

Facilitation and Presentation Techniques

I. Oral Presentations¹

In many fields, the ability to communicate orally is just as important as the ability to write well. Studies show that people in management positions rely more on oral communication than on written communication.

A survey done among engineers showed that of 30 specific job-related tasks, 10 of the most important were oral tasks, such as: project proposal presentations, project progress report presentations, etc. The purpose of this section is to provide some guidelines on how to give formal and informal presentations.

Keys points for a successful presentation:

1. *Prepare properly.*
 2. *Practice sufficiently.*
 3. *Deliver your presentation with energy and enthusiasm.*
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1. Preparation of Presentations

Begin by checking all the details you need to plan your presentation, this includes:

- The duration of the talk.
- Whether time for questions is included.
- The size and location of the room.
- The projection/lighting facilities provided.

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- ❖ Projection and lighting facilities are particularly important to check. Does the room have the equipment you need? E.g., slide projector, overhead projector. Is it working? Is it in the right position?
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Have a look around the room and try out the equipment not later than the day before your presentation, so you are able to use it with confidence.

The most important thing to remember is that people have a limited attention span, and that you must therefore organize your talk very clearly so that the main points stand out.

This is how you do it:

- Analyse your audience and ***limit your topic accordingly***. What do your listeners already know? What do they need to know? How much information can they absorb?
- ***Determine your primary purpose***. What is the main point you wish to communicate? Build your presentation around that

¹ The section on presentation skills is taken from Sturrock (2001).

- **Select effective supporting information.** Remember, your listeners will only remember at most three or four supporting points and only two or three supporting details for these points. So choose the information that will sell your case to your particular audience.
- **Choose an appropriate pattern of organization.** Often your supporting information can be ordered according to one dominant pattern of organization: problem-solution, criteria, chain of reasoning, process of elimination, experimental research, chronological description, or comparison and contrast, to mention a few. Whatever pattern you choose, stick to it.
- **Prepare an outline.** Main points and main supporting points only. Only write out the whole text if you feel the information is too technical for you to be able to just explain it.
- **Select appropriate visual aids.** These are indispensable, firstly as prompts to help you and secondly as attention-getters. People remember visuals much more than they do words

The following options are available for technical oral presentations:

- Overhead transparencies
- Slides
- Flip charts
- Chalkboard
- Handouts
- Computer screen projection (PowerPoint)

2. Content of Presentations

The content of the presentation has three main elements: the introduction, the body of the presentation and the conclusion. Ideally the time spent is:

- Introduction: What you will do (content), how you will do it (structure) – 10% - 20%.
- Body – 65%-80%.
- Conclusion – 10%-15%.

Introduction

Capture the interest of your audience from the beginning – make your opening comments strong. Never begin with an apology.

Remember that it takes a few minutes for an audience to establish a relationship with a new speaker: do not begin with key information. You might say what your talk is about and show a transparency with the title on it. This allows the audience to settle in. After these preliminaries, you should introduce your topic.

Make sure your listeners are clear about whatever the basic problem or issue is. If necessary, provide background information and define essential terms. In the introduction you should:

1. Explain the structure of your talk.
2. Set out the aims and objectives of the presentation.
3. Explain your approach to the topic.

Body of the Presentation

This section should include the bulk of your experimental results or literature findings, depending on the type of presentation. Keep details of methods to a minimum (just enough to explain your data). Results should be presented in an easy format.

Present summary statistics rather than individual results. Graphs and diagrams are usually better than tables. The audience will be able to see the trends and relationships in your data. Each diagram should have a short title and the symbols and trend lines should be clearly labelled. Take the audience through your story step-by-step at a reasonable pace. Try not to rush your story because you may be nervous. Avoid complex story lines and have your visuals well organized.

Consider the structure of your 'main message'. Keep it as simple as possible and announce each sub-division, so your audience is aware of the structure.

❖ *Do not overwhelm your audience with large amounts of data.*

Conclusion

You must bring your talk to a conclusion. Listeners' attention typically decreases during a presentation, but perks up again towards the end, when they hope to catch a closing comment or recommendation.

Finish as strongly and as clearly as you started. Provide your audience with a clear 'take-home message' by returning to the key points in your presentation.

Signal the end of your talk by saying "Finally,..." or "In conclusion,..." and stop speaking after that sentence, as your audience will lose interest after that point.

Visual Material

Some things to remember about the visual material that you use during your presentation:

- Keep text to a minimum: present only the key points. Less than 10 lines per sheet is preferred.
- Do not use the lower 10 cm of the sheet. Some of the audience may not be able to read it because of people in front of them.
- Start each point at the beginning of a new line. Sentences should be avoided and should not exceed 2 lines.
- Font size: choose a large font and do not use capital letters for all letters. For example Arial Bold 24 points is suitable.
- Make sure the text is readable: try out your material beforehand.
- Graphs: limit the number of trend lines and use different colours for different lines.
- Avoid using too much colour.
- Use simpler figures rather than one complex graph.
- You should speak for about 2 minutes for each overhead sheet.
That means that for a presentation of 10 minutes, you should not use more than 5 overhead sheets.
- Make sure there are no spelling errors on the sheets.

Improving your delivery performance

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The greatest obstacle to effective delivery is nervousness. The key is to convert your nervousness into the kind of energy that will inject liveliness into your speech. A number of ways exist to do this:

1. Be well prepared. Have all your notes and visual aids in order. Practice in the room and with the equipment you will actually use if possible.
2. Release tension. Exercise, listen to music, do whatever will help you to relax.
3. Establish contact with your audience beforehand. This will help you concentrate on them rather than yourself.
4. Be aware of your posture and facial expressions. Concentrate your full attention on what you have to say.

❖ *Practice makes perfect*

Practicing your presentation in front of a friendly audience, or videoing or tape-recording it, will all help you spot and correct any flaws: awkward transitions, poor delivery, length of presentation, etc. In short it will help you give your presentation effectively. Here are some things to watch for:

1. Avoid monotony by devising interesting ways to reiterate your main points.
2. Avoid a breakdown in flow by creating smooth transitions to bridge the gap.
3. Rehearse your presentation. Ask a colleague or friend to listen and comment constructively on parts that were difficult to follow.
4. Use note cards with keywords and phrases. As you rehearse, your confidence will improve and you will find a set of cards much easier to handle than pages of notes.

Questions and answers

Sometimes you will be asked questions after an oral presentation. The best approach is to prepare beforehand:

1. Consider what questions you may be asked: prepare brief answers. Have colleagues or friends throw every kind of difficult question they can think of at you.
2. Do not be afraid to say if you do not know the answer to the question.
3. Always be polite to questioners.

II Facilitation skills¹.

1. Facilitation Skills

Facilitation means enabling members of a group to take part in a process in an effective way. To be a good facilitator of a multi-stakeholder or social learning process requires time and experience, and learning by doing is the best way.

Skills in group dynamics management, analysis and synthesis, conflict resolution and the like are important.

2. Facilitation Tips

Preparation & Introduction

- Be clear about the objective and intended outcomes
- Be well prepared but flexible
- Have very clear instructions and focusing questions for each session
- Keep it as simple as possible
- Be very time conscious; don't be over ambitious about what can be achieved

Group Interactivity

- Avoid over-facilitation
- Use activities to create an atmosphere that breaks down barriers between people and reduces the feeling of threat.
- Alternate between small groups and plenary sessions, but don't overdo it.
- Build a common language

Recording

- Record all material on flipchart paper and stick finished sheets to the walls
- Have helpers to write up discussions in detail
- Write up the workshop as soon as possible.

Involve others in facilitation

- When working with larger groups, have assistant facilitators who are trained in the techniques being used and well prepared for their role.
- Delegate roles and responsibilities

Frustrations and concerns

- Be responsive to people's concerns or frustrations
- Give people time to relax and unwind
- Frustration and conflict are healthy parts of a workshop, learn how to manage them and don't be frightened.
- Take risks with workshops and don't worry too much about getting it perfect. People like to talk together and share their ideas; if they have had this opportunity, the chances are they will have found the workshop worthwhile.

3. Running a Workshop

Tips for workshops

1. Explain the background and context for the workshop, and the intended outcomes.

¹ This material is taken from the Multi Stakeholder Processes website of the International Agricultural Centre, Wageningen. <http://www.iac.wur.nl/msp/index.php?ID=51>

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2. Get participants to introduce themselves and, if appropriate, conduct some sort of 'ice breaker' that establishes rapport between participants and generates a few laughs
3. Explain the agenda and process of the workshop and the role of the facilitator
4. Invite participants to make a statement about what they would like to see achieved from the workshop.
5. Run a series of activities that will enable the objectives of the workshop to be achieved.
6. Clarify the outcomes from the workshop and agree upon future actions
7. Ask participants to provide a written evaluation of the workshop (optional)
8. Close the workshop by inviting participants to say what the workshop has meant for them
9. Write up the workshop and provide a report to participants as soon as possible.

Facilitation toolkit

A good facilitator always makes sure the most important things are present:

- Clock
- Name tags
- Blu-tack, buddies, or glue spray
- Flipchart paper, butcher's paper
- Masking tape
- Whiteboard
- Colored cards, half A4
- Sticky notes
- Marking pens (lots)
- Overhead projector, transparencies
- Laptop, computer, beamer
- Refreshments

