

Communications In Action

Presentation Skills

First of all, let's define what a presentation is. For the purposes of this workshop, a presentation is a form of communication that you would use when you want to impart information to a number of people at the same time so that they consistently do something for you as a result.

So, the focus of today is going to be on planning, designing and delivering presentations in a way that communicates effectively, motivates consistently and gets the people in your audience to do something as a result of the presentation.

What might the audience do for you? Whilst the most common outcome is that they will buy something, you can also consider possible outcomes that include making a decision, agreeing to a proposal or even giving you a job!

Your own situation may require you to adopt a slightly different meaning than the one we're working to here, so bear in mind that the approach taken in this workshop is designed to generate maximum choice, maximum flexibility and maximum effectiveness. You can always limit your skills to fit into your own environment, but you would find it harder to expand your skills out of any limitations imposed on you through the course. By bearing this in mind throughout the day you will get the most from it and be most effective as a result of it.

Above all else, use the day to really stretch your abilities and try all the things you always wished you could!

These notes are available to download at www.ciauk.com/warwickshire

Preparing for your presentation

What will be the starting state of the audience? Open minded? Curious? Impatient?

Many presenters just launch in and start talking at the audience instead of first tuning themselves into the audience's state. This is one of the most important things you can do as a professional communicator and it's called pacing.

Begin by thinking about the audience's starting state. Then, thinking about the desired outcome for the presentation, choose a useful end state for the audience. Finally, plan a route!

Start state
State 1
State 2
State 3
End state

These other presenters I mentioned often start by planning what they want to say rather than how they want the audience to respond. This is why their presentations seem more like transmissions than interactions.

What about technical presentations? Surely they serve to inform or instruct the audience? Again, what do you want them to do with that information? Agree with it? Make a decision? Understand it? Use it?

The outcome for the audience is always your starting point for designing a presentation. Once you know this, the rest is easy.



Planning outcomes for the audience

If you don't want your audience to do anything as a result of your presentation then you are wasting your time and theirs. An email could replace your presentation if all you want to do is transmit information. A presentation is a specialised communication tool, so use it to achieve the right outcome for you. Think carefully about what the presentation adds, over and above any other form of communication.

Even a decision or an opinion is an action because it requires the audience to process information and then do something. Forming an opinion is an active process, just as much as buying a product.

What do I want?

How will the people in this room help me to get it?

What do I need them to do for me?

What do I need to tell them in order to achieve that?

What happens if you don't know what they want? Ask them what they want! What happens if they don't know what they want? Tell them what they want!

Use words like might, may, probably etc. to introduce outcomes to the audience:

You're probably wondering what you're going to get out of this presentation, and by the end of it you may already be thinking about what next step to take. I could tell you about all the benefits to you of what I'm going to propose, but instead I'm just going to give you the information you need to make up your own minds.

Designing your communication

There's an old saying used by old presentation skills trainers: tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you've told them. In other words, the audience have a limited attention span so you have to drum your message into them. Here's an updated version, for a more modern audience:

Tell them what you want them to do
Present the information they need in order to do it
Tell them what you want them to do

I'm going to present some information after which I'd like you to give me your opinion.

I'm going to present a project update after which I'd like you to give me feedback.

I'm going to present a proposal to you after which I'd like you to make a decision.

By telling people what you want them to do, you are helping them to filter the information so that they pay attention to what is important for them. If you don't tell people what to do until the end, they will be completely unprepared for it and will not do what you ask. This process is called labelling or framing, and it's often used naturally by anyone who is a skilled communicator.

You can influence your audience's state and participation in a very simple and effective way. The more they participate, the more energetic and alert they will be. The more alert they are, the better they will respond to you and the more they will remember. The more they remember, the more effective you will be.

So what's the simple way to achieve this?

The other way that you can communicate large amounts of complex information easily is through stories. You might call them anecdotes or case studies, and the structure is the same. They add an extra dimension to your presentation and will bring it to life, giving the audience something personal and emotive to respond to and interact with.

Think back to someone who you think of as being an exceptional presenter, trainer, teacher or performer. What do they do? Do they tell stories?

So, engage your audience by:

- Framing your communication
- Asking questions
- Telling stories

Structuring the presentation

The first thing you need to achieve in your presentation is to get the audience's attention. You can ask questions, tell them about yourself, use an ice breaker, tell a joke, or do anything else that fits the context.

One very useful way to achieve this is to build your audience towards an 'agreement state' in which they are more likely to agree with you, consider your ideas favourably and make the decisions you want them to make.

So, right now, you're reading these words as you think about your next presentation. Perhaps you've presented in the past, or experienced other people presenting to you. In either case, you may be the kind of person who really wants to achieve the best you can and refine the skills you're already developing. It's good that you're taking such an active interest in yourself because you know the results that it will bring you.

Was there anything in that last paragraph that you could disagree with? Was there anything to agree with?

In the first section we talked about pacing the audience's state. This is the same process, and this time you're pacing their experience. As you begin with very general facts that are true for the audience, you will see them nodding in agreement. As your presentation becomes more specific, or less factual, they will be more likely to agree with you than to disagree. For example, to say that you're reading notes from a presentation skills course is true. To say that you're reading notes from the best presentation skills course is a belief. Your beliefs - product benefits, opinions or proposals - are more likely to be accepted if your audience is in an agreement state.

Tell your partner three things that you know they can see/hear/feel

Tell your partner one thing that may be true - a suggestion

Ask your partner what they are aware of

Repeat 4 or 5 times

The way you structure the content of your presentation depends on the context and purpose of it, so as a general rule:

Tell the audience the purpose of your presentation, what you want to achieve and what they need to do to help you.

Start with background, big picture, landscape, 'true' information. Talk about the wider context to your presentation, both what's good and what's missing from it.

Move onto the detail of your presentation, what you are presenting, what problems it solves, what it achieves, how that helps the audience, what it does for them.

Summarise the key points, information, benefits, outcomes. Tell the audience what you want to achieve and what they need to do to help you. Say thankyou!

Timing

It's more important to stick to time than to say everything you want to say. The audience will be left with a far better impression if they feel the presentation is complete than if there is any sense of something being left out.

As a rule of thumb, when you plan your presentation content, create enough content to fill about three quarters of your allocated time. The rest of that time will most certainly be taken up by late starts, questions, conversations and all the other unexpected things that happen whenever you work with children, animals or audiences.

It is very easy to fill in time during a presentation, and by finishing early you give the impression of being very much in control - something that the audience will notice and appreciate.

If you have any activities or interactive sessions planned for your presentation, build in even more contingency, so that you create content for only half of the allocated time.

Many people take the approach that they have a lot to say about themselves and their companies, and it's very hard to pack all that into a short time. Certainly, if you believe that the function of a presentation is for you to tell the audience something, or give them information, then you will certainly find it difficult to pack in everything you have to say.

Let's take a different approach - one that takes a lot of pressure off you and makes the whole experience far more enjoyable. Simply ask yourself this question:

What one question can I ask that will get the audience to do what I want them to do?

After that, the only remaining question is what to do to pad out the remaining time!

Here are some examples:

What one thing can I tell you about my company that will most help you make the right decision?

What information will be most useful to you right now?

What can we do in this next hour that will make this whole presentation worthwhile?

Starting from the point of cramming in everything there is to say is difficult. Starting from the point of what your audience needs to hear in order to take the next step is easy.

So, here is a useful idea for you. Always start your presentations with a question:

What would you most like to hear about that will be most helpful or useful for you right now?

By concentrating on the answer to that question, timing will never be a problem for you.

Getting ready

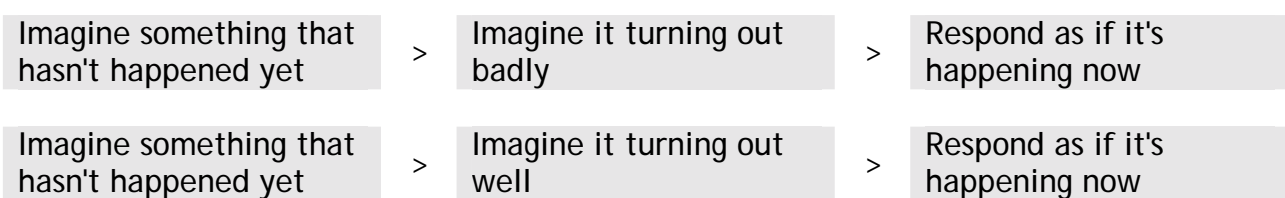
If you ever worry or are nervous about a presentation, here are some very simple tools you can use to change that.

The first, and most important thing to remember is that the majority of people inadvertently make all kinds of everyday activities difficult, and these same people could make those same activities incredibly easy with just one simple, small adjustment.

Most people plan for the start of things, not the end

Public speaking, cold calling, going to the dentist and flying can be difficult, to say the least. How many times have you felt nervous about doing any of these? How many times have you felt nervous at the end? What many people experience is worry leading up to the event, nervousness at the start and relief at the end. Which of those three states would you like to feel, all the way through?

The processes of worry and excitement are the same, with just a tiny change in content:



So, here's the simple way that you can overcome doubt, worry, anxiety, nerves or fear:

Plan for the end!

So, when you imagine the presentation, imagine it from the point where you're saying thank you, the audience is nodding approvingly and you feel good about having done a good job.

If you're having trouble accessing a resourceful or confident state, here's a simple method you can use.

Firstly, think of the specific state you want to access. "Confident" is quite vague, and overconfidence can be as harmful as nervousness.

Remember a specific time when you were in this state. Remember what you saw, how bright the memory is, how sharp, how near, how big and how colourful. Next, remember what you heard, how loud, from where, what pitch, how clear. Finally, remember what you felt, where, how warm or cold, what movement, what sensation.

Now, make the picture bigger and brighter, the sounds louder and the feelings more intense as you double the feeling, and double it again. Say a word to yourself that represents this feeling and keep on repeating it as you concentrate on the feeling.

Finally, test the "anchor" by saying the word and noticing how the feeling comes back. The more you practice this, the better it will work for you.

Using presentation aids

You've probably seen a presentation where the presenter read out the words on the screen verbatim, and you probably thought "I could read that myself..."

The more words you put on the screen, the less the audience will pay attention to you. When you put words on a slide, the first thing the audience will do is read the words. While they're doing that, they're not listening to you.

To get you thinking about visual aids, we'll play a quick game of Pictionary, where you have to draw the word or phrase on the card for the audience to guess.

If you want to include a presentation script or detailed notes, put them into notes pages, not the main slides. Think of slides as signposts rather than guidebooks and you'll be on the right track.

What other presentation aids can you use to enhance the overall experience?

Computer projected slides

Easy and quick to create, easy to share a common layout or style, easy to change when you find out new information five minutes before your presentation!

Whiteboards

Good for keeping track of meetings or informal "chalk and talk" sessions, not so good for presentations as you have to turn your back to the audience to use them, and you can't prepare your presentation beforehand.

Flipcharts

Good for presentations as you can write them beforehand, use different colours, draw pictures etc, and you can face the audience while using it. Not as easy to change or update as whiteboards.

Portfolios/desktop flipcharts

Good for product information but be wary of forcing your audience through your standard presentation pitch.

Music

Very effective for managing your audience's state. Although more appropriate for large conferences, don't underestimate its power.

Anything that's to hand!

You can use anything to highlight or add some extra dimension to your presentation. The obvious example is product samples or models, but you can use anything you want to give your presentation some extra impact.

Tuning in to the audience

It's important to engage all of your audience's senses - not just the one you prefer.

Watch this 30 second presentation and write down the first 5 things that you notice.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now design your presentation content to engage all sensory preferences.

Your audience have a number of other preferences that it's important for you to know about:

Motivation

Some people are motivated towards outcomes, others away from drawbacks. Towards people will be motivated by benefits and will tend to rush into decisions without weighing up the consequences. Away from people will be motivated by savings or avoidance and will tend hold back because of potential problems.

Reference

Some people make decisions based on internal information, others on external information. Internal people use their own experience and tend to think this applies to everyone. External people rely on other people or sources of information.

Choice

Some people need options, others need processes. Options people need alternatives and will create their own if they feel restricted. They often do things in a seemingly random order. Process people need step by step procedures and need to do things in the right order.

Everyone has a preference, and this can be influenced by context and state. Whilst you can quickly profile the people in your audience, the safest approach is to make sure you cover all preferences.

Make a decision because it achieves x and avoids y. You already know that you need to do this because everyone is doing it. By doing this the right way, you're giving yourself more choice in the future.

Questions and objections

Questions and objections are a wonderful source of feedback for you - they tell you that people are paying attention!

Questions demand a direct answer. Objections often provoke argument. Unfortunately, people ask questions for lots of different reasons, only one of which is "to find out an answer", so it's not always useful for you to answer questions. Here are some possible reasons for asking a question:

- To demonstrate knowledge
- To demonstrate superiority over the presenter
- To disguise an objection
- To provoke a response from the presenter
- To provoke a response from another audience member (e.g. their boss)
- To demonstrate attentiveness
- To waste time
- To set up for an attack
- To gain control of the presentation
- To learn something

If you want to learn more about the motivation behind questions, listen to the political interviews conducted on Radio 4's Today program, every weekday morning. For example, in this recent (paraphrased) exchange, the journalist wanted to know if the Conservative politician had been part of the plot against Iain Duncan Smith.

Journalist: Is it important for a government to be accountable?

Politician: Absolutely, yes

Journalist: So will you be accountable for demanding his resignation?

Politician: That's a private matter

The journalist's question was a blatant set-up, and the politician's answer is essentially a "yes I did". This wasn't a particularly elegant set-up, but it still trapped an unwary interview subject. I've seen many presenters trapped in exactly the same way. The solution to this is very simple. In the case of a question, the sequence is:

Pause
Repeat the question
Check your understanding of the question
Pause
Answer the question

And in the case of an objection:

Pause
Repeat the objection
Check your understanding of the objection
Ask if there are any more objections, repeat and clarify each one
Restate the objections
Pause
Address them all as a single objection

Closing

It's very important that you give yourself time to close the presentation properly. Here are some points to bear in mind:

Remind the audience of the purpose of your presentation

Remind the audience of the key points

Remind the audience of the questions that you answered

Ask the audience to do whatever it is you want them to do

Tell the audience what they need to do right now - the first step

Make sure the audience knows how to get in touch with you

And always remember to say thankyou!

Remember!

Plan what you want the audience to do as a result of your presentation

Plan the presentation as a series of states - uncertain, curious, certain, committed etc.

Then fill in your content to support the states

Choose the most useful state for you to present in

Keep planning

Pace the audience's state, then lead it

Use presentation aids that reinforce and complement, not reproduce

Make sure your content appeals to all senses

Uncover all objections and deal with them together

When faced with disagreement, agree with the questioner, disagree with the question

Always pause...

Tell stories

Welcome your emotions and let the audience connect with you personally

Close - tell the audience what you want them to do next

Say thankyou!

And finally... remember to enjoy yourself!

More information

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Other modules in this series of Business Skills courses include:

- Communication and Interpersonal Skills
- Presentation Skills
- Negotiation and Influence Skills
- Personal and Time Management Skills
- Team Building Skills
- Essential Sales Skills
- Creative Problem Solving Skills
- Networking Skills
- NLP Foundation

Recommended reading:

NLP - Skills for Learning (Peter Freeth)!
Words that change minds - Shelle Rose Charvet (for more advanced use of language)

All of these and more can be found on the recommended reading list at www.ciauk.com/books