportunity to state what the audience should remember from the presentation. For example:

“Remember: you aren't limited to growing crops in soil. As we have seen today, hydroponic systems offer many benefits to the environment, to the quality of food, and to the consumer.”

Transitions. Finally, sentences and parts of the speech should be connected with words, phrases, and possibly entire sentences called transitions. Transitions connect parts of a speech: “The first benefit of a hydroponic

system is...; second, hydroponic systems benefit...; and third...” Or, “The next step in developing a hydroponic system is...” Transitions also allow the speaker to move from point to point in the speech.

- III. Delivering the presentation. After the organization and content of the presentation are determined, visual aids are prepared and speakers should practice delivering their presentation incorporating the visual aids. Additionally, it is beneficial to practice in the environment in which the presentation will be given, if possible. As the presenter practices and builds confidence, the quantity of notes used should be reduced. Ideally, notes should be limited to key words and phrases, because the fewer the notes, the more the speaker is free to concentrate on the audience.
- IV. Developing Confidence. Speakers develop confidence largely through multiple speaking experiences. The more speaking opportunities given to students, the more easily they will develop the confidence necessary to present themselves as knowledgeable speakers. Confidence also results from controlling as many aspects of a speaking situation as possible, from “covering all the bases.” For example, within the speaker’s control are limiting food intake and making proper clothing choices on speaking days, and arriving early to check technical equipment. There are other techniques listed on the “Presentation Planning Check List.”
- V. Learning From the Presentation. Following the presentation, students can benefit from writing a brief reflection of their experience.
 - What was there about the presentation that went well?
 - What did they learn from the experience that will benefit their next presentation?
 - If there was a question and answer session, what did they learn about their presentation from audience questions?
 - Did the questions indicate there were aspects of the presentation that should have been handled differently?
 - Did the questions provide information about aspects of the presentation that went well?

Requesting a brief reflection from students provides an additional opportunity to learn from the presentation, to gain confidence by identifying and acknowledging aspects of the presentation that went well, and to identify goals for personal improvement for future presentations..

References and Resources

There are many resources available for just about any aspect of planning and giving presentations. For example:

The website of Toastmasters' International lists tips for successful public speeches.
<http://www.toastmasters.org> Accessed April 11, 2005.

Other useful sources are:

Leech, T. (2004). *How to prepare, stage, and deliver winning presentations* (3rd ed.).
New York: Amacom. (Common sense tips for planning presentations with
helpful information on preparing and displaying visual aids.)

Morgan, N. (April 2001). "The kinesthetic speaker: Putting action into words."
Harvard Business Review, 112-119. (A brief but thorough description of tips for
managing delivery.)

Natalle, E. & Bodenheimer, F. (2004). *The woman's public speaking handbook*.
Belmond, CA: Wadsworth/Thomsen Learning. (Although some of the pointers
are specifically for women, most of the tips can be used by everyone.)

Redmond, M. & Vrchota, D. (in press). *Everyday speaking: A practical guide to
planning presentations* (working title). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. (Based on
the assumption that most presentations are given to small audiences.)

Smith, T. (1984). *Making successful presentations: A self-teaching guide*. New York,
NY: John Wiley & Sons. (Written by a public speaking coach, the advice is
aimed at presenters in a professional environment. The information is also
applicable in a classroom environment.)

Wagstaffe, J. (2002). *Romancing the room: How to engage your audience, court your
crowd, and speak successfully in public*. New York: Three Rivers Press. (Made
up of brief essays on the entire public speaking process.)

Presentation Planning Check List

Pre-Planning:

- Know your presentation goal
- Analyze your audience

Organizing your presentation:

- Chunk material
- Organize material
- Plan an ear-catching introduction
- Plan a memorable conclusion
- Insert transitions

Delivering your presentation:

- Prepare visual aids
- Practice
- Deliver in prepared conversational mode with minimal notes

Presenting yourself confidently:

Prepare your speech by practicing: in front of a mirror, before a video camera, with an audience, in your presentation room.

Prepare the day of your speech by: exercising, eating carefully, choosing comfortable presentable clothing

Prepare yourself: take a glass of water to the lectern, organize your visual support, breathe.