

Giving Professional Presentations

1. Audience/Objectives

- Be able to answer the following questions about your audience:
 - “What do they already know?”
 - “What do they need/want to know?”
 - “Why should they care, and how can I make them care?”
- Put objectives into writing—be clear about your purpose before you begin.

2. Be Ethical

- Be accurate, honest, truthful, and fair—avoid hyperbole or unsupported claims.
- Never plagiarize or gather illegal or unethical information/research.

3. Structure your Presentation

- The written word is not the same as the spoken word—do not read!
- Do not simply follow a written script word-for-word. Consider what organizational pattern would be most appropriate—chronological, spatial, topical, historical, cause and effect, problem–solution—and have a coherent thesis.
- Make sure to support your points. Support includes, case studies, testimonials, illustrations, analogies, narratives, anecdotes, statistics/research, etc. Although support might include “numbers,” support does not consist of reports of your tests of significance, etc.—support involves “words!”
- Practice—many times—and be prepared for the worst: the speaker before you not ending on time, the equipment breaking or not being available, not having a projector (or a plug) for your PowerPoint presentation, etc.
- Use an “On-Target” style and format—i.e., make your documents look like organizational documents, like the handouts your professor produces, etc. Remember, just because you love 10-point Times New Roman does not mean that everyone else does!
- Properly format and proof carefully! No mistakes!

Formatting Suggestions:

- Lots of white space. However, don’t “double space,” you’re not writing a class paper.
- Readable type sizes—never less than 10–11 point.
- Easy-to-read fonts on overheads and documents, preferably serif fonts—Bookman, New Century Schoolbook, Palatino, Times New Roman, etc.—rather than san-serif—Ariel, Helvetica, Monaco, etc.
- Use headings and subheadings and Indent key paragraphs.
- Create **simple** charts and figures. Do not use complex tables/charts.
- Lots of bulleted items.
- Place borders around important text and key items.

4. Choose an Appropriate Media Mix.

- PowerPoint, slides, transparencies, flipcharts, posters, and chalk/white boards all have unique characteristics. Do not assume that PowerPoint is the “best” method because it’s the latest—few people are impressed with PP anymore.
- All media/delivery styles have pros and cons. Use what you are most comfortable with and what is most appropriate for the target audience.

5. Know What Makes Your Audience Laugh.

- Use humor only if you can!
- If you can tell a joke, don't be afraid to tell one. However, never mock a group—racial, cultural, social, corporate, community—even if your client does. Never engage in stereotyping.
- Learn the heroes/villains and the corporate icons.
- Learn who the members of the dominant coalition are—and never forget that you are really giving your presentation to them.

6. Prepare a Worksheet to verify that you have completed all tasks when preparing a professional presentation.

7. Be Prepared For Questions

- Anticipate difficult questions and prepare for them.
- Generate a list of relevant questions and answers ahead of time.
- Use heuristics: e.g., “there are three relevant issues here . . . first . . .”; or “to answer your question requires that we consider two issues . . . number one...”
- “Speak up then shut up.” Keep your answers brief. Let the audience persuade themselves. Only intercede if the discussion seems not to be helping you.

8. When you Respond to Questions

- Paraphrase the question before you begin:
 - Rephrase questions for audience members who may not have heard the question.
 - Rephrase questions so it is clear exactly what you are responding to.
 - Rephrase questions to limit your response to the issue you want to address.
- Use nonverbals. Raise your hand to cue the audience how to ask questions, count out main points with your fingers, etc.
- If your topic is controversial:
 - Take questions one-at-a-time and then move on to avoid getting into a debate or argument.
 - After you take a question, respond to the whole audience, not the individual.
 - Paraphrase answers to avoid confrontational responses.
- Phrase answers as full sentences. Do not give “yes”/“no” answers.
- Monitor your nonverbal cues so that you convey genuine interest and concern.
- Put the “burden of ignorance” on your own shoulders. Never answer: “I don't know.” Instead say, “I'll locate the answer and get back to you on that . . .”
- Answers should be short and focused—about 15–30 seconds.

9. As an Audience Member

- Be prepared: generate a list of relevant questions ahead of time.
- As the speaker gives his/her presentation, take notes regarding new questions and expand on what you currently have.
- Ask follow-up questions to expand understanding and probing questions to understand more fully the speaker's message.
- Avoid leading questions, “you do agree . . . ?”
- Consider the role you might be playing (student, group member, etc.) and make it your responsibility to gather appropriate information.