



SIX EXECUTIVE TIPS FOR CREATING AND DELIVERING DYNAMIC PRESENTATIONS

White paper by Alexa S. Chilcutt, Ph.D. and Adam Sharples Brooks, Ph.D.
The University of Alabama, College of Communication and Information Sciences
Directors of The Public Speaking Program and The Speaking Studio



Executive and management professionals display their leadership skills and business acumen in many ways. There is one skill set, however, that is often overlooked, but when mastered has the potential to maximize one's perceived credibility, career advancement, and overall success. The ability to craft, organize and present a targeted message with confidence makes public speaking skills invaluable! Public speaking occasions provide opportunities to convey information, expertise, and make favorable impressions. This white paper will discuss three areas of improvement that will help you take your presentations to the next level. These tips are intended help clarify and craft effective messages, cultivate dynamic delivery, and calm anxiety.

Clarifying and crafting a specific message means strategic preparation. This means starting with paper instead of opening a blank PowerPoint. While you may know the material and have an idea of what you want your audience to take away, organization is crucial. Begin by asking the following six questions comprised of five Ws and one H.

What am I trying to accomplish? You wouldn't begin a business without a clear business plan, so why develop a presentation without understanding your purpose? Are you intending to inform? Informing would include extending common knowledge to include updated or relevant information. Or, are you persuading your audience toward an action or attitude toward a topic? Reveal your purpose for presenting up front so that the audience knows what you are attempting to accomplish!

Why is the information important? How many meetings have you attended that you felt were a waste of time? The same is true for presentations. Each audience member is asking, "What's in it for me? Why should I care?" at the onset of your presentation. Only give a presentation when there is new or valuable information to relay!

Nancy Duarte's 2012 article in Harvard Business Review advises to, "pretend your whole [time] slot got cut to 5 minutes. This will force you to lead with all the information your audience really cares about — high-level findings, conclusions, recommendations, a call to action. State those points clearly and succinctly right at the start, and then move on to supporting data, subtleties, and material that's peripherally relevant." Show the audience that you value their time by summarizing up front.

Who am I speaking to? In speaking, just as it is in business, understanding your customer is vital to success. Audience identification is critical in understanding how to approach the topic. What information should be or not be included must be based on their existing knowledge or opinions. Don't waste their time and your time by rehashing information that should be understood. Instead, take the time beforehand to determine what they care about and tailor your message to suit their needs as you know them.

Where am I speaking? While this question may not deal with the content itself, it will help determine the formality of the presentation. In most cases, authenticity overrides form. The size of the group and the set-up, or how the space is physically arranged, will help you determine what you choose to do. Your presentation might best be delivered in a conversational and interactive way, or it might be best to deliver it with more formality. The set-up will also help you determine whether you need larger visual aids.

When (time)? Time constraints will guide the amount of information given for presentation. Time of day also factors into how receptive the audience may be. Numerous studies have indicated that audiences typically listen at a rate of fifty percent

effectiveness. They literally only listen to, or absorb, half of what you are saying at any given point. To compound the issue, they leave remembering only about twenty-five percent. With this in mind, identifying the most important twenty-five percent of your message should direct how you organize and deliver the content.

How am I going to present it? Based on the information you have gathered up until this point in the preparation process, what presentation style makes the most sense? A PowerPoint or Prezi is not necessary in all circumstances and should, when used, be visual rather than textual. Handouts should include auxiliary information that complements the message. For example, you might give a summarized number or statistic verbally, but provide the full process, such as a graph or chart, on a handout. You might then reference the additional information for those who want to look at the details. How you present is tied to the presentation's purpose, audience, and time. And don't forget, energy is always appreciated!

Now that you have clarified the purpose, audience, and necessary content, your presentation organization comes from an old axiom:

Tell them what you are going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you told them.

People like to know where you are taking them and be able to follow along, whether the presentation is ten minutes or an hour. Below is an organizational outline that includes the steps involved when creating a powerful introduction that is a prelude to the presentation.

Outline:

Introduction

- Use an attention-getting device. Instead of starting with, "Hello, my name is...", make use of a shocking fact, statistic, quote, or narrative.
- Reveal your topic, purpose and intent early.
- Gain credibility; why should they listen to you?
- Preview your main points.
 - For the body of your preview, give them three clear, main points.
 - Support each point and bring the focus back to audience
 - If your presentation is persuasive, state the problem, create tension, and then resolve that tension with solution.

Your conclusion sums up the information presented by regaining attention, repeating main points, and suggesting implications or **a call to action** for the audience. Finally, tie back to your attention-getting device as a strong way to close!

Practice makes better, not perfect. Cultivating dynamic delivery takes lots of practice and includes being comfortable with the material itself, mastering gestures and facial expressions, and vocal variety. The more you practice, the more you will be able to convey your message in a conversational tone and find ways to connect with the audience.

Practice is also the key to overcoming anxiety. Mayo Clinic cites a fear of public speaking as the second-most common phobia. Knowing that it is a normal condition, you can learn to manage that fear and anxiety. It can be minimized with practice and by implementing some of these useful tips:

Before the Presentation

- Memorize your introduction and conclusion.
- PRACTICE! Put on an outfit and run through entire speech, standing up.
- Record your run through on audio or video. Watching the recording will give insight into your verbal and non-verbal delivery and will help you manage time.
- Be aware of how much you use verbal filler words, such as uh, um, like, yeah, and you know.
- Arrive early and get a feel for the space and set-up.

During the Presentation

- Don't hide behind the podium.
- SMILE AND MAKE EYE CONTACT.
- Use extemporaneous style.
- Use pauses or silence strategically.
- Be distraction-free.
- Read the audience's body language; are they engaged?
- Enjoy it, and they will, too.
- Finish strong with a *call to action!*
- Don't go over allotted time. Stop short and encourage questions or discussion.

Fielding Questions

- Encourage them to ask questions. Don't be afraid of silence!
- Repeat audience questions so that the entire audience can appreciate your answer.
- Keep eye contact with the person who posed the question.
- Don't know? Say, "I don't know the answer to that off-hand, but I can find out and get back to you. Make sure to give me your e-mail address after the presentation."
- *Don't make promises you don't intend to keep!*

Professionals in the Tuscaloosa and surrounding area can take advantage of *The Speaking Studio* located on The University of Alabama campus. The Speaking Studio is staffed with public speaking consultants who facilitate the recording and immediate feedback of individual or group presentations. To make an appointment, go to speakingstudio.ua.edu.