

Making Better Presentations



Name: _____

Making Better PRESENTATIONS

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Introduction

Information and skills you will acquire

Getting the most out of this booklet

Making Better Presentations is one of a valuable and user-friendly new series of easy-to-read booklets created specially to help you develop at work. The materials have been created from actual experience in workplace training. Experts have pooled their knowledge and experience to involve you in learning new skills and building on those you already have. The booklet is divided into clear *sections*, containing specially devised *activities* and a *mini project*, to allow you to practise as you learn.

Making Better Presentations will enable you to:

- Understand the importance of identifying the purpose of the presentation and who the audience will be. Identify the right venue and style for a presentation.
- Select what material to include and what to leave out of a presentation.
- Break down material into sections and give a good introduction and conclusion to a presentation.
- Develop techniques to help you use your voice well and use visual aids appropriately.
- Develop techniques for controlling nervousness, helping you to give a relaxed presentation.
- You may want to work your way through the booklet from start to finish, or focus on an area of interest.
- Once you have completed the questionnaire on page 4 you will be able to see clearly which topics you need most help with, and which areas you can safely leave out.
- The questionnaire will also allow you to create your own learning plan for which an example and space is provided on page 5.
- You may want to ask your supervisor or another colleague for their views on the areas you could work on, or for help with the activities in the booklet.
- As you may want to use the booklet for future reference, you may want to write the answers out in rough first and then write them in the booklet.

Section I

MAKING EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS TO GROUPS

Why are you giving your presentation?

When you first start to think about your presentation you need to find out why you are giving the presentation. The key question to ask is: What does the person who asked you to give the presentation want you to achieve?

For example you may be asked to talk about a biscuit-making machine that you have been working on. You could talk at length about what the machine does and how it works. However, what your supervisor wants you to do at the presentation is tell the management group about the problems you have been having when the machine breaks down. This will back up your supervisor's proposal to have the machine replaced.

Who will make up your audience?

Your audience could come from a whole range of different people, for example, trainees, colleagues, people from outside the organisation or supervisors.

It is important to know who you are talking to because this will affect what you include in your presentation. If you are talking to colleagues who are familiar with the subject then you can assume that they know certain things. If you are talking to a group of new trainees you will need to ensure that they have the necessary background information.

When you know who is going to be in the audience, you should pitch the presentation at their level of knowledge. For example, if the audience has some technical knowledge you can safely include this sort of information. If your audience includes people who have different levels of knowledge and some do not have specialist knowledge, then you will need to make sure that the information you include can be understood by everyone.

You will also have to try to make sure that people who are familiar with the subject find out one or two things that they didn't know before, otherwise there is no point in them coming along. However, you don't have to do this for people who are coming along just to support you, such as your supervisor or colleagues.

Activity 1

Preparing for a presentation – what to do first

Beryl is preparing to give a talk to members of the local neighbourhood group. She wants to talk about the water company plan to clean the polluted brook.

Below are three questions which need some thought before Beryl gives her presentation. Write a sentence in response to each question.

1. What is the main aim of Beryl's presentation?

2. Who will be listening to Beryl's talk?

3. Suggest some topics which Beryl's talk might cover?

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

The mini project later in this booklet will ask you to give a short presentation. Many of the activities you will be doing are designed to help you prepare for this presentation. Talk to your supervisor and ask if you can make an 8 – 10 minute presentation relevant to your job.

Activity 2

The three key questions

After you have spoken to your supervisor, write down the answers to the three questions in the spaces below.

1. What is the main purpose of your presentation?

2. Write down what the presentation is about in no more than three short sentences?

3. Who will be listening to your presentation?

FEEDBACK: If you have clear answers to these questions you will find that preparing for your presentation will be much easier.

What to include and what to leave out

When you are trying to decide what information to include and what to leave out in your presentation, you will need to keep going back to the aim of your presentation and what background knowledge your audience has.

For example, if you are a Kitchen Assistant in a canteen and you are asked to give a presentation to new trainees on how to make apple pie, you will need to include how to make short crust pastry. If you were talking to more experienced cooks, you might leave this out because you would assume they knew this already.

In a presentation to introduce of a new type of paint for painters and decorators, you would only need to mention the old type of paint very briefly. The people at your presentation will only want to find out about the new product.

You can see that it is very important to think in advance about who your audience is and what they will want to know. This will guide you as to what to include and what to leave out.

Activity 3

Who will be in your audience?

Describe the people who will be listening to your presentation. What do they want to hear?

FEEDBACK: If you spend a little time thinking about your audience and what they want to hear, this will help you to identify what it is they want out of the presentation.

Activity 4

What does your audience want to hear?

Thinking again about your own presentation, what information will your audience find most useful? Is there any material you should leave out? If so, make a note of what it is and why you think it best not to include it in this presentation.

FEEDBACK: Here are some indicators which you can use to compare with your own answers.

- Would the information be at a basic or more advanced level to suit your audience? Will everyone in the audience be able to follow what you are saying? Is this the information your audience want from the presentation?

- What information will be of least use to your audience? Do they need all of these points to follow the main messages you are trying to put across?
- You would leave out information which is not essential to the main aim of your presentation and anything which requires a lengthy and difficult explanation.

Breaking your material down into sections

However good and appropriate your material is, if people find it difficult to follow, your presentation will not be very useful.

The order in which you present material is very important. Think about how you can break your material down into sections, which make your talk easy for your audience to understand. For example, if you are talking about the problems of a machine breaking down, you might divide your presentation down into sections such as: how often, what happens and the effects.

In the different sections of your presentation, you may also need to give some brief explanations. For example if you are talking to colleagues about a new office procedure, you may need to explain why certain people must be fully informed about particular events, so that your colleagues understand the new procedure and will co-operate with it.

Activity 5

How can Beryl structure her talk?

Returning to the example of Beryl and her presentation to the neighbourhood group, can you think of a simple way in which she could break down her talk into easy stages for her audience?

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Activity 6

Breaking down your own material

Now break down the material for a presentation you might be asked to give into sections. Give each section a heading. Think about what would be the best order for your material. Take a separate sheet of paper to do this in rough then write the headings for your presentation in the space below.

FEEDBACK: Now you have broken down your own presentation into sections, ask yourself the following questions.

- Are these separate sections or is one section really part of another?
- Can any of the sections be left out?
- Would my audience find the order easy to follow?

Starting and finishing your presentation

To maximise the impact of your presentation you need to have a good introduction and conclusion. In your introduction you will need to say what your presentation is about, why you are giving your presentation and what you hope your audience will get out of it. If you do not do this, your audience may become confused. It would be like starting a book at chapter 2.

When you finish your presentation, you will need to briefly state the main stages of your presentation. If you do not do this your audience will be left dangling and will think that you haven't finished the presentation off properly.

To help your audience focus clearly on your presentation, a useful guide is:

- In your introduction, tell your audience what you are going to talk about.
- Deliver your talk.
- In your conclusion, tell your audience the main points of the talk you have just given.

Section 2

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

How to use your voice

Practise your presentation a few days before you give it. It is best to begin with your presentation written out in full. Then when you feel familiar with it, reduce the amount of notes you rely on.

When you first practise, read out your presentation. This is when you can begin practising to use your voice. Try not to mumble because you feel embarrassed. Feel proud of yourself and what you have to say.

If you have a quiet voice or you tend to mumble, try this voice exercise:

- Speak and pinch your nose at the same time. If you find that your words sound very nasal and strange, particularly 'd' 'b' and 'm' sounds, this is because you are talking from the front of your throat.
- Pinching your nose, talk from the back of your throat. You will find that there is very little difference in how your voice sounds and your normal speaking voice.

Here are a few tips to help you to use your voice well:

- If you can get into the habit of talking from the back of your throat, you will find that your voice will be easier to understand and your presentation will carry more. This is a far better way of projecting your voice than shouting or speaking loudly.
- If you want to know how you sound to other people, put your fingers in your ears while you are talking.
- Try to speak more slowly than you normally do, as it helps the audience to follow the presentation. Do not think that you have to speak without any pauses. This will be exhausting for your audience.
- Be proud of whatever accent you may have. Speak the way you normally do, otherwise your presentation will sound very false.
- When you are giving your presentation allow yourself to move your body and arms, as you would if you were speaking normally, you will find that this helps you to put expression in your voice.

Activity 8

Think about your own voice

Think about the following aspects of your voice. Tick the box if you think you need more practice.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too loud | <input type="checkbox"/> Too soft |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking too fast | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking too slowly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking naturally | <input type="checkbox"/> Moving my body and arms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking from the back of my throat | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Putting expression in my voice | |

FEEDBACK: If you need more practice in any of these areas, the best way of doing this is to practise your presentation in front of supportive people such as friends and colleagues. Ask them to tell you how they think you can improve the way you give your presentation.

Giving yourself time

Many people think that the art of giving presentations is to talk non-stop, without pausing for breath. Allow yourself to pause briefly here and there, for example when you move onto a different stage of your presentation. This will not only help you collect your thoughts; it will also help your audience to think about what you have said.

Giving a good presentation does not mean giving as much information as possible. You need to give yourself enough time to put your ideas across to people and not rush through them.

Your expression and body language

The message you put across is not only in your words. It is in your expression, your body movements and the tone and emphasis you put on your words.

Your expression will alter the meaning of what you say. For example, if you are talking about an exciting new idea and you have a bored expression on your face, people will not take much notice of you.

Here are some do's and don'ts about expression and body language:

- Don't smile too much and suggest that everything is wonderful. People will think you are glib and be wary of what you are saying.
 - Don't look too serious, this will make your presentation hard going.
- Don't look down and avoid eye contact, your audience will not feel involved and quickly lose interest. Try to

look at everyone and use only a passing gaze. If you look at people for too long they will feel uncomfortable.

- Don't stand in a fixed and rigid position. If you move around a bit your voice will become more animated and so be easier to listen to. However, don't do this too much, as it can be very distracting.
Don't hunch up your shoulders. This will make you seem unconfident about what you are saying. Similarly if you slouch or lean, it will seem as if you just don't care. You need to stand up straight.
- Don't talk all on one note or using just low notes as it can make your presentation sound very boring. People like to pick up on the emphasis of different ideas. Listen to broadcasters, if they are talking about something sad, they tend to talk in a low tone of voice. When they are talking about something very important they talk slightly louder and emphasise every word.

Use of visual aids

There is a saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. This is true when we are making a presentation.

We are far more likely to remember what we see than what we hear. It is sometimes easier to understand something e.g. a calculation or a street layout, if we can see it. Here are some of the visual aids you can use in a presentation.

Overhead projections

If you are giving a presentation, it is useful to use an overhead projector to emphasise the most important points of your presentation.

Each overhead should be no more than six points and these points should be very short, preferably, one to two words. Use a bullet-point for each point. Overheads are also far more effective if they are typed in large print.

Use colours such as black and dark blue which people can read. Red can be an alarming colour so do not use it unless this is what you want to do.

Make sure that the layout of your transparency i.e. portrait (upright) or landscape (sideways), is suitable for the overhead projector you are going to use. An example of a transparency is shown in the feedback to Activity 10.

You may find that it is necessary to ask your supervisor for help in getting your overheads to look professional, particularly if you are presenting to people outside the organisation.

Flip charts

You can use flip charts to write key points. Remember, as with overheads, you must write clearly and precisely. You can also display plans, maps, pictures and photographs.

Slide projectors

Make sure that you have practised how to use the slide projector before the event and you know how to load the slides. If you are unsure, ask for help a few days before the presentation. If in doubt do not use it.

Handouts

Handouts are always useful. Give them out at the beginning if they will help your audience to follow the presentation. Otherwise give them out at the end.

Computer technology

Computers allow a range of different media for use in presentations. You may need to seek specialist advice if using this technology.

Activity 9

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Watch a presentation on TV

Watch someone presenting information on the television. What techniques are used to make the information more interesting and enjoyable? Write your observations on a separate sheet of paper.

Activity 10

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Draft an overhead

Draft an overhead for a presentation on one of the following:

- a recent day out
- your ideal job
- a new idea for your team.

You should take a separate sheet of paper for this.

Venue and style of presentation

The venue for your presentation will affect the style of your presentation. If you are talking to a group of more than 25 people in a hall or large room your style will need to be different to a presentation to 10 people in an office or meeting room. Depending on where the presentation is going to be held and the numbers of people attending, you will need to think about what visual aids you will need and how formal the presentation is going to be.

Who is going to be there will also effect where your presentation is held and the type of presentation you

give. If your presentation is going to be given to colleagues in the team rest room, then it will be more informal than one given to clients or customers in a large meeting room.

If you are presenting to a large group of people at a large venue you will need to:

- Speak louder so that everyone can hear you.
- Use more visual aids to keep peoples' attention because it is that much more impersonal.
- Be more rigid in the way you deliver your presentation e.g. leave questions to the end.

If you are speaking to a small group in a more informal setting you will have greater opportunity to talk directly to your audience. This means you may be able to:

- get your points across without overheads and other visual aids
- allow people to ask questions as you go along
- talk in a more chatty style.

Key Learning Points

- Try to speak from the back of your throat so that your voice is clearer and carries more. Slow down your normal rate of speech.
- Allow yourself to pause during your presentation, so that your audience knows that you are moving onto the next stage and you give yourself a chance to collect your thoughts.
- Remember, your audience does not only hear the words you are saying, you are also giving strong messages through the way you move and your expressions.
- Allow yourself to move around while you are talking, it makes your voice more animated.
- Use an overhead projector if one is available as this helps you to reinforce the main points of your presentation. Do not show overheads that contain too much information.
- Match the style and venue of your presentation to your audience and the occasion of your talk.

Section 3

MAKING YOURSELF FEEL MORE CONFIDENT

Do's and don'ts before the presentation

Here are some groundrules when preparing for a presentation. We have already covered some of these points in detail in this booklet.

Do:

- prepare well for your presentation and avoid speaking 'off-the-cuff'
- find out who your audience is and the aim of the presentation
- use overheads if you think they are necessary
- try to visualise yourself being confident giving the presentation
- remember the main ideas of your presentation rather than memorising it word for word
- try to get used to thinking while you are talking.

Don't:

- have a negative image of yourself giving the presentation
- get anxious about the presentation and worry about it for days in advance
- prepare more material than you need
- expect to remember the presentation word for word.

Activity II

Your worst experience during a presentation

What has been your worst experience when giving a presentation? Describe what went wrong. What lessons did you learn from that experience? If you have never had this experience, write about the worst presentation you have heard. What mistakes did the speaker make? What could the speaker have done to improve the presentation?

FEEDBACK: Common mistakes which people make when giving a presentation are:

- not giving the presentation enough thought beforehand so it is difficult to follow
- speaking too fast
- speaking too softly
- trying to remember the presentation word for word and forgetting things
- giving too much information so the main points get lost.

- standing in front of the overhead projection
- unreadable overheads with too much information on them.

Making yourself relaxed about the presentation

It takes time to get used to giving presentations and to forget about your nerves.

Here are some ideas to help you feel relaxed about giving your presentation:

- Prepare your notes so that they are easily to follow on the day and make sure that your overheads are in order. As your presentation day gets nearer, gradually reduce the number of notes that you have, so that you are left with outline notes. If you take full notes with you to the presentation, nervousness will make you read them.
- If your presentation includes anything which you are not sure about, either check it with your supervisor beforehand, or leave it out of the presentation.
- Try to remember the themes of your presentation, rather than learning your presentation word for word. This is far easier to remember. If you try to memorise every word you will panic if you forget anything.
- Make sure you arrive at your presentation in good time, so that you have time to collect your thoughts.
- Sit down and try to relax yourself by breathing deeply and slowly. Put negative thoughts out of your mind. Try to get involved in other things that are happening.
- Remember that your audience is likely to support you and will not mind if you feel nervous or get off to a shaky start.
- Check that there is nothing wrong with your appearance beforehand e.g. spinach on teeth, buttons missing. This will stop you worrying during the presentation.

Activity 12

Make yourself more relaxed

Take another look at the list of ideas we have given on page 19. Which techniques for making yourself more relaxed about giving a presentation would you find useful? Make a note of them. Is there anything else that you do which we have not mentioned here?

Knowing how to cope with difficult people

From time to time you will come across difficult people in your audience, particularly if the subject affects their job or lives.

Here are some ways to help you deal with difficult situations:

- If someone interrupts you while you are talking and asks a question, tell him or her that you will answer questions at the end.
- If people talk or whisper to each other during your presentation, stop what you are saying and look at them. If they do not stop, ask them if they would prefer to leave the meeting.
- If someone disputes what you are saying, either deal with it straight away, if you think it necessary to clarify what has been said, or say that you will come back to it.
- If you say that you will come back to something you must remember to do that.
- If someone asks a question that you do not know how to answer, say that you will find out after the presentation and come back to them.
- Never waste your audience's time by arguing with or discussing at length a topic with just one person. If you do not come to a satisfactory conclusion, say that there is a difference of opinion and then move on.

If things start to go wrong

A common problem when giving a presentation is that you lose your place and forget what you were going to say next. Give yourself time to sort out your notes and find the next thing you have to say.

You may be so nervous that you cannot speak and think at the same time. Do anything that helps you through the next few moments, read your notes, show an overhead etc. Once you have got over these few moments of panic you will find that you can start thinking about your presentation. People will realise you are nervous and will be supportive and patient.

Talk aloud to your audience and let them know what the problem is e.g. if you can't remember the name of something, tell them and say that you will come back to it later. This comes across better than dithering and getting flustered.

If someone in your audience thought that your presentation was going to be about something else, give them the opportunity to leave.

If the overhead projector doesn't work, find out if there is anyone in the audience who can help you fix it.

Make sure that you are not standing in front of the OHP screen and that your OHP's are correctly positioned. Give yourself time during the presentation to put these things right.

Mini Project

By now you will have completed much of the preparation to give a short 8–10 minute presentation. Prepare a review sheet to give to your colleagues at your presentation. Include the following points:

Please make comments about the performance of the presenter.

- clarity of topic and the aim of the presentation
- key points easy to follow and understand
- amount and relevance of information
- loudness of voice
- tone of voice
- body language
- body movement
- coping with any difficulties
- ending the presentation
- use of visual aids.

FeedBack toActivities

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 1

1. The main aim of Beryl's presentation is to give local residents information about the plan to clean the brook.
2. Local residents will be listening to the presentation.
3. Her presentation will cover an explanation of the plan, how to respond to the water company and how to complain to your local councillor or M.P.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 5

One suggestion for a simple way of breaking down Beryl's talk into easy sections would be to take each part of the plan as a separate section of the presentation. Beryl would perhaps want to give a short introduction about the plan. Beryl would then talk about advantages and disadvantages. She would also inform the audience on a letter of complaint to the M.P.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 9

These techniques are often used to make presentations more interesting and enjoyable:

- facial expression e.g. surprise, excitement, raised eyebrows, smiles, eye contact
- tone of voice e.g. high, low
- pictures; diagrams; examples
- using more than one person
- short sentences.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 10

This is a suggested overhead transparency for a presentation on 'A new idea for my team'.

Multi-skilling Administrative Assistants

Advantages:
Sick leave cover
Better customer service
Holiday cover
Handling other peoples' telephone calls
Dealing with all office enquiries

Note: This overhead is reduced size. Font size 16–18 should be used for the text, with a larger size used for the heading. The layout format would be portrait i.e. upright A4 size paper, which is the same as this booklet.

Giving a presentation can be quite a terrifying experience for anyone, whether it is to your local club or to your colleagues at work. This booklet has been designed to provide techniques and information on how to improve your presentation skills and increase your confidence. It will help you with all stages of the presentation ranging from your first thoughts to the way you handle difficult questions.

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The Campaign for Learning is a national charity seeking to create an appetite for learning in everyone. Its four areas of work are Workplace Learning & Skills, Family Learning, Learning to Learn and influencing policy. It co-ordinates Learning at Work Day and a Family Learning Festival each year. The Campaign is supported by the government, a wide range of businesses, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and individuals.

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