

# Components of an Effective Presentation or Speech

## OVERVIEW

The following ideas are designed to help speak to either one person (e.g., a coach, a teacher, a prospective employer in an interview) or a large group in a formal setting. Speaking in front of people is considered, by most Americans, the most stressful experience imaginable; these strategies can help ease some of that stress by getting you prepared.

## PREPARATION

First, clarify your topic. Try the business card test: you have only the side of a business card to state your main idea. Aside from this, the following points are essential, even if they do seem obvious:

- **Preparation:** know your material “cold” so you can worry not about *what* to say but about *how* to say it.
- **Rehearsal:** this might mean walking around your bedroom all afternoon repeating your lines over and over; it might also mean practicing in front of friends, parents, mirrors, even video cameras or tape recorders.
- **Audience:** how you speak, what you include, how you act will be determined by the answers to a few simple questions: To whom am I speaking? Why am I speaking to them? What do they know---and what must I explain? How much time do I have?
- **Tools and Aids:** what, if any, visual or other aids (props, handouts, transparencies, poster board, computer presentation, video) should I use to convey this information to my audience most effectively?

## VISUAL AIDS

When your purpose is to convey complex or abundant information to your audience, use visual aids to help them keep track of your main ideas. These aids also let the audience know what to expect; for instance, in the example provided below the audience can relax, knowing the speaker will take questions when they finish their presentation.

Consider using one of the following:

- poster board
- overhead transparencies (with colored pens or xeroxed)
- presentation software such as PowerPoint, HyperStudio, or ClarisWorks
- handout with the same information as displayed on your visual aids so they don't have to take notes but can pay closer attention or supplement your notes with their own

## CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS/SPEECHES

- Visual aids:
  - are clearly visible and readable to all members of the audience.
  - use large, basic fonts such as Helvetica for clarity and neatness.
  - include minimal text for emphasis and readability.

- Overview of Presentation
  - Background
  - Current status
  - Proposed changes
  - Implications
  - Summary and questions

- use concrete, precise words that will not confuse the audience.

- do *not* include graphics or images that compete with the information.
- Effective, engaging speakers:
  - pace their speech so that each word gets the proper enunciation and emphasis.
  - look at their audience as much as possible
  - project and inflect their voice in order to engage the audience and emphasize those ideas they feel are important.
  - use humor or other such devices to engage and maintain their audience's attention.
- Effective presentations
  - provide an overview of the presentation at the beginning.
  - provide a summary of the presentation's main points at the end.
  - provide strong supporting examples to clarify the ideas.
  - follow a logical, coherent progression from idea to idea.
  - avoid any theatrics that will undermine the speaker's ability to effectively convey the information to their audience.
  - anticipate the audience's questions and are ready to answer them.
  - restate questions from the audience to clarify (and provide time to compose a thoughtful response to the question).
  - use transitions to clearly mark where one idea ends and the next begins; these transitions also make for a more fluid, coherent speech.
- Presentation Strategies:
  - **Note cards:** these can contain either cue words or main ideas across the top of the card, followed by ideas or scripts as needed.
  - **Outline:** helpful, abbreviated script that supports but allows you to speak instead of read. Also helpful as check-list of what you've discussed.
  - **Memorize:** if you have time, memorize what you will say, especially if you are presenting your information dramatically. Actors reading off of 3x5 cards just doesn't work too well.
  - **Write your outline or script in larger type and triple-space** it so you don't have to search through the document to find your place.
  - **Have style:** whether this is the handouts, your way of speaking, your humor, or the guiding metaphors and analogies you use to help them understand, make sure your speech engages their attention and their heart if at all possible. Give them something to remember.
  - **Avoid words you can easily trip over** during the course of your speech. This is particularly important for speeches that cause stress.
  - **Monitor your audience:** if you see that you are losing them, adjust your speech, improvise, project yourself more forcefully.
  - **Cue words:** on note cards or outlines, such words, if the speaker is well-prepared, allow the speaker to recall all they want to say about a topic once they see the word. Example: *Implications* signals the memory to recall the list of five different implications for the expanded use of technology in every aspect of our lives.