

10. Presentation Skills

Learning objectives

- Presentations play an important role in a successful career.
- Understand the objective clearly.
- Understand the need of the audience.
- Presentations have three main stages
 - Introduction
 - Body
 - Summary
- Points to remember–
 - Before the presentation.
 - During the presentation.
 - After the presentation.
- Planning visual aids and handouts.
- Strategies to overcome the podium panic. 21

Case Study

Fountainhead Institute of Management decided to purchase 100 pieces of laptop for their students for the new semester which was about to commence in a month's time.

As is the done practice, quotations were invited from five well known laptop manufacturing companies.

After suitable scrutiny, it would be zeroed down to two companies.

Of course, the choice would be based on the price and the features of the laptop, its range etc.

So, it all depended upon the way these two companies projected and marketed their wares, in order to suitably impress and convince the management that how they stand to benefit by dealing with their company and its product.

That can be done only through an effective presentation !! both Verbally and Visually !!

It is obvious that one company bagged the contract. Everything else being equal, i.e., the quality of the laptop, its pricing, its features etc. of both the companies, the competition would have indeed be stiff.

What finally worked out favourably for the company which was selected was, the thorough preparation that went into their Presentation.

The cutting edge is the ability to make effective presentations

In the Indian context, it is a sad fact that Oral Communication Skills are often neglected in the academic curriculum, emphasis on good standards for written English skills is however, prominent. Unfortunately, an effective presentation depends a lot on the Oral Communication Skills of the presenter.) 2

What is an Oral Presentation?

Oral Presentation usually takes place in a seminar, a demonstration, or a lecture hall. An Oral Presentation is a talk given to a group in which you present your views on an issue or topic, based on facts and on your research.

You will need to prepare for your Oral Presentation in much the same way as you would for a Written Assignment.

This would involve;

- Understanding your objectives clearly.
- Understanding your audience and their needs.
- Understanding the chosen topic well.
- Developing your point of view, in relation to the topic.
- Convincing your audience that the point of view presented by you is well supported by facts.
- The presentation style that will be used.
- Choice of less formal language, which makes it easier to listen to and understand.
- Effective use of visuals.

Needless to say, in the above-mentioned case study, the company which won the contract would have worked in great details with

regard to the preparation for their Presentation, keeping in mind all the above-mentioned points.

The general format of your presentation should be as follows:

1. **Introduction**—which will be the initial statement presenting your point of view, your objective etc.
2. **Main Body**—will comprise of all the arguments and evidence you will present in support of your point of views or objectives.
3. **Conclusion**—during this part you will recapitulate and give a summary of all the points of view expressed by you in favour of your objective with an aim to convince your audience.

“Prepare and Practise”; the two golden words, for an effective presentation

In an Oral Presentation there are three stages to be followed.

1. Before the Oral Presentation.
2. During the Oral Presentation.
3. After the Oral Presentation.

I stage: Before the Oral Presentation

Prepare and Practise

In the I stage of the presentation, preparation plays a very vital role. The success of your presentation depends on your preparation, something like the ‘proof of the pudding is in the eating’!

Preparation takes place at two levels.

Preparation at Level I

Take great care in your preparation by following the under-mentioned steps:

- Think about your *purpose*.
- Think about the *audience* and their background knowledge to help you choose the content and style of delivery.
- Estimate the *time* available for your presentation, to help you decide the content matter.

- Collect all the relevant *information* pertaining to the content and arrange them in a sequential manner.
- Decide on the *main points*; select on the suitable examples.
- Decide on the non-verbal communication that you will be utilizing by way of charts, graphs, pictures etc.
- Choose the key words to drive home the point.

Preparation at Level II

- A. • Prepare a hand written draft of the notes which you will use in the presentation.
- Go through the draft thoroughly, modify it.
 - Use key words and phrases; write them in bold, so that it will be a quick reference for you to move ahead.
 - Now, as the notes are almost final, take a print out with double spacing between the points, as this will give you a chance to write few points in between as you go along.
 - Time the presentation.
 - Make a set of cue cards in logical sequence.
- B. • If you are going to use power point or slides, use only key words and phrases, do not clutter the screen with too many information.
- Use size 16 font as the minimum.
 - Use clean font styles such as Arial, Times New Roman, Palatino etc.
 - If you are using an OHP, number all the transparencies.
 - Ensure that all the tables, charts, graphs are Simple and Clear.

Practice makes man perfect

Practice

- A. ▶ Practice your presentation in front of a mirror or group of friends.
- ▶ Check on your non-verbal cues, i.e. your facial expressions and gestures, are appropriate.

- ▶ Check your posture.
 - ▶ Check your mannerisms.
 - ▶ Check that you maintain eye contact with the audience or the reflection in your mirror.
 - ▶ Check on the voice quality; the tone, the pitch, the rhythm etc. This is important because you will be able to hold the attention of your audience merely by the power of your voice; you are literally centre stage!
- B. ▶ Anticipate the questions that could be asked based on your Presentation.
- ▶ Prepare the appropriate Responses.
 - ▶ Prepare mentally for any modifications in your responses.
 - ▶ Practise your presentation keeping all the above-mentioned points in mind, As many times as you can.

This way, you will lose your nervousness and gain confidence.

On the day of the Presentation

Arrive early to the venue to oversee the following preparation is to your satisfaction.

- i. Ensure that the hall/room is clean. The seating arrangement is as planned.
- ii. Ensure that the PA System is working; that there is provision for a cordless mike as well as a collar mike.
- iii. Ensure that the overheads are clearly focused on the screen.
- iv. Check on your standing position, it should not obstruct the view of the audience, of the screen.

II stage: During the Oral Presentation

(All your preparation will reap fruits, so be confident and go ahead)

- Greet the audience.
- Look relaxed. (even if you feel you are a mass of jelly!)
- Wait for the audience to settle down a bit, till they focus their attention on you, before you commence.

- Briefly state the topic/s you will be covering.
- Use your visual aids appropriately.
- Look at the audience and establish eye contact with most of the people. Never make the mistake of focusing your attention on only a few, for then, the others will lose interest in what you have to say and you would lose the battle even before you have begun!
- At all points of time, face the audience, never turn your back to them!
- Draw on your voice power. Use it effectively with right amount of inflections and variations, to sustain the interest of your audience.
- Follow the Main Three Stages of Presentation i.e. Introduction, Main Body and Conclusion.
- Summarize your main points effectively.
- Give your handouts either before or after your presentation, so that you do not lose your audiences' attention.

III stage: After the Oral Presentation

It is time to reflect and time to improve

Unlearning and re-learning is a continuous process in our human life!

A feedback about our presentation gives us an opportunity to know about the positive aspects, as well as the areas which need improvement.

Pebbles of opportunity are laid immensely before us

After the presentation, you can distribute the feedback form amongst the audience; as the feedback is not signed, the review will be very frank. Reflect upon the feedback; view it very critically; identify the areas for improvement; work on it and you will see that each presentation of yours will take you a step ahead in your pursuit for excellence, for don't we all know, that it is only survival of the fittest that still works!

Do you suffer from a podium or rostrum fright?

Well who has not? Everyone suffers from what is popularly known as 'Stage Fright'. It varies in degrees that is all; if anyone says he does not suffer from it, well then he must be an old hand at it or he conceals his nerves very well.

So, how does one get rid of this stage fear? This anxiety, at having to face a room full of people?

Let us analyse the root cause of this fear factor. When do we face fear? It is always fear of the unknown. As we cannot visualize the outcome of our action, when caught unprepared, we fear the consequences. Take the example of an examination; first of all, I wonder if there is anyone at all who will say that she enjoys examination!! So, we realize that examinations are a feared zone.

Let us consider this aspect—we do not fear all exams with the same intensity. Why?

You will note that the subjects in which you have taken pains to prepare well, in all topics without skipping any of them, your fear quotient is less.

However, if you have done 'selective study', omitting many topics, the fear always lurks as to what if all questions are asked from the topics you have omitted? It is then, when you enter the examination hall with fear.

So, what is the conclusion one draws from the above? That—when you are well prepared, your fears are less, in other words, your state of fear is directly proportional to your state of preparation!

Well, that is the key: Preparation; but apart from that, if we follow some basic techniques, it should help us in making an effective presentation.

- Accept the fact that, feeling nervous is not a negative sign; the audience also understands your nervous state; if your content is good, the audience is generally forgiving.
- Learn to relax; do some breathing exercises to calm you down before the presentation.

- Go with a confident note and step; after all you have your cue cards to fall back upon.
- Start off your presentation in your comfort zone. Constantly seek feedback from your friends and close relatives and work on your grey areas.
- If your introduction is good, half the battle is won; add a bit of humour and at all costs, avoid monotony.
- Pay attention to details, the room, the podium, the mikes, and the visual aids.
- Be punctual. Even if the audience walk in slowly, you be standing on the stage, welcoming them. Give an allowance of 10 minutes from the time given for commencement of the presentation; but after that, you commence with your presentation, with an air of 'I mean business'.
- Ensure that your conclusion is impressive, it is like the taste of the dessert! People often leave the dining hall after a sumptuous meal with the dessert leaving a sweet and contented aftermath taste! So should your conclusion be, leaving a sweet taste with your audience where they can savour your presentation.
- Let every person go out of the auditorium feeling that he has gained something out of your presentation.

Fundamental steps for an effective presentation

- I. Design a plan for the specific audience.
- II. Develop a flexible form.
- III. Prepare an interesting presentation pattern.
- IV. Follow the presentation with a question and answer session.

I. Design a plan for the specific audience

- Understand the purpose of your presentation. (Why?)
Is it for providing information/motivation/teaching?
- Understand the audience. (Who?)
- Understand the expectation and requirement of the audience (What?)
should be the content?)

- Understand the suitable timing for it. (When?)
- Understand the suitable venue for it. (Where?)
- Understand the execution of the plan. (How?)

II. Develop a flexible form

Having formulated a plan, now it is time to give it a Form.

You may have a good idea but you should be able to express that idea and be able to convey it to others and share with them.

Begin by:

- Make an outline of your presentation; a kind of route map.
- While deciding on the content matter, try to look at things from the audiences' perspective like--
 - a. Why should the audience pay attention to your talk? What is their motivation here?
 - b. What is in it for me here attitude? Your presentation should be informative?
 - c. What is the significance of the topic? What is your line of persuasion here?
 - d. What is your expectation from the audience? (You have a purpose)
- Decide on the use of visual aids.

III. Preparing an interesting presentation pattern

Your presentation pattern should include:

- A good content matter.
- Effective use of visual aids.
- Excellent Communication Skills.
- Effective use of Non-Verbal cues (Gestures, Posture, Facial Expression and Voice).
- Your presentation style which should reflect your Confidence, Poise and Credibility.
- Building a rapport with the audience.
- Intention to not only attract but also retain the audience interest.

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- A mental picture of how you are going to position yourself; mentally go through your posture, gestures, facial expressions etc., so that it appears controlled and at the same time enthusiastic.
- A strategy to look natural!

Stress

IV. Follow the presentation with a question and answer session

A question and answer session helps you:

- To build a bridge, to reach out to the audience.
- It provides you with an immediate feedback.
- It helps you to clarify your point of view.
- It makes your session more interesting.
- If you are convincing, you make yourself more marketable!

to go along with

Exercise

Answer the following questions.

1. What are the important features of presentations?
2. What can make the presentations effective?
3. Discuss the features of Oral Presentation.
4. Describe the two levels of preparation to be done before Oral Presentation.
5. What are to be taken care of before, during and after the Oral Presentation?
6. List the fundamental steps of an effective presentation.
7. How does one prepare for an interesting presentation?
8. What is the purpose of a question-answer session?

To start