Presentation Skills

Professional Development Center, 1994-95
Presentation Skills

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Dealing With Nervousness

Feeling Nervous?

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Relaxing
Feeling Nervous?

Ten Worst Human Fears in the U.S.

1. Speaking Before a Group
2. Heights
3. Insects
4. Financial Problems
5. Deep Water
6. Sickness
7. Death
8. Flying
9. Loneliness
10. Dogs

- David Wallechinsky, The Book of Lists

If speaking before a group makes you nervous, you’re not alone. The Book of Lists reports that public speaking is the number one fear in America — more frightening than insects, heights, loneliness, disease, and even death. In total, over 85% of the population experiences some anxiety when speaking in front of a group.

Nervous feelings are the result of adrenaline pumping through your body. Some normal manifestations of nervousness are:

- butterflies in the stomach
- sweaty palms
- shaking limbs
- dry mouth
- pounding heart
- cold hands
- quivering voice
- memory loss
- dizziness

Most of these symptoms are not visible to your audience; the audience can’t see your cold hands or your pounding heart. You rarely appear as nervous as you feel.

Don’t berate yourself for feeling nervous. Even the most professional speakers experience some nervousness and generally regard it as a positive sign — without an adrenaline boost, a “performance” can fall flat. If you channel your nervous energy properly, your presentation can be more dynamic than if you were totally relaxed.
1. Be prepared.
   The first step to managing nervousness before a presentation is to prepare well. Carefully define the message you want to convey, analyze your audience, collect all the necessary information, and study it thoroughly. Anticipate specific questions and plan how you'll handle them. If you're confident about your material, you're on your way to successfully managing nervousness and being a better presenter.

2. Rehearse.
   Once you know your material, rehearsing your presentation is the next step to managing nervousness. Practice your delivery, out loud, at least three times. Some people like to rehearse in front of a mirror, others prefer practicing in front of a friend. Rehearsing out loud will enable you to check your timing and discover what still needs work. Now is the time to anticipate any questions you may receive and to practice answering them.

3. Don't memorize.
   Although you might think that memorizing your presentation might make your task easier, don't do it. Memorizing the first minute of your presentation can help to get you through the jitters, but don't write out and memorize your entire presentation word for word; you run the risk of sounding artificial and even worse, losing track of your script. If you do decide to memorize your beginning, be sure to write the way you speak — using contractions, idioms, etc. If possible, begin with the information you find easiest, or with a familiar anecdote. Use visual aids or index cards with key words to guide you through your material, and talk to the members of your audience — don't read to them.

4. Check out the location.
   When you're presenting, last minute surprises are no fun. Limit surprises by finding out what the room is like and rehearsing there, if possible. Where will you be standing in relation to your audience? How well does your voice carry? What is the room temperature? Take responsibility for the room set-up and equipment arrangements.

5. Eat and drink right.
   Avoid caffeine. It can increase your heart rate and heighten anxiety. Drink warm, caffeine-free liquids like herbal teas or warm water with lemon. Also, avoid dairy products and bananas, which coat your throat and affect your voice. Stay away from alcohol, and try not to eat a heavy meal or anything unusual before you speak.
6. Use relaxation techniques.
Stretch, exercise, breathe deeply. Learn a few techniques to channel your adrenaline rush.

7. Visualize yourself doing a wonderful job.
"See" yourself doing all the right things. Recall your good points and convince yourself that you'll be great.

8. Begin when you are ready.
Take the "stage" with energy and purpose and set your stance. Give yourself a moment to get settled in. Organize your materials, look at your audience, and begin when you are ready to begin.

9. Establish eye contact with a friendly face.
The smiles and nods of a friendly face can calm you down, so seek out a friendly face. Looking at individuals in the audience will remind you that you are not speaking to a faceless mass.

10. Don't panic.
If you lose your place, simply go back to the last point you remember and pick it up from there. Those "blank" moments always seem longer to you than they do to the audience. If appropriate, you may ask your audience to recap for you. Don't take yourself too seriously and expect to deliver a perfect presentation. If you stumble a bit, just keep going.
Relaxing

You might want to try one or more of these relaxation techniques before your presentation. Some can be done in private; others can be done discreetly, moments before you present.

The Full Body Tenser
- Tense up your toes and hold.
- One following the other, tense up your feet, calves, knees, thighs, pelvis, hands, arms, shoulders, chest, neck, and face holding them all as you go.
- When you're completely tensed, hold for 3 seconds.
- Then, release all at once.

The Narcissist
- Stretch your arms straight out from your sides.
- Wrap them around yourself.
- Hug yourself tightly.
- "De-hug" and relax.

The Marionette
- Bend over, bending your knees slightly.
- Relax your head and hang loosely.
- Take a deep breath and slowly exhale.
- Slowly roll back up, vertebra by vertebra, raising your head last.

The Deep Breather
- Close your eyes, or focus your eyes on a single object.
- Take a deep breath through your nose, as you count to 3.
- Hold it for a moment.
- Slowly exhale through your mouth, as you count to 5.
- Repeat two or three times before you speak.

The Waiting Chair
- When seated on a chair, reach down on both sides and grab the bottom of the seat.
- Pull up hard for five seconds.
- Release.
- Repeat several times.

The Boardroom Table
- When seated at a table, extend both arms under the table, palms up.
- Press up for five seconds.
- Release.
- Repeat several times.
Perfecting Your Delivery

Dress

Stance
Stances to Avoid

Gestures

Eye contact

Voice
Vocal Warm-Up
Dress

First impressions count, and your audience's first impression of you will be based on your appearance. Enhance your credibility by looking neat and professional, comfortable and confident. Rehearsing your presentation in business attire often helps correct some stance problems and nervous habits because you feel more professional.

Dressing Tips

- Dress with your audience in mind and wear clothes that are appropriate for them and for your relationship to them.

- Keep room temperature in mind when you dress. You don't want to add to nervous perspiration by wearing heavy clothes that don't breathe, or have to fight chattering teeth because you didn't anticipate the air conditioning.

- Don't test out a new suit, dress, blouse or shoes on the day of your presentation – you may have unanticipated problems with fit or comfort. Wear something you've worn before that looks and feels good.

- Keep clothing and accessories simple. Don't let your jewelry compete with you. The audience should be looking at you, not your outfit.
Stance

The beginning is usually the hardest part of a presentation. How do you stand? Where do you put your hands? Where do you look? Find an appropriate stance that works for you, using the suggestions:

Stance

1. Walk with assurance to the front of the room.
2. Plant your feet shoulder-width apart.
3. Face your feet straight out. This position may feel awkward, but it looks better than it feels. Or, pull one foot back slightly, and place it on an angle.
4. If comfortable, let your hands hang at your sides. Or, better yet, place your hands waist high, loosely resting one inside the other, ready to gesture.
5. Pull your shoulders back, hold your head straight and your stomach in.
6. Look around at a few members of your audience and smile.

Don't leave your opening stance to chance. Rehearse your walk to the front of the room, the placement of your hands and feet, and your initial eye contact and facial expression.

Movement

If the layout of the room permits, you may use movement to change the pace, make a transition, draw attention to a visual aid, or reinforce an idea. For example, leaning forward may emphasize a key point or stepping in front of a visual aid may bring the audience's attention back to you.

Don't overuse movement. Pacing is distracting and annoying. Rocking and swaying indicate nervousness. And small spaces don't allow for much movement. If you would like to move across the room, let your eyes lead you to where you're headed, take full steps, and come to a stop. Remember that some movement is interesting if it works to enhance your presentation.
Stances to Avoid

Rehearse your stance — and avoid getting stuck in one of these.
Now is the time to talk with your hands. Strive to use emphatic gestures to accent and reinforce your message.

**Good Gesturing**

- Incorporate the same relaxed style of gesturing that you use everyday conversation into your presentation. If you focus on making your points clearly and enthusiastically, most gesture will happen naturally.

- When presenting in a small room, use smaller hand and arm movements. In a larger room or lecture hall, broader movements are more visible to the audience.

If you are not a natural gesturer, plan a few into your presentation. Here are some ideas:

- As you describe an object, outline it with your hands.

- Clench your fist to show strength, determination, or anger.

- Use a sweeping motion to convey the scope of your topic.

- Use your fingers to enumerate.

- Intertwine your fingers to imply integration.

- Signal "stop" by raising your palm to the audience.

- Use your left hand to signal one point of view and your right to represent the other.

**Poor Gesturing**

- Avoid nervous gestures that detract from your message, e.g. twisting your ring, playing with your hair, wringing your hands, or playing with a pen.

- Try not to repeat any gesture too often; even a good gesture can become annoying or boring.

- Beware of some gestures, like pointing, that may make your audience uncomfortable.
Eye Contact

Eye contact is your ticket to credibility. Western audiences want you to "look them in the eye" — a mark of honesty and forthrightness. You will appear more confident and be more compelling if you look at your audience while you talk. You also will be able to gauge their reaction and adjust your presentation accordingly.

Effective Eye Contact

- Have "mini-conversations." Think of talking to the audience individual by individual. Talking to people one-to-one may not be as intimidating as talking to a group.

- With a small audience, meet the eyes of everyone in the group. Look at one person long enough to complete a thought or phrase, and then move on to another face.

- With a large group, work sections of the room, trying not to favor one side or the other. You may want to look around the room in a Z pattern.

- Turn the upper part of your body, not just your eyes or head, to look at different sides of the room, or your audience will feel as if they are watching you watch a tennis match.

- Judge the audience's comprehension of your message by looking at them. Do you need to further explain, respond to a question, or recap?

- Pay special attention with your eyes to the key decision-makers.

- As you work on effective eye contact, remember that your facial expression is also an important element of non-verbal communication. Have a pleasant expression on your face. A smile usually works, unless, of course, you're delivering bad news.
The voice is a powerful vehicle for conveying meaning. Thus, the times you have been influenced not by what was said, but how it was said. There are four primary elements of the voice:

- Pitch
- Volume
- Rate
- Articulation

**Pitch:** how high or low a tone is.

- Avoid monotony; add variation and inflection.

- Speakers with higher-pitched voices should aim for downward inflection for emphasis, and speakers with lower-pitched voices should aim for upward inflection.

- The inflection of your voice can change the meaning of what you’re saying. For example, an upward inflection at the end of a sentence indicates a question, a downward inflection at the end of a sentence indicates a statement of finality.

- If pitch is dropped too low, the words may be unintelligible.

**Volume:** how loud or soft the voice is.

- The appropriate volume will depend on such variables as the size of the room and audience and the presence of carpeting and a microphone. A general rule: Speak loudly enough to be heard by the people seated in the rear of the room. Rehearse in the room with a friend to test your volume.

- Avoid the monotony of unvarying sound. Dropping the voice to a whisper or raising it to a shout can be equally effective for emphasis.

- Breathe from the diaphragm to increase volume and to avoid straining your voice.
Rate: how quickly or slowly the words are spoken.

- The appropriate base rate allows the listener to hear all the words clearly. Give the listener time to both receive the information and process it.

- Add variety to your rate of speech by changing your pace and adding pauses.

- Your pace may be increased for points that will be easily understood and may be slowed for more complex or important points.

- Speaking quickly is a common manifestation of nervousness. If you are anxious to rush through your material, build in pauses and breaks during your rehearsal.

- If you have an accent, slow down a bit more — particularly at the beginning of your presentation — so your audience can become familiar with your pronunciation and vocal patterns.

Articulation: how clearly sounds are enunciated.

- Speak clearly and pronounce every syllable. (Don't overdo it, of course, or you will sound stilted and artificial.)

- Fight mumbling. Don't drop off at the end of sentences.

- Watch out for filler words: um, er, like, ah, ya'know. If you tend to add filler words, get a sense of where and why you add them, and monitor yourself in conversation. Knocking out filler words in conversation should carry over into your presentation style.

Most importantly, vary all four vocal elements. Varying the elements will improve the audience's comprehension and hold their attention. It will help you make your points and persuade your listeners. And finally, it will convey your interest, energy, and enthusiasm.
Vocal Warm-Up

Warm up your voice before you begin, especially if your presentation is early in the morning, or if you're running short sleep. Start with a steamy shower and a warm cup of water. Then try these exercises that relax your neck, throat and mouth and warm up your voice:

- Drop your head forward and slowly roll your head around in a complete circle.

- Stretch your mouth open as wide as possible. Stretch your lips as wide as they go, then bring them to a pucker.

- Practice a few tongue twisters, e.g. "She sells seashells by the seashore" or "Black bugs' blood."

- Have a brief conversation or two before your presentation to make sure your voice and vocal patterns are warmed up.

- Inhale and exhale slowly several times. As you exhale, vocalize the vowel sounds — a e i o u — to warm up your vocal cords.

- Rehearse your opening exactly as you plan to deliver it, with the same volume, pacing and language.
Preparing Your Presentation

- Define the Purpose
- Analyze the Audience
- Write the Close
- Design the Opening
- Structure the Body
- Create Visual Aids
- Rehearse Rehearse Rehearse
Purpose

The purpose of your speech refers to the effect you want your presentation to have on your audience. Do you want to inform them of something, or are you interested in persuading them to accept your point of view? Perhaps you intend to entertain your audience, or simply to consult with them. Your purpose should be specific, e.g. “I want to persuade the vice president of marketing to authorize a complete analysis of the current competition.”

Message

The central message you want to convey comes directly from your purpose. Your message consists of the statement or points you would like your audience to remember. To determine your precise message, imagine you have to reduce your entire presentation to one sentence. Your message will be stated at least once, but probably more, during your presentation.
As you write your presentation, think about your audience. The more you know about them, the better. Gearing your communication toward your audience's needs and interests may be the most important way to achieve your objective. As you develop your presentation, you should continually answer the question that runs through the mind of any audience member throughout any presentation: "What does this mean for me?"

Audience analysis includes considering the following questions:

1. Who are they?
2. What do they know?
3. How will they respond?
4. How can you appeal to them?

(1) Who are they?

What do you know about them?

Primary audience:
- those who hear your message directly

Secondary, or hidden, audience:
- those who may not physically be in the room, but who will hear about or be affected by your message; or, those in the room who are not directly affected by your message

Key decision maker:
- the person(s) who has the ultimate decision-making authority over your proposal

The individuals:
- educational level, training, age, sex, background, opinions, interests, expectations, and attitudes

The group:
- shared norms, traditions, standards, rules, and values
(2) What do they know?

What do they know about you?
What do they know about your topic?
How much background information do they need?
How much new information do they need?

(3) What do they feel?

How interested are they in your message?
What is their probable bias: positive, neutral, or negative?
Is your desired action easy or hard for them?
Will they be awake or exhausted from a full day of presentations or work?

(4) What appeals to them?

What do they really care about, value, or treasure?
Do tangible benefits (money, vacation, time) matter, or are values and beliefs more important to them?
Can you draw upon your personal credibility?
Persuasion

Audience analysis is particularly important when giving a presentation to persuade. The three concepts of persuasion outlined by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* serve as the best basic advice on how to persuade: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*.

*Ethos* refers to the speaker’s credibility with the audience. Establish credibility up front by mentioning your education, related experience, title, or reputation. Cite a well-respected institution or individual that supports you or your position. If you earn the audience’s respect and trust, the audience is more likely to be persuaded.

*Pathos* refers to emotional appeals. Some audiences are more susceptible to emotional arguments than others. Some causes lend themselves to emotional appeals more readily than others. The better you know your audience, the more easily you can gauge the success of an emotional pitch.

*Logos* refers to logical appeals. The general rule for business presentations is to open with your recommendation so that your audience has a framework for listening to subpoints. Back up your recommendation with numbers, facts, statistics and expert testimony. Point out exactly how the audience will benefit from your recommendation; for business audiences, these benefits often relate to the bottom line.
The close should include an outright statement of your message. By designing the close before the opening or the body, your entire presentation will more likely reinforce your primary message.

Keep in mind that the close will most likely be remembered because it is the last thing the audience hears. Design it carefully.

Ways to Close

- Use a strong transitional phrase such as "to summarize," or "in conclusion," to cue your audience to listen.

- Summarize your main points.

- Refer to a question, image, or story you used in your opening.

- Restate the benefits to be gained from following your plan or solution.

- End with a call to action, telling the audience exactly how you would like them to proceed.

- Finish with a thought-provoking question or statement.

- If a Q & A session is part of your presentation, provide an initial close before Q & A. Then close once again after the Q & A session. (If you neglect this step, the audience will tend to remember the last thing they heard, which may have been an objection or a tangential remark.)