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Designing Effective Oral Presentations (PAGE 1)

[Understanding the Speaking/Writing Relationship](#) * [Questions You Need to Ask](#)

The ability to speak effectively is as crucial as the ability to write effectively according to studies about kinds of communications most often required of employees.

During a routine week, employees will actually spend more time speaking than writing; using the phone; conversing informally with colleagues, subordinates, and superiors on routine office topics; conducting meetings; working in problem solving groups; conducting employee evaluation sessions; participating in teleconferences and sales presentations; and frequently becoming involved in formal speaking situations before groups inside and outside the organization. Communication research also reveals that the higher an employee moves in an organization, the more important speaking skills become.

The purpose of this section of the OWL is to provide you the basic strategies for presenting technical and business information in an oral presentation. You will use many of the same strategies in developing an oral presentation that you use in preparing an effective written document. Understanding similarities between writing and speaking can be helpful for several reasons. Many times, you will be asked to document an oral presentation you have given; that is, you must submit what you said in written form. Or, you may be asked to make an oral presentation of a written document.

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Understanding the Speaking/Writing Relationship

Being an effective speaker and an effective writer requires you to

- [Understand the context for your presentation,](#)
- [Analyze your audience,](#)
- [Understand and articulate your purpose clearly,](#)
- [Develop sufficient and appropriate supporting material,](#)
- [Organize the material so it is easy for the audience to follow,](#)
- [Choose a speaking style, level of language, approach to the subject, and tone](#)

-
- suitable to your role as well as your audience and purpose,
- Select graphics that will enhance your audience's understanding of your message.

Because listening is a different processing method than reading, you will need to know how to adapt guidelines for organization, style, and graphics to fit the speaking situation. However, you will see that writing and speaking are, nevertheless, similar communication activities.

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Analyzing the Situation

Analyzing the situation is often difficult to separate from analyzing an audience; in a sense, audience is one facet of the larger situation. In analyzing the situation, you need to know why your presentation is required.

- What is the broader concern underlying the need for the presentation?
- What primary issues underlie the presentation?
- How does your presentation relate to these issues?
- What will be happening in the organization when you make your presentation?
- How does your presentation fit into the organizational situation?
- If you are one of several speakers, what kinds of presentations will the other speakers be making?
- In what surroundings will you be making the presentation?
- What will happen in the situation before and after your talk?
- How does your talk relate to other participants' actions?

For example, delivering a presentation at a regular meeting of project directors is different from briefing other people in your team about what you've been doing. Making a presentation at a company picnic is different from delivering a presentation at the annual meeting of a professional society whose focus is on current issues in a discipline.

- ▶ Thus, knowing the **situation** is as important as knowing your audience and your purpose. In many cases, **situation** will be inextricably bound up with questions of audience attitude and the way you shape your purpose. Audience attitude frequently results from **situational** problems or current issues within the organization, and what you can or should say in your presentation, your purpose and the content you choose to present may be dictated by the **context** surrounding your presentation and the perspective that your audience brings.

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Analyzing the Audience

Just as readers determine the success of written communication, audiences determine the success of oral presentations. Writing or speaking is successful if the reader or listener

responds the way you desire: the reader or listener is informed, persuaded, or instructed as you intend and then responds the way you want with good will throughout.

Just as writing effectively depends on your understanding your reader as thoroughly as possible, effective speaking also depends on your understanding your listener.

- You cannot speak or write effectively to people without first understanding their perspective.
- You must know how your audience will likely respond based on their
 - educational and cultural background,
 - knowledge of the subject,
 - technical expertise,
 - position in the organization,
 - principal uncertainties or questions in this situation.

To achieve your purpose for communicating, you must present your message appropriately. Technique counts.

When you analyze your audience, focus on their professional as well as their personal profiles. Your audience will pay attention to some things because they're members of a department or class; they'll react to other things because of their likes, dislikes, and uncertainties. You have to keep both profiles in mind. Your analysis will suggest what you should say or write, what you should not say, and the tone you should use.

Audience Analysis Questions:

- How much does my audience know about the subject?
- How much do they know about me?
- What do they expect from me?
- How interested will they be in what I say?
- What is their attitude toward me?
- What is their attitude toward my subject?
- What is their age group?
- What positions do they occupy in the organization?
- What is their educational background?
- What is their cultural/ethnic background?
- What is their economic background?
- What are their political and religious views?
- What kinds of cultural biases will they likely have toward me and my topic?

In viewing this list, you will note the prevalence of questions on **attitude**--the audience's attitude toward you as well as the subject. Some attitudes will matter more than others, according to the situation.

- ▶ These questions are particularly crucial ones, as you need to know, **before** you begin planning your presentation, whether your audience will consider you trustworthy and credible. To be an effective speaker, you must know your audience, establish a relationship by being sincere and knowledgeable about the subject, then conform to their expectations about dress, demeanor, choice of language, and attitude toward them and the topic.

When you speak to people from other countries, you should plan to do



research on the culture of that country. Be aware that hand gestures you use routinely with US audiences may have different meanings in other cultures. Also, the clothing you choose to wear should also be selected with the culture of the audience in mind. If the audience and situation call for more formal clothing than you usually wear, practice your talk wearing the clothes you'll be wearing at the presentation.



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Determining the Goal of Your Presentation

Oral presentations, like written presentations, must be designed around a specific purpose.

▶ **As a writer and a speaker, you must know your purpose.**

You must conceive your purposes in terms of your audience's perspective. Like the report or letter, the oral presentation must make purpose clearly evident **at the beginning**. By knowing what they will be hearing from the beginning of the presentation, the audience can more easily focus their attention on the content presented and see connections between parts of the talk.

▶ **As you plan, state your goal in one sentence.**

Then, as you begin your presentation, state your goal in terms of your audience's background and attitude; announce your purpose early in the presentation to prepare your audience for the main ideas to come. You may want to restate the purpose in words familiar to the audience.

Both written and oral communication often have multiple purposes. The main purpose of your presentation may be to report the status of a project, to summarize a problem, to describe a plan, or to propose an action, but your long-range objective may be to highlight or document important specific issues within the topic about which you are speaking and to further establish your credibility within the organization. You may want the audience to dislike another proposed solution, to desire a more comprehensive solution, or decide there isn't a problem after all.

Oral presentations, like written presentations, can enhance an employee's reputation within an organization. Therefore, consider every speaking opportunity an opportunity to sell not only your ideas but also your competence, your value to the organization.

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Choosing and Shaping Content

Preparing the oral presentation often requires the same kind of research needed for the written report. To achieve your goal, you will need to determine what information you will need. You will also want to choose information that will appeal to your audience--particularly their attitudes, interests, biases, and prejudices about the topic.

In selecting content, consider a variety of information types: statistics, testimony, cases, illustrations, history, and particularly narratives that help convey the goal you have for your presentation.

Because listening is more difficult than reading, **narratives** can be particularly effective in retaining the attention of your listeners. While statistics and data are often necessary in building your argument, **narratives** interspersed with data provide an important change of pace needed to keep your listeners attentive.

- ▶ In short, vary your content, but be sure that every item you include pertains to the goal of your presentation.

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Organizing Your Presentation

- ▶ Oral presentations must be organized with your audience's needs and perspective in mind.
 - Is your audience interested in what you will say?
 - What are the main questions they will want you to answer?
 - Which of these questions is most important? least important?
 - Based on your purpose and the audience's expectations, in what order should you present these ideas?

Generally, oral presentations have an introduction that ends with your main point and a preview of the rest of the talk, a main body, and a conclusion.

The introduction should clearly tell the audience what the presentation will cover so that the audience is prepared for what is to come.

The body should develop each point stated in the introduction.

The conclusion should reiterate the ideas presented and reinforce the purpose of the presentation. It usually answers the questions, "So what?"

* * * * *

Getting Your Ideas in Order

In planning your **introduction**, be sure that you state your goal near the beginning. Even if you use some type of anecdote or question to interest your audience, state the goal of your presentation next. Then, state how you will proceed in your presentation: what main issues you will discuss. The main ideas you have developed during the research and content planning stage should be announced here.

The **conclusion** to the presentation should help the audience understand the significance of your talk and remember main points. Write out the final statement. At a minimum, you should

restate the main issues you want your audience to remember, but do so in a concise way. Try to find a concluding narrative or statement that will have an impact on your audience. The conclusion should not be long, but it should leave the audience with a positive feeling about you and your ideas.

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Choosing an Appropriate Style

How you sound when you speak is crucial to the success of your presentation. You may have effective content, excellent ideas, accurate supporting statistics. However, if the style you use in speaking is inappropriate to the occasion, to the audience (as individuals and as members of an organization), and to the purpose you are trying to achieve, your content will more than likely be ineffective.

You want to sound respectful, confident, courteous, and sincere.

- ▶ The most effective style is usually a **conversational style**: short sentences, concrete language, speech that suggests to your audience that you are really talking to them.

When a speaker writes the entire speech and memorizes it, the presentation does not sound as if the speaker is talking naturally to the audience.

The tone and degree of formality will be dictated by your organizational role and your relationship to your audience.

- Do they know you?
- Is your rank in the organization above or below them?
- Are you speaking to an audience of individuals from all levels within the organization?
- What demeanor, approach, and level of formality does the organization usually expect from those giving oral presentations?
- Is the audience composed of people who understand English? How well do they understand English?

Answers to these questions as well as your purpose will determine how you speak to your audience.



If you are speaking before a group that is composed largely of people from another country, you need to determine beforehand how fluent they are in English. If they are not comfortable with English, be sure that you speak slowly; avoid idiomatic expressions; choose concrete words; and speak in relatively short sentences. Limit each sentence to one idea.



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Choosing Visual Aids to Reinforce Your Meaning

Because we live in a time when communication is visual *and* verbal, visual aids are as important to oral communication as they are to written communication.

Visual aids

- help your audience understand your ideas;
- show relationships among ideas;
- help the audience follow your arguments [your "train" of thought]; and
- help your audience remember what you said.

In addition, the presentation that uses visual aids effectively is more persuasive, more professional, and more interesting. Many of the guidelines for using visual aids in oral presentations mirror those for written documents: they need to fit the needs of the audience; they must be simple; they must be clear and easy to understand.

How many visual aids?

Some kinds of oral presentations will require one kind of visual aid; presentations conveying complex information may require several kinds of visual aids. The point, quite simply, is that listeners are as resistant to an unbroken barrage of words as readers are to unbroken pages of prose.

You can use

 drawings,
  graphs,
   props and objects,
  a blackboard with an outline,
  charts,
  demonstrations,
  pictures,
  statistics,
  cartoons,
 

 photographs, and even "interesting" items  or maybe a map  .

Use anything that will help people SEE what you MEAN! (Weren't you attracted to the icons above???)

- ▶ But because these will be seen while the audience is listening to you, you will need to be sure that all visuals are as simple as possible and as easy to read: In short,
 - Avoid too much information on any single visual.
 - Use boldface type in a font size that can be easily read.
 - Use sans serif type because it produces a sharper image for slides and transparencies.
 - Limit the fonts you use to two per visual.
 - Avoid all caps.
 - Use a type--size and font--that contrasts distinctly with the background.
 - Avoid visuals that use too many colors--more than four on any one aid.
 - Avoid making your audience study your aids. If they are busy trying to decipher your visual aid, they will not be listening to you.
 -

- Bar graphs, circle graphs, simple diagrams, pictures, and lists are standard types of visual aids. Whatever aid you decide to use, limit the aid to only the concept, data, or point you are trying to make.
-
- Be sure that what the visual says is immediately evident.
-
- Computer graphics and programs such as Harvard Graphics, Powerpoint, and Excel in combination with color printers and slide projection equipment give you the opportunity to experiment with graphic design. Try developing visual aids that are visually pleasing as well as clear.
-
- Use technology whenever possible. Some web sites have visuals that you can use for presentations about that topic.
-
- Technology allows speakers to download graphs, drawings, and figures from the World Wide Web. The Web is perhaps one of the richest, newest, most colorful sources of visual aids.

Figure 3 shows a graphic of nitrogen oxide emission trends from the EPA web site, downloaded via Netscape through Yahoo. You might want cruise through this highly effective web site, as it has superb graphics and material for all ages of users:

<http://www.epa.gov/acidrain/ardhome.html>

Figure 4 shows data on Angolan Oil research downloaded from Texas A&M University's Geochemical & Environmental Research Group: <http://www-gerg.tamu.edu>

Most of these graphics have tables that accompany them. So, if you need hard data, it's there!

Many presentation rooms now have ethernet connections and even computers that have the appropriate software to run a browser such as Netscape. When the computer is connected to an overhead projector, Web images can be shown on a screen. Because of the increasingly rich range of materials available on the World Wide Web, resources available to enhance any oral presentations are almost limitless. Even if the room in which you will give a presentation does not have ethernet connections, you can still print Web materials via a color copier onto paper or transparency masters.

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Planning Your Presentation--Questions You Need to Answer

Thus, when you learn that you are to give an oral presentation, the first step in preparing for the presentation is to analyze each point listed above by answering the following questions, just as you did in planning your written communication. Once you have done so, you are ready to design, structure, and organize your presentation so that it will effectively satisfy the constraints that arise from your consideration of each point.

► Situation

- What situation creates the need for this presentation? Who is involved? What is the

- scenario for this situation?
- Where will I be speaking?

▶ Audience

- Who is my audience?
- What do I know about my audience's background, knowledge, position in the organization, attitudes toward me and my subject?

▶ Purpose

- What is my purpose in giving this oral presentation?
- Is there (should there be) a long-range purpose?
- What is the situation that led to this presentation?
- Given my audience's background and attitudes, do I need to reshape my purpose to make my presentation more acceptable to my audience?

▶ Content

- What issues, problems, questions or tasks are involved in the situation?
- What ideas do I want to include or omit?
- Based on the audience and the context, what difficulties do I need to anticipate in choosing content?
- Can any ideas be misconstrued and prove harmful to me or my organization?
- What questions does the audience want answered?

▶ Graphics

- What kinds of visual aids will I need to enhance the ideas I will present?
- Which points could be understood better with a visual?
- Where should I use these in my presentation?

▶ Style

- What kind of tone do I want to use in addressing my audience?
- What kind of image of myself and my organization do I want to project?
- What level of language do I need to use, based on my audience's background and knowledge of my subject?
- What approach will my audience expect from me?
- How formal should I be?

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Designing Effective Oral Presentations (Page 2)

Designing Each Segment

The structure of the oral presentation is crucial for one main reason: once you have articulated a statement, the audience cannot "rehear" what you have said. In reading, when you do not understand a sentence or paragraph, you can stop and reread the passage as many times as necessary. When you are speaking, however, the audience must be able to follow your meaning and understand it without having to stop and consider a particular point you have made, thereby missing later statements that you make as you move through your presentation. To help your audience follow what you say easily, you must design your presentation with your audience, particularly their listening limitations, in mind.

Audiences generally do not enjoy long presentations. Listening is difficult, and audiences will tire even when a presentation is utterly smashing. For that reason, as you design your presentation and select content, look for ways to keep your message as concise as possible. Don't omit information your audience needs, but look for ways to eliminate non essential material. Again, without carefully analyzing your audience's attitude toward the subject, its background, knowledge of the topic, and perspective toward you, you cannot begin to make accurate decisions regarding either content or design and structure of your presentation.

► Choose an Interesting Title

The effective presentation requires you to focus your audience's attention on what you are saying. A good way to grab your audience's attention is to develop a title that, at the very least, reflects the content of your presentation but does so in an interesting way. Like the title of a formal report or the subject line in a letter, memo, or informal report, the title of an oral presentation should prepare your audience for the content you will present. Therefore, from the beginning of the presentation, your audience is prepared for what you will say.

► Develop Your Presentation around Three Main Divisions

Helping your audience follow your message easily requires that you build into your structure a certain amount of redundancy. That means that you reiterate main points. When you divide your presentation into an introduction, the main body, and the conclusion, you are building in this necessary redundancy.

- In the introduction, you "tell them what you are going to tell them";
- In the main body, you "tell them"; and
- In the conclusion, you "tell them what you told them."

This kind of deliberate repetition helps your audience follow and remember the main points you are making. (Readers can "reread" text, but listeners cannot "rehear" oral remarks.) To design your presentation with planned repetition, you must clearly know your purpose and what you want your audience to know.

▶ Help Your Audience WANT to Listen

You may also wish to introduce your topic with an attention-getting device: a startling fact, a relevant anecdote, a rhetorical question, or a statement designed to arouse your audience's interest. Again, the device you choose will depend on the audience, the occasion, the purpose of the presentation.

Or, if your audience is not readily familiar with the subject, you may want to include background material to help them grasp and process your main points. Tell your audience what points or topics you plan to cover so that your audience can sense and then follow the direction of your statements.



An Important Note:

In introducing the topic and preparing the audience to understand the ideas you will present, you also have three concerns:

1. The way the introduction is designed, the presentation of the topic, the purpose, the background, and the plan must motivate the audience to listen receptively; and
- 2.
3. They must want to listen because you convince them that you have credibility. Because most people's attention span will be limited, you want to be sure that your introduction makes clear why they should listen. Thus, you must be sure that your frame **your** purpose with the audience's perception of you and the topic.
- 4.
5. Your audience will not listen--really listen to you--unless you have credibility. If your analysis of your audience and the situation in which you will be speaking indicates that you must establish credibility with your audience, then you may need to include in the design of your introduction a number of strategies:
6.
 - Acknowledge that you perceive the problem that your audience has with you or your topic.
 - Establish a common ground with the audience, points of agreement.
 - Attempt to refute (if you can do so efficiently) erroneous assumptions that you believe the audience will have toward you or the subject.
 - Ask the audience to allow you the opportunity to present your information as objectively as possible.
 - In designing your introduction, remember that much of the success of the presentation rests of your ability to make your audience want to listen

and to prepare them to follow and to understand what you say.

▶ Design the Body

In the introduction you state the main issues or topics you plan to present. Thus, in designing the body of the presentation, you develop what you want to say about each of these main points or ideas. You may want to present your ideas in a chronological sequence, a logical sequence, or a simple topical sequence. This method will help your audience follow your ideas if you are giving an informative speech, an analytical speech, or a persuasive speech. The important point, however, is that you need to demarcate and announce each point in the body as you come to it so that your audience knows when you have completed one point and begun another.

▶ Design the Conclusion

The conclusion reinforces the main ideas you wish your audience to retain. Remember: in the introduction, you "tell them what you will tell them"; in the body, you "tell them"; and in the conclusion, you "tell them what you told them." In a presentation which has covered numerous points, you should be sure to reemphasize the main points. But the conclusion also allows you to emphasize the importance of specific ideas, or you can reiterate the value to the ideas you have presented. In short, how you design the conclusion will depend on your initial purpose. A strong conclusion is nearly as important as a strong introduction, as both the beginning and the end will be the parts most likely remembered.

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Choose an Effective Delivery Style

Style in writing refers basically to your choice of words, the length and structure of your sentences, and the tone, or attitude you express toward your audience. Style in delivering oral presentations is also defined by these same characteristics plus many nonverbal cues that can either enhance or detract from your presentation. While the style you use will vary with the audience, topic, and context, always consider the following guidelines that can enhance your delivery style:

Avoid speaking in a "written" style. Use phrases, and use a variety of sentence lengths. Avoid excessively long, complex sentences, as listeners may have difficulty following your ideas. In general, keep your sentences short. Speak as if you were talking to your audience. If you concentrate on getting your point across by having a conversation with the audience, you will likely use a natural, conversational style. Many suggestions for clarity in writing also apply to clarity in speaking:

- Avoid long, cumbersome sentences. Long sentences can be as hard to hear as they are to read.
- Avoid overuse of abstract, polysyllabic words. Instead, use concrete language that your audience can visualize.
- Avoid overuse of jargon, unless you are sure that your audience will be readily familiar with all specialized terms.
- Use sentences that follow natural speech patterns.

- Use short, active voice sentences.

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Use Techniques to Enhance Audience Comprehension

Because your audience cannot "rehear" ideas, once you have stated them, look for ways to help your audience easily follow your ideas:

- Be sure you clearly demarcate the beginning and end of each point and segment of your presentation.
-
- Announce each main topic as you come to it. That way, your audience knows when you have completed one topic and are beginning the next one.
-
- Allow a slight pause to occur after you have completed your introduction, then announce your first topic.
-
- After completing your final topic in the main body of your presentation, allow a slight pause before you begin your conclusion.
-
- Speak slowly, vigorously, and enthusiastically. Be sure you enunciate your words carefully, particularly if you are addressing a large group.
- Use gestures to accentuate points. Move your body deliberately to aid you in announcing major transition points. In short, avoid standing transfixed before your audience.
-
- Maintain eye contact with your audience. Doing so helps you keep your listeners involved in what you are saying. If you look at the ceiling, the floor, the corners of the room, your audience may sense a lack of self-confidence. Lack of eye contact also tends to lessen your credibility. In contrast, consistent eye contact enhances the importance of the message. By looking at your audience, you can often sense their reaction to what you are saying and make adjustments in your presentation if necessary.
-
- Do not memorize your presentation, and do not write your presentation. Otherwise, your speech will sound as if you are reading it. Use brief notes, written on one page, if possible. Use colored pens to highlight points. Avoid note cards and several pages of notes. If you suddenly forget what you are trying to say, and if you have several pages of notes, you can easily lose track of where you are in your notes. If possible, type the outline of your presentation on one sheet of paper. If you do forget what you are going to say, a quick glance will usually refresh your memory.
-
- Rehearse your presentation until you are comfortable. Try walking around, speaking each segment and then speaking aloud the entire presentation. Rephrase ideas that are difficult for you to say--these will likely be hard for your audience to follow. Be sure to time your presentation so that it does not exceed the time limit. Keep your presentation as short as possible. Therefore, avoid adding information to your presentation (and your outline) as you rehearse.
-
- If possible, record your speech. Listen to what you have said as objectively as possible.

As you listen, consider the main issues of audience, purpose, organization, context, content, and style.

- - Listen for tone, attitude, and clarity. Is the tone you project appropriate for your audience and your purpose? Is each sentence easy to understand? Are you speaking too rapidly? Are the major divisions in your presentation easy to hear? Are any sentences difficult to understand?
 -
 - If possible, become familiar with the room where you will give the presentation so that you will have some sense about how loudly you should talk and how people will be seated.
 -
 - Try not to provide the audience handout material before you begin. To do so encourages your audience to read rather than listen. If you must provide written material, be sure the material is coordinated with your presentation. That way, you have a better chance of keeping your audience's attention on what you are saying.
- ▶ In routine business presentations, you may wish to provide your audience with a short outline of your presentation. Be sure to include in the outline the main points you want to stress. This kind of outline helps your audience follow your train of thought.

Figure 6. This is an example of a speech outline.

Note that it begins with the title and the speaker name, title, and affiliation. Each point is highlighted, and the main subpoints briefly listed. The outline also indicates where graphics will be inserted, and the author leaves space where listeners can take notes. If you plan to give your audience extensive "notes" or documentation, do so after you have concluded your presentation. Otherwise, many people will be reading the package and not listening to you. When you are planning your presentation, determine how you will handle questions. In many types of public presentations, questions may not be an issue, but during oral reports, such as status reports, project reports, and proposals, you can expect your audience to have questions. Thus, as you plan your presentation think of questions they may ask and decide how you will handle these.

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Use Visual Aids Whenever Possible

Any oral presentation will be enhanced by visual aids. Research has shown that oral presentations that use visuals are more persuasive, more interesting, more credible, and more professional--i.e., more effective--that presentations without aids. Particularly if your presentation is long--20 minutes or more--visual aids can help your audience follow your ideas easily and with fewer lapses in attention. In addition to the points made in the last section, a few guidelines need consideration:

- You can use visual aids to announce each main point as you begin discussion of that point. You can also use visual aids to accentuate and illuminate important ideas. However, the message that the visual carries should be immediately apparent. If the

audience has to study the visual to interpret its meaning, they will not be listening to you.

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- If you don't really need formal visual aids, you may want to write the outline for the main body of your presentation on a board or use a transparency to let your audience see your plan and trace your movement from one section of your presentation to another. In both oral and written presentations, readers/listeners must perceive the pattern of organization to comprehend effectively. Powerpoint is an effective tool for developing and presenting outlines to aid listeners .
-
- In presentations where you do need visual aids, use bar graphs, line graphs, or circle graphs rather than tables, particularly if the tables are multicolumn. Tables are harder to interpret than a graphic presentation of the content. Also, tables can easily contain too much information.

Tables are more acceptable in written reports, where the reader has time to study them, but line and bar graphs depicting the trends established will provide the audience immediate visual access.



Use Visuals Effectively

The key to using graphics and visual aids effectively requires using them so that they make the maximum impact. Begin your presentation with no aids, as you want your audience to be listening to you, not looking at props, specimens, or other visual aids. Present the aid at the appropriate point in your presentation, then remove it immediately. Present the aid; give your audience a few seconds to comprehend it, and then comment on the aid. Use a pointer, such as a laser pointer, to focus your audience on the part of the graphic you are discussing.

- Be sure to speak slowly and deliberately as you explain or use a graphic to avoid confusing your audience. In addition, remember to talk to your audience, keeping eye contact, and not to the object or visual aid.
-
- Be sure that all writing on transparencies can be clearly seen. If possible, use color transparencies and color pens.

Slides, whether 35mm or Powerpoint, are excellent visual aids, but these, too, need to be used with care.

- Keep slides simple. Avoid excessive data on slides. Powerpoint helps you avoid this particular trap, but Powerpoint allows you almost unrestricted use of color. (It's easy to use too much color or a slide background that is entirely too ornate.)
-
- If you are preparing slides or transparencies for video conferencing, use the plain background and a color--such as yellow or light green--and black text. Color can enhance a visual, but it can also reduce the effectiveness of the message. The point is to use good judgment in visual design. Use visual aids, but don't overdo color or text.



Templates available in programs such as Powerpoint are tempting, but they may not be readable when text is placed on them!

- When you use slides, tell the audience what they will see, show them the slide; give them time to digest what they are seeing; then comment on the slide.
-

- Turn off the projector lamp between slides. Do not begin talking about another topic while a slide, depicting a past topic, is still showing. Remember: people cannot see and listen at the same time.
-
- Avoid using too many slides or transparencies.

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Speaking Effectively--Practice, Practice, Practice

No matter what type of presentation you are giving, your ultimate success as a speaker and the success of the presentation depends on your establishing credibility with your audience. Guidelines on planning, structuring, and delivering the presentation are important because they are designed to build your credibility with your audience. However, no amount of planning and organization will substitute for practice, which builds confidence. Practice also enhances and displays your planning and the value of your ideas.

Your audience expects you to be

- knowledgeable,
- prepared,
- organized, and
- trustworthy.

Achieving each of these goals depends on your using and then practicing the guidelines above.

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