

# EFFECTIVE ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE



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# Preface

**Oral presentation or public speaking** is a specific form of communication i.e. the art of speaking in a structured manner on a particular topic in front of a group for a specific purpose at a specific time and place. The ability to do such a presentation is not a natural one but rather a skill that must be learned and developed.

*Effective oral presentation skills: a practical guide*, the result of years of experience and research, is intended to serve as a guide for anyone wishing to speak effectively in public. It provides the essential features and tips on preparing, organizing and delivering an effective oral presentation in English, or any other language. Other useful content includes actual words and phrases that express metalinguistic content (in *italics*), for example, structure, lists, examples or transitions.

This practical guide is divided into six sections; each one focuses on one particular point to think about when preparing for and giving an oral presentation. The first one deals with preparation and planning, which is the most important stage. The second one deals with the structure and signposting. The third deals with visuals and how to make the best use of them. The fourth discusses how to create interest and establish and maintain a relationship with the audience. The fifth deals with body language and the last is concerned with English pronunciation and the voice.

It is important to remember that there is no single recipe for an oral presentation<sup>1</sup>. Audience, context, purpose, subject, speaker's personality and cultural aspects may influence the presentation. For example: a weekly presentation of sales figures to the same group of people will not require a complete introduction or conclusion as prescribed in this document. On the other hand, trying to present new skills or tools to an audience may require a more careful presentation. Also it is important to take into consideration established conventions; different communities may have different techniques or may even react differently to a presenter or a presentation: English-speaking vs. a French-speaking audience, a scientific forum, a literary group or an assembly of business managers.

**Remember anyone can give a good presentation. Don't worry if you are not naturally extrovert. Preparation and practice can be the keys to success!**



<sup>1</sup> Many companies offer training in presenting and have specific guidelines or a style sheet for corporate presentations. Also, over time you will develop your own personal style.

# I. PREPARATION AND PLANNING

## **I.1 ESSENTIAL PREPARATION AND PLANNING CHECKLIST**

This is a checklist of the essential elements to consider when preparing and planning an oral presentation. Use it yourself by filling in the boxes on the right under "My Ideas".



<u>QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF</u>	<u>EXAMPLES</u>	<u>MY IDEAS</u>
1. What is the aim?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ to sell my product</li> <li>✓ to adopt my recommendations</li> <li>✓ to inform and explain</li> <li>✓ to present my candidature</li> </ul>	
2. What is my title?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How to reduce production costs</li> <li>✓ The advantages of ...</li> </ul>	
3. Who am I speaking to?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the topic appropriate for the audience?</li> <li>✓ Are these people the decision-makers, top managers, users, interested?</li> <li>✓ Why should the audience listen?</li> <li>✓ What are the benefits to the audience of my product/report/speech?</li> <li>✓ What do they know about the subject? How does this change my approach?</li> <li>✓ What aspects will they be interested in?</li> <li>✓ What sort of questions will they ask me? What are the answers?</li> <li>✓ Do they understand technical language or not?</li> </ul>	
1. What are the main points I want to make?	<p>Keep the body to about three main parts.</p> <p>Make sure the presentation differs from the written report. Try to bring some added value to the presentation.</p>	
5. What do I want the audience to do after listening to my presentation?	<p>We must invite them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ to buy my product</li> <li>✓ to contract our services</li> <li>✓ to react to findings or results</li> <li>✓ to make better informed decisions</li> <li>✓ to learn how to do something</li> <li>✓ to change their mind</li> <li>✓ to adopt my point of view</li> <li>✓ to give me a job</li> </ul>	
6. How much time is planned for me to speak?		

## 1.2 Other questions concerning physical aspects

Who is the audience?

How many people will there be in the audience?

Where will it take place?

How big is the room?

How bright is the room? Can you make it dark?

What equipment is there in the room? Does the equipment work?

What equipment do I need? a black or whiteboard, a pointer?

Is there chalk or a marker available?

Where can you stand? Is there a lectern?

Is there room to put your notes or papers?

Where can you put your computer?

Is there an electric outlet, projector cable, Internet connection (or wifi)?

Do you need an adapter or extension lead?

Is there a video projector<sup>2</sup> and a screen?

Can you present the information and not block the view of the screen?

Can the information be seen from everywhere in the room?

Is there a sound system? Do you need a microphone?

Are you going to need **handouts** or any other documents? How many? Do they present a good image of you and your company?



### When?

What day of the week is it? What time of day is it? Will the audience be more or less receptive when listening?

### How long?

Respect the time constraints not only out of respect for the audience but also for effectiveness. Keep to the essentials; try not to digress. Also be ready to adjust content to audience or time constraints: what can be eliminated if time is short or if the audience is more familiar with content than expected?

### Other considerations

Am I dressed appropriately?

**Experienced presenters are able to improvise and adapt to changing circumstances but you may have only one chance to present your information, so be prepared.**

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<sup>2</sup> Always plan for a back up in case the equipment fails, i.e. make a paper copy of the slides.

## II. STRUCTURE OF AN ORAL PRESENTATION

A good oral presentation is well structured; structure makes it easier for the listener to follow.

A typical presentation has three parts: the beginning, the middle and the end, also called the introduction, body and conclusion. **In the beginning you say what you are going to say. In the body you say what you want to say and in the conclusion you say what you have said.** This is the golden rule for an effective presentation.

Below we are going to look at each part in turn in terms of the content and formulaic language used to express it.

### II.1 THE BEGINNING OR THE INTRODUCTION

The beginning of a presentation is the most important part. It serves to get the audience's attention and give a good idea of what is to follow. It prepares the audience for what it is going to hear and what it should get out of listening to the speech.

Try to make a strong introduction. In English-speaking countries it is not uncommon for the speaker to begin with a joke, an anecdote, a statement made to surprise or provoke in order to gain the audience's attention, to make people want to listen, to feel relaxed and to introduce the subject. This may or may not be appropriate in other cultures or in some contexts. Other techniques include telling a story, making a very controversial statement, using an interesting quotation, mentioning common values, asking a direct or rhetorical question.<sup>3</sup>

A direct question is not only a good technique to establish a relationship with the audience but is also a means for the speaker to see where the audience is, i.e. what it knows about the subject. Along with the question the speaker may also ask for a show of hands. E.g. *If you have heard of that before, raise your hand.*

A rhetorical question helps to focus people on the subject of the presentation before the speaker actually presents the information. The speaker sets up the talk, asks the audience questions and then proceeds to answer them in the course of the presentation, making him look good. E.g. *This is the situation we are in. How can we explain this? What are the reasons for it? What are the implications for the company?*

Try to present information in such a way that the audience can identify with it, you can give an anecdote, unusual or surprising facts, or an illustration from real life.

On the following page is a list of key content of an effective introduction followed by many examples<sup>4</sup> of language which may be used.

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<sup>3</sup> These techniques are also important to create audience interest and establish and maintain a relationship between the presenter and the audience. See Part IV.

<sup>4</sup> Obviously any one single expression is enough.

### II.1.1 Get the audience's attention and signal the beginning

*Right. Well. OK. Erm.  
Good. Fine. Great.*

*Let's get the ball rolling.  
Let's get down to business.*



*Shall we start?  
Let's begin.  
Can we start?*

### II.1.2 Greet audience

It is important to greet the audience by saying something like:

*Hello ladies and gentlemen.  
Good morning members of the jury.  
Good afternoon esteemed guests  
Good evening members of the board  
Fellow colleagues, Mr. Chairman/Ms Chairwoman.  
Thank you for your kind introduction.*



### II.1.3 Introduce yourself, (name, position, and company)

The purpose of introducing yourself is to identify yourself for the audience but also to establish expertise on or experience of the subject thus providing credibility and allowing the audience to see where you are coming from<sup>5</sup>. A student, researcher, director, manager, neophyte or layman do not all have the same expertise or authority.

*Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce myself.  
Good morning everyone, I'd like to start by introducing myself.  
My name is...*

*I am a student at the Telecom Business School  
I am a doctoral candidate in...  
I am X Y from 3 Com. I'm the manager of...  
I am a researcher from ... I've been working on the subject now for X years...  
I've had wide experience in the field of ...*

*Good morning, my name is Lawrence Couderc. I am a student at Telecom SudParis and I would like to talk to you today about some of my findings in a study I did on...*



Sometimes, especially when invited to speak, the host introduces the guest, by giving the same information as above and then the floor<sup>6</sup> to the guest speaker.

*I am very pleased and proud to introduce ...who is.... He/she is known for... Now I'll hand over the floor over to today's speaker.*

<sup>5</sup> Expertise may also be inferred from a person's job title or position.

<sup>6</sup> *prendre la parole* = to take the floor. Someone gives the floor to someone. Someone takes the floor. Someone has the floor.

#### II.1.4 Give title and introduce subject

What exactly are you going to speak about? Give the title. The title should be specific to effectively communicate the topic of the presentation to the audience. Give a rough idea or a working definition of the subject: i.e. in a few words what the topic of the speech is. Situate the subject in time and place, in relation to the audience and/or its importance.

*I plan to speak about...*  
*Today I'm going to talk about...*  
*The subject of my presentation is...*  
*The theme of my talk is...*  
*I've been asked to give you an overview of...*

Why are you going to speak? Why are you going to speak about the particular topic to a particular audience?

*I have chosen to speak about this because...*  
*I was asked to speak about X because...*

The reason for speaking about a particular topic to a particular audience should be made explicit unless everyone is aware of it. It may be the result of a desire to persuade and convince. It may be comparison of two or more products, plans or proposals to aid in making a decision.

Culture may be important here; scientists want to demonstrate their work and findings while managers and humanities people want to share ideas and reflections with their audience.



Have you set any limits on the scope of your talk? What won't you speak about? It may be very useful to eliminate certain areas before you start so as to avoid confusion or deviation from your main task. It also protects you from criticism later for not covering certain aspects or issues.

Have you estimated the time it will take?<sup>7</sup> It is useful to give the listeners some idea of how long you will speak so as to maintain their attention.

*Today, I'll be concentrating on...*  
*I will not speak about...*  
*I have limited my speech to...*  
*My talk will last about 15 minutes.*  
*I will speak for 15 minutes.*

You may want to give acknowledgements here too. If you have been sponsored, supported or encouraged by a particular firm, organization, professor, etc. you may want to recognize their contribution. Your research and paper may have been the work of a collaborative effort and you should acknowledge this by giving the names of all the participants.

At some point you should ask a question or somehow try to determine the attitude and knowledge of the audience. How do they feel about the subject? You may

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<sup>7</sup> Concerning time, professional people are very often pressed for time. The average person's attention span is also very, very short. Conclusion: the shorter the better!

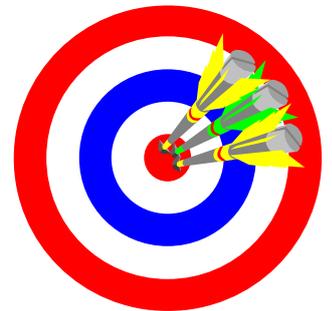
then have to modify the content of your speech, as you may not know the audience as well as you thought you did.

*Have you<sup>8</sup> ever heard of...?  
You may already know...  
I feel sure that some of you...  
Every day you encounter...  
You've probably seen countless times...  
You may have wondered...*

### II.1.5 Give your objectives (purposes, aims, goals)

A speech should have two purposes: a general purpose and a specific one. The general purpose of an informative speech is to have the audience understand and remember a certain amount of information: the current situation or how to do something or how something is done.

*What I would like to do today is ....to explain  
to illustrate...  
to give you the essential background information on...  
to outline...  
to have a look at...  
to present...  
.....to summarize...*

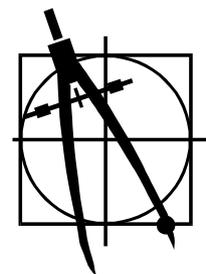


This, however, is not enough. What do you the speaker really want the audience to remember, or to do afterwards, or to take away with them after listening to you? This is the specific purpose.

*My purpose in writing this document, "Effective oral presentation skills: a practical guide" is to give you a solid background on the subject of oral presentation skills so that in the future, at TEM or elsewhere, you can deliver an effective speech in front of a group.*

*What I want my listeners to get out of my speech is...  
If there is one thing I'd like to get across to you today it is that...*

Once you have established your objectives you may go on to formulate the rest of the presentation.<sup>9</sup>



### II.1.6 Announce your outline (also called the **agenda**)

You want to keep the outline short and simple; two or three main points are usually enough. The headings of the outline should be of the same grammatical form.

Depending on the context or specific cultural environment, the outline may or may not appear on a slide. Some consider it rather scholastic. However, in the course of the presentation, the outline should be referred to through signposting as we will see later.

Today with slide presentation software it is possible to use a slide tracker to enable people to know in which part of the presentation the speaker is.

<sup>8</sup> The use of "you" in each of the sample phrases also attracts the audience's attention and creates a relationship between the speaker and the audience.

<sup>9</sup> If you change the purpose of the speech (or the time, place or audience), the outline should also be changed.

*I have broken my speech down/up into X parts.  
I have divided my presentation (up) into Y parts.  
In the first part I will give a few basic definitions.  
In the next section I will explain  
In part three, I am going to show...  
In the last part I would like/want to give a practical example...<sup>10</sup>*

### **II.1. 7 Questions and comments from the audience**

It is a very good idea to inform the audience during the introduction of your policy on asking questions. It is up to you to decide when and whether you will accept questions.

*I'd ask you to save your questions for the end.  
There will be plenty of time at the end of my speech for a discussion.  
You may interrupt me at any moment to ask questions or make comments.  
Please stop me if you don't understand anything I say but could you keep any specific questions until after I've finished.*

### **II.1.8 Make a transition between the introduction and the body**

Let the audience know that you have finished the introduction by making a transition to the body<sup>11</sup>.

*Now let us turn to point one.  
Let us now move on to the second part, which is, as I said earlier....*

In general, a transition can be indicated by using a **divider slide** between two parts.

If you are giving a technical presentation a glossary<sup>12</sup> might be useful and avoid unnecessary interruptions. Always explain abbreviations and say acronyms giving their full name when you first mention them and be especially careful with the pronunciation.

<sup>10</sup> Notice the variety of ways of indicating parts and variety of grammar, i.e. verb forms that follow.

<sup>11</sup> You will also need to do this between each part of the presentation.

<sup>12</sup> Often the aim of the first part of the body is to define key concepts.

## II.2 THE MIDDLE OR THE BODY

### II.2.1 Content

What and how much information should you include in your speech? All your information should support your purpose. In most cases you will have to limit the content, as time is precious!

### II.2.2 Quantity

How much information should you give? Enough to clearly develop your ideas. Illustrate your ideas through convincing, concrete examples.

### II.2.3 Sequencing the content

There are many ways of organizing content: *logical; chronological order; cause/effect; problem/solution; from general to specific; from known to unknown; from accepted to controversial*. Whatever sequencing you choose, the headings should be all of the same grammatical form.

### II.2.4 Keeping the audience's attention

The beginning and the end of a talk are what listeners will pay most attention to and hopefully remember. You therefore need to make an effort to keep the audience's attention throughout the middle of the speech. (See part IV.)

### II.2.5 Signposting or signaling where you are



Just as when you are driving a car and you see road signs to guide you on the way to your destination, when giving a presentation you need to guide the listener to constantly inform him/her where you are. This is done by using metalanguage, i.e. language that talks about language. You announce what you are going to say and then you say it. For example:

*Now that I have introduced the problem I would like to turn to some of the financial consequences of doing nothing.*

*That's all I am going to say about finance for the moment but I will return to the subject in my conclusion.*

*Before I conclude let me remind you of the three clear warning signs that we should not ignore*

Signposting may seem to introduce redundancy to the talk but it is very useful as the audience may not always be paying attention, become distracted or confused, or lose their place. NEVER forget to announce that you are going to conclude!

### Listing information

Much information is presented in list format, which is for some a necessary evil. One way of presenting lists effectively is to vary the language whenever possible and above all avoid reading text directly.

*There are three things we have to consider: one, two, and three.*

*Now let us look at the first aspect which is...*

*First of all,...*

*In the first place...*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Do **not** use: *in a first time, at first, at last, firstable*.

## Linking ideas, sections/making transitions

Just as you indicate examples, announce you are at the end of one section and going to begin the next. A very brief summary or reminder of key information can also be given, especially if necessary to remember during the presentation, or if explanation particularly complicated, detailed or technical. Experienced presenters will make a clear pause or change their stance and pitch of their voice as they move from one part of a presentation to another.

*I have finished defining key concepts and now will go on to the next part which is...*  
*That's all I would like to say about ..., now let us turn to the next point, which is....*  
*Now that we've seen... let us turn to...*

## Outlining options

If there are alternative ways of looking at a topic or proposal, outline them to show you are familiar with the different ways of dealing with a situation.

*There seem to be two possible ways of dealing with this...*  
*We've looked at this from the point of view of the manufacturer but what about if we were to look at it from the consumer's point of view?*  
*A number of options present themselves at this point....*

If what you are dealing with demands a comparison of strengths and weaknesses indicate clearly the different aspects and underline the points you feel are important or secondary.

*What exactly are the benefits?*  
*On the plus side we can add...*  
*This is not the only weakness of the plan...*  
*We cannot ignore the problems that such an action would create...*  
*We do not need to concern ourselves with...*  
*Of lesser interest are...*

**Examples, reformulation, summaries etc.** enable a speaker to be clear and concrete.

### To give an example:

*Now let's take an example.*  
*An example of this can be found...*  
*To illustrate this...*  
*Let's see this through an example.*  
*For example,*  
*For instance,*  
*e.g.*

### To rephrase:

*Let me rephrase that,*  
*In other words*  
*Another way of saying the same thing is*  
*That is to say*  
*i.e.*

### To summarize:

*To summarize*  
*To sum up,*  
*Let me summarize by saying*  
*So that concludes my overview*  
*In conclusion*  
*Briefly said*  
*In short,*  
*What I've tried to show in this part...*  
*To recap what we've seen so far...*

### To emphasize

*What is very significant is...*  
*What is important to remember...*  
*I'd like to emphasize the fact that...*  
*I'd like to stress the importance of...*  
*I'd like to highlight...*

*I'd like to underline...*  
*What I tried to bring out...*  
*What we need to focus on...*

**To refer to what you have said previously:**

*As I have already said earlier...*  
*As we saw in part one...*  
*To repeat what I've said already...*

**To refer to what you will say:**

*We will see this a little later on.*  
*This will be the subject of part 3.*  
*We will go into more detail on that later.*  
*We'll see that in greater depth later.*

**To refer to what an expert says:**

*I quote the words of...*  
*In the words of...*  
*According to...*  
*Here I'd like to quote...*  
*As Mr. X says in his book...*  
*There is a famous quotation that goes...*

**To refer to common knowledge:**

*As you all may well know...*  
*It is generally accepted that...*  
*As you are probably aware (of)...*



## 11.3 THE END OR CONCLUSION

The end of a presentation should summarize key information presented and may include some kind of final call to action, or opening to other (related) issues. It should never come as a surprise to an audience or be abrupt.



### 11.3.1 Content

The end or the conclusion of a presentation should include: a brief reminder of what you tried to show in your speech and how you tried to do so, a short conclusion, thanks to the audience for listening, and an invitation to ask questions, make comments or open a discussion.<sup>14</sup>

At the end you should briefly summarize your speech in a few lines to make sure the audience has retained the main points. Alternatives are: to state the point of the speech; give the essential message to retain; list the main points and what you want the audience to remember; review informally or indirectly by using a quote, a comparison or example.

To signpost the end of your talk you may say.

*I'd like to summarize/sum up*

*At this stage I would like to run through/over the main points...*

*So, as we have seen today...*

*As I have tried to explain this morning BT finds itself in....*

Then you should give some kind of conclusion, i.e. you should give a message that logically comes out of the ideas developed in your speech. It may have been the specific aim given in the introduction. Other possibilities include: a commentary, the lessons learned, some recommendations, or the next steps. You could also make a call to action; the audience should have to do something.

*In conclusion I would like to say that...*

*My final comments concern...*

*I would like to finish by reminding everyone that...*

To be very effective, good presenters put this key information on the last or conclusion slide. That is the information that the presenter wants the audience to remember. It is here that any recommendations or proposals that you wish to make should be displayed

*As a result we suggest that...*

*In the light of what we have seen today I suggest that...*

*My first proposal is...*

If you need to, distribute any text, or more detailed information such as a report, results, etc.

*I've prepared a slim folder of the proposals...*

*In the sheets that are now being distributed you will find a breakdown of the...*

Thirdly, thank the audience for being there.

*Thank you very much for your time/attention.*

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<sup>14</sup> A conclusion does not introduce new information.

Avoid a slide with “thank you” written on it. It is polite but does not convey key information. A better idea is to leave contact information and useful links on display while you answer questions.

Finally, invite questions and comments or invite a discussion. If you choose the former, you put yourself in a superior position compared to the audience and are considered as an expert. You will need to be very prepared intellectually and psychologically to transfer control to the audience and be able to answer any questions. However, in the case of the latter, you put yourself more or less on equal terms with the audience and do not have to be the expert with all the answers! The audience may have some clear ideas or some practical knowledge about the subject!

*I'd be happy to answer any questions....  
If there are any questions please feel free to ask.  
Please feel free to make any suggestions or comments*



### II.3.2 Dealing with difficult questions <sup>15</sup>

At the end you may have to deal with questions and comments which may or may not be easy, polite or relevant. Always be polite and positive.

1. Make sure you understand the question.
  - Ask the question back to see if you understand
  - Repeat the question in your own words to check that you have understood.
  - If not, ask the questioner to repeat

2. In answering difficult questions you may use the following techniques:

- Delay the answer (ask for time and/or repeat the question)

*Just a minute please. What is a...?*

*How can I put it?*

*I'm glad you asked that question.*

*That's a good question/point/remark.*

*Can I answer that question later?*

- Admit that you are not responsible for a particular piece of information

*I saw that in the work of...*

- Agree but give an alternative point of view

*I agree with you but there is another way of looking at it.*

## II.4 SUMMARY OF PART II

To make an effective presentation and give a good image of yourself or your firm, careful preparation and organization are required. You need to take into consideration who you are speaking to, when, where, and why, as all of these details will have an impact on the structure and content of your speech. A well-structured speech with a step-by-step approach is one that is easy to follow. Besides structure, it is also necessary to be relatively repetitive. Remember the golden rule:

**The golden rule is: announce what you are going to say, say it and finish by saying what you've said.**

In addition to verbal communication a message is transmitted via many other channels or media: visuals, body language and the voice. These are the subjects of the following sections.

<sup>15</sup> See Powell 1996, pp. 110-118 on tactics to employ in dealing with difficult questions.

### III. VISUALS<sup>16</sup>

#### What are visuals?

Visuals are any kind of visual media used to communicate a message.

- graph<sup>17</sup>
  - table
  - image
  - photo
  - drawing
  - diagram
  - real object
  - sample
  - slide
- chart
  - histogram
  - video/film
  - map
  - illustration
  - plan/layout
  - model
  - mockup/prototype
  - slideshow



#### Why use visuals?

- to present information clearly
- to illustrate points easier to understand in visual form but difficult in a verbal form (e.g. statistics)
- to reinforce ideas
- to serve as logical proof
- to bring more interest to a talk
- to focus the audience's attention
- to pull the audience into the talk
- to involve and motivate the audience
- to help the audience understand
- to change focus from aural/oral to visual
- to involve all the senses
- to respect conventions
- to save time and avoid writing information on a board
- to avoid turning back to the audience when writing on a board
- to help the speaker remember key data, or other information, ease memory load in delivering the speech
- to provide a trace for audience of what was said and to take away as future reference.

#### Slides

Slides, especially ones that are created from **presentation software** (also known as **slideware**), e.g. Power Point<sup>®18</sup> and projected onto a screen from a laptop computer through a video projector are commonly used today. Even though slides are great visuals, they may not always be appropriate and do require particular care in terms of design and use.

#### What should you put on a visual?

On the first slide or perhaps on the bottom of each slide:

- name of speaker
- name of company with company logo
- name of conference or event

<sup>16</sup> For more information on describing visuals, especially graphs and the movement of the curve on a graph, see Sweeney 1997. On exploiting visuals see Powell 1996, pp. 20-29.

<sup>17</sup> For more vocabulary of charts see the end of this section.

<sup>18</sup> There is some resistance to Powerpoint™. Criticism includes the pre-formatting, ubiquity, bulleted ideas, boredom, lack of personal style and limits of cognitive load. See Tufte or <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html> [http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/in\\_defense\\_of\\_powerp.html](http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/in_defense_of_powerp.html)

- date of presentation
- title of presentation

Other text should include:

- headings, parts of the presentation, so audience knows where the speaker is or **slide tracker**
- main points in short phrases or as key words, i.e. a telegraphic style rather than full sentences (unless the slides are the deliverable).
- any information which is easier to visualize or any that the audience may want to note down such as: technical information, statistics, lists, examples, definitions or quotations (may be in full sentences).

It is a generally accepted rule of thumb to have no more than six or seven lines of text and six or seven words per line.

There is also trend to use very little text, and to rely on images. Any text, such as numbers or single words (labels), are incorporated into some kind of image. See **data visualization**<sup>19</sup>.

## Design

Design includes layout, fonts (typeface), size of text, colors.

- Layout should be pleasant and easy to read: horizontal/landscape layout is preferable.
- **Template**. Easy to use but try to personalize it. It does become boring to see the same one used over and over again. It is also a good idea to choose one that fits the topic. For example, a presentation on hygiene might profit from a white background with a sober design to suggest purity.
- Avoid cluttering the background with a clip, photo or other image. These sometimes make the text difficult to read.
- Contrast between background and text. The choice of light or dark background with light or dark print depends on the light available in the room where the presentation will take place. Text has to be readable. Often the best choice is a light background with blue or black print.
- Use sans serif fonts: Arial, Calibri, Trebuchet, Microsoft sans serif, Verdana, New Century Schoolbook and Courier.
- Use at most two different fonts.
- Font size - maybe **20** or more depending on the size of the room you will be speaking in. A good idea is to use different sizes for different types of text: i.e. **20** for main headings, **16** for subheadings, **14** for other text.
- Use CAPITAL LETTERS, **bold face**, *italics*, underlining, **reverse** (white on black) or **shading** to highlight but only when necessary.
- Avoid using only capitals.
- Avoid elaborate effects, such as shadow, elaborate builds, dissolves, too many may actually detract from the message as they disturb the audience's attention.

**Spelling.** Check spelling on slides with a spell checker or ask someone to proofread your slides. There should be no mistakes as they reflect on the speaker and company. They suggest, for example, a lack of rigor, care of detail, or expertise with software.

<sup>19</sup> Data visualization is an attractive and effective presentation of data, especially figures. See for example McCandless 2011

## How many?

One every two minutes is sufficient. Too many slides are worse than none at all.

## How should you present a visual in a presentation?

It is not good practice to simply display a slide especially if it contains a graph, chart, table with figures or even image on the screen and expect the audience to turn its attention to it, understand and process the information, come up with the main point and make the link with what you are saying. We would suggest the following strategy:

It is important to prepare your audience for what they are going to see. Invite (and even indicate with a gesture or pointer) to look at the screen. Announce what the slide is supposed to illustrate. You may also give the source, explain how to read or interpret the data, present the key and give any other pertinent details.

*Let's look at the current distribution of the market, as you can see...  
I'm going to show you now the most recent figures available...  
My next slide concerns the method by which...*

Remember to draw the audience's attention to key information, trends or points.

*As you can see....  
The first line of figures is the most revealing...  
Notice/observe how the increase has had an effect on the...  
What is important here is the way that...*

You can also try to rephrase your point to give it emphasis and to give the audience time to absorb the information.

*In other words, the number of employees has a direct effect on the...  
Or to look at it in another way, every time you...  
That is to say, no matter what technique is used, the results remain...*

Make sure you clearly explain and give an analysis or interpretation of the key data. How does it relate to the overall topic of the presentation?

Sometimes an audience expects the slides before a presentation. The advantage is it can prepare and formulate questions and comments. Also it saves the audience time as it does not have to take notes. It is often a good idea to prepare a paper copy, called a **handout**, in case of equipment failure to so that listeners can take them away and use them for future reference. Today, slides are sometimes the **deliverable**, that is, they replace a written report.

Slides can also be used as a support for the speaker during the speech: to make sure he/she remembers key parts, or important details, thus relieving memory load and a stress. Some people still prefer **notes** or **note cards** but presentation software includes **speaker notes** (also known as **notes pages**). In either case the speaker should place the computer so that he/she can see the slides clearly and maintain eye contact with the audience.

## Tips

- Visuals should supplement the spoken message and not serve as a crutch for a poor presentation.
- Adjust slides to the audience.

- Test the visuals to see if people sitting at the back of the room can see them. Face the audience and stand to the side of the screen so you do not block the audience's view of the slides.
- Use **builds** to reveal bulleted text point by point, so you can focus on very important information. If not, the audience reads the whole slide, and does not concentrate on the topic being presented at any given moment.
- Put slides in **slide show mode** which enables transition moves from one slide to another easily. To advance use a wireless device or mouse, unless you have a person to help you.
- Use a pointer or a pen to draw attention to a specific point.

### **Vocabulary of graphs/charts**

- axes: horizontal/vertical axis
- bar chart
- flip chart
- flow chart
- histogram
- key
- line graph (algorithmic, linear curve, line,)
- organization chart
- pie chart (segment, slice of the pie)
- source

### **Vocabulary of the equipment used**

- blackboard
- whiteboard
- interactive digital whiteboard/IDW
- video projector
- chalk, felt tip pen, marker
- computer
- eraser
- loudspeakers
- microphone/mike
- overhead projector/overhead/OHP
- paperboard
- podium, lectern
- pointer: (wireless) presentation pointer, laser pointer
- screen
- speakers
- stage

## **IV. CREATING INTEREST AND ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUDIENCE**

Special attention is required, in general, to create interest and establish and maintain a relationship with the audience. An audience may or may not be interested in you or what you have to say. Even if they are, minds wander and people are preoccupied and get distracted. Often the aim of the presentation is to give new information, i.e. move people's minds to new ground, which may require the presenter to adjust to what people think, to constraints, etc.



From the very beginning you need to create interest and continue doing so throughout your speech. You need to put everything on your side to promote information transfer or knowledge acquisition. There are many techniques to accomplish this. It is a good idea to maintain a dialogue (and not a monologue). Other techniques include using rhetorical questions or emphasizing as we will see below.

- Arouse listeners' interest from the beginning. In the introduction show how your subject or what you are going to say, affects or may affect them and their lives. Make your presentation personal by using words like *you*, *we*, *us*, *our*.
- Try to see where the audience is, so you can make any necessary adjustments, even at the last minute, on the spot. For example, they may not have enough background to follow your presentation, know all about the subject you planned to present or be very hostile to change.
- To do so you may use techniques<sup>20</sup> such as:
  - Give an unusual fact, statistic or example.
  - Illustrate with a real life story or anecdote.
  - Ask the audience to do something. "Raise your hands if you know."
  - Ask the audience direct or rhetorical questions.
  - Use of humour such as telling a joke can be effective but be careful and test beforehand!
- General attitude reflects personality, openness, empathy and expertise. Other tips include:
  - Be lively and enthusiastic throughout the presentation.
  - Be brief and clear in giving the subject and purpose of the presentation.
  - Use a variety of media sources.

### **Rhetorical questions**

What is a rhetorical question? A question that a speaker asks but does not expect an answer to. A question does, however, automatically attract attention, perk up the ears and often generate an answer. Why use such a question? To make sure the audience is listening, or to appear to be having a dialogue with the listeners<sup>21</sup>.

*Have you ever seen/heard/experienced...?*  
*How can we explain this?*  
*What does that mean?*  
*What can be done about that?*



<sup>20</sup> See Powell 1996, pp. 82-84.

<sup>21</sup> See Powell 1996, pp. 62-64.

What does this mean for us as consumers?

## Emphasizing/highlighting<sup>22</sup>

- Say something is important.

The important thing to remember is...

The essential element is...

The key point here is...

- Stress key information.

We experimented with the concept over a period of three years.

- Add auxiliary verbs for emphasis.

We did see a noticeable difference.

- Change the word order

What I'd like to show today is the difference between the two products.

Good it may be, easy it isn't.

- Repetition<sup>23</sup>

As I've said before...

Let me repeat,

This is not good for students, it is not good for teachers, it is not good for the school!

Quality is not something that affects the bottom line, it **is** the bottom line.

- Tripling<sup>24</sup>

This method is clearer, cheaper and more consistent.

They said 'no' last year, they say 'no' now, but will they say 'no' next year?

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<sup>22</sup> See Powell 1996, pp. 48-52.

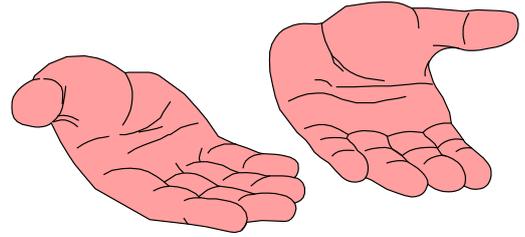
<sup>23</sup> See Powell 1996, pp. 58-60.

<sup>24</sup> For more on tripling see Powell 1996, pp. 69-72.

## V. BODY LANGUAGE

### **What is body language?**

Body language is one form of non verbal communication, which according to some experts represents about 55% of the message. It includes: eye contact, facial expressions, posture, movements, and gestures.



Some body language is very cultural, in that some may be specific to a particular culture, while others can have different meaning.

### **Why is body language useful?**

It is a natural part of communication:

- to clarify meaning; it is very visual
- to vent nervousness
- to maintain interest
- to emphasize and regulate

### **Be natural and relax!**

Below are just a few examples of both positive and negative body language:

#### **Positive body language**

- eye contact to keep audiences' attention (an Asian audience might feel aggressed.)
- facial expressions should be natural and friendly. Don't forget to smile.
  - raise eyebrows to show surprise
  - open eyes wide
  - squint your eyes or knit your eyebrows to show consternation or puzzlement
- posture – stand straight but relaxed (do not slouch or lean)
- movement - to indicate a change of focus, keep the audience's attention
  - move forward to emphasize
  - move to one side to indicate a transition
- gesture
  - up and down head motion or other movements to indicate importance
  - hand (or pen or pointer) to indicate something, especially on a slide.
  - shrug of the shoulders to indicate "I don't know!"
  - hands - back and forth = two possibilities, more or less
  - arm - movement back and forth

#### **Negative body language**

- loss of eye contact with the audience: looking down at notes, looking at the screen, the board, the floor, one particular person, the clock, or turning one's back to the audience
- staring at one person or a part of the audience or looking blankly into people's eyes
- swaying back and forth like a pendulum
- nervous tics
- hands in pockets

## VI. PRONUNCIATION AND VOICE

Correct pronunciation is important to make oneself understood, to demonstrate proficiency and to establish expertise. Incorrect pronunciation is perhaps the first cause of communication breakdown. If the listener is not accustomed to the speaker's native language, he/she will not understand a mispronounced word. Mispronunciation tires the listener's ear, strains the brain's processing of information. It may result in the listener completely turning off.

### VI.1 What is pronunciation?



There are many important aspects of pronunciation of English; they can be the cause of a breakdown in communication and comprehension more than grammar. **The main features** of English pronunciation are:

**Individual sounds or phonemes**<sup>25</sup> are often slightly or even very different from one language to another; a little work, effort and practice are required. One basic problem of French speakers (and many others) of English concerns vowel length: long English sounds are much longer than corresponding French sounds and the short sounds of English are shorter than French short sounds. For example: *ship* vs. *sheep*; *it* vs. *eat*. Schwa is the shortest and most frequent vowel sound in English; it only occurs on unstressed syllables. (e.g.: *man* vs. German; *stem* vs. *system*; *mine* vs. *determine*; *face* vs. *surface*).

**Sounds in connected speech.** Sounds as well as words do not often occur alone but rather one after another, in a chain or connected speech. In the presence of other sounds, sounds may influence each other:

linking - link a consonant to a following vowel: e.g. *Come on!* *Is it?*

elision - a sound disappears: e.g. *I want to go. Tell her!*

assimilation - one sound influences one nearby: e.g. *I wanted...* (Americans pronounce 't' as a 'd'.)

**Stress:** Stress is a syllable that is higher in pitch, longer, or louder than its neighbors (unstressed syllables). English is pronounced with a succession of stressed and unstressed syllables, in a pattern which is particular to English. It is not obvious so it needs to be learned. You can try to listen carefully and perceive it; listen especially for the stressed syllables as they carry important information. Then you need to try to use stress. There are two types of stress: word stress and sentence stress.

**Word stress** occurs in multiple syllable words; one syllable receives the stress (called main stress; long multi-syllable words have another slightly less stressed syllable called secondary stress). The other syllable(s) is(are) not stressed, i.e. is unstressed. Unstressed vowels are sometimes reduced to schwa, the shortest and most common vowel sound in English. Word stress is fixed; the stress pattern cannot be changed, i.e. the word is always pronounced in the same way. Therefore incorrect word stress is very difficult to process for the native speaker and is the cause of communication breakdown.

<sup>25</sup> See "English Pronunciation Notebook for Telecommunications Students". <http://www-cours.int-evry.fr/~storz/pronunciation/>

**Sentence stress** concerns stressing particular words in a sentence usually at regular intervals.<sup>26</sup> A speaker may wish to stress words that communicate his/her main points; sentence stress is not fixed. Words that are usually stressed include: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, negatives, demonstratives and interrogatives. Unstressed ones include articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions. A good idea is to listen to natural English for the stress and try to practice using typical or important phrases in a specific context related to the speaker or topic.

**Intonation** is the rising and falling movement of the voice which is very important for meaning. In general, at the end of a statement (affirmation) the voice goes down. At the end of a question whose answer is yes/no, the voice goes up, while at the end of a questions that begin with a wh- word (who, what, where, when, why, how, ) the voice goes down. The voice goes up after each item in a list and down on the final one.

Finally, phrasing (also called chunking or thought groups) is the grouping together of words; groups are separated by a pause. (See voice below.)

**Tip: Before speaking, make sure you can pronounce proper nouns, words that are similar in English and native language (cognates), numbers and key technical words.**

## VI.2 Voice

The human voice is a very powerful communication medium in itself. The voice, or more precisely the qualities of the voice, should be used to the fullest to deliver an effective presentation.<sup>27</sup> The voice is important:

- to convey authority and confidence
- to indicate importance, meaning
- to create atmosphere
- to communicate enthusiasm
- to maintain the audience's attention (and avoid putting it to sleep!).

Qualities of the human voice include loudness, speed (fast or slow), variety, pitch (high or low), silent moments or pauses.

First and foremost, to make an effective presentation a speaker has to think about pitching his or her voice, not too high or too low. The speaker should also make sure his/her voice sounds pleasant and transmits enthusiasm for the subject and for the opportunity to speak to a given audience.

A sure, loud and clear voice also transmits confidence, thus expertise in delivering information effectively. Speaking relatively loudly and clearly, more practically, serves to: make sure everyone in the audience can hear the message and to make oneself understood. Some miscommunication is due to the fact that sounds are not clearly articulated or pronounced loudly enough.

Delivery and flow. The delivery of the actual text of the presentation, i.e. the flow of speech should be as natural as possible, not too slow or not too fast. Too slow might make listeners fall asleep. If speech is too fast, people do not have time to listen,

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<sup>26</sup> For excellent practice work in the context of everyday expressions, see Graham 1986. See also Powell 1996, pp. 32-45 or *ComScience*.

<sup>27</sup> See Lynch 1986.

identify sounds, words, process information and interpret meaning. When nervous the tendency is for the speaker to speak too fast or when one does not feel comfortable getting up in front of strangers, a large group, or not sure one's message or text, the tendency is to speak too slowly. In both cases, practice is the best cure.

Another idea concerning delivery and flow is to vary them. Known information can be delivered relatively quickly (which is why it is a good idea in the beginning of the presentation to see where the audience really is.) New information can, on the contrary, be delivered more slowly.

Words are not delivered with a pause between each one; they are not delivered one immediately after another (like a machine gun). When words occur one after another in speech, they are grouped together to form a thought group, phrase or chunk. Between each group of words there is a very slight natural pause. By grouping (phrasing or chunking) words a listener can more easily process information. It is a good idea to work on this by marking a part of a written text (preferably of one's actual presentation) and practice it.<sup>28</sup>

Highlighting. The voice is often used to highlight key ideas and information by making a slight pause (silence) before what is said and then speaking slightly more slowly and loudly than normal (in the context of the presentation).

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<sup>28</sup>See Gilbert 1984, Powell 1996, pp. 36-38, or *ComScience*.