

Preparing for a Presentation

Below are some helpful things to think about when preparing for any presentation.

MAKE IT AUDIENCE – CENTERED:

Who is your audience? What do they care about? What can you find out about them that will help you tailor your presentation? What do they know about your subject? What level of detail or sophistication is appropriate? Remember – your presentation should serve THEM. Do your homework here and it will make for a much stronger presentation.

THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS (audience-centered!):

As a result of your presentation, what do you most want your audience:

To Think: what would you like them to know, and remember when they leave?

To Feel: what emotions would you like to create in your audience (that could inspire them to act)?

To Do: what action(s) do you ideally want them to take?

LOOK FOR A “HOOK”:

What kind of opening will grab the audience immediately? Is it an arresting story, a prop, a provocative statement, a shocking statistic, an activity? How does this “hook” relate to your main points?

BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front):

Make it clear!

This should happen somewhere near the beginning. Ie, if I had to leave your presentation after the first 2 minutes, would I get your main message?

A few forms this might take:

“Today I aim to inform you about...”

“My goal here is to persuade you to...”

“I hope you will change your mind about...”

WIIFM (What’s In It For Me?)

As clearly as you can, appeal to what is in this for your audience. Why should they do what you are asking or change their thinking about your topic? Why should they even spend 5 minutes fully attending to your presentation? Paint an inspiring picture of what the future could look like if they do what you ask, change their attitude, learn something important, etc.

CREDIBILITY

Why should the audience listen to YOU? What are your credentials/experiences that make you trustworthy on this topic? Establishing credibility is key to gaining the audience’s trust.

Perhaps someone will introduce you, which can help, but also think about including experiences and references in your speech that will bolster your credibility in the audience's eyes.

ROADMAP

Give us a little agenda or preview for your speech. While this isn't mandatory in every circumstance, it can often help "ground" the audience in the presentation. It is especially helpful if the speech has a lot of complexity.

LOGOS/ETHOS/PATHOS

Aristotle wrote about 3 types of rhetorical appeals:

- 1) Logos – appeal to reason
- 2) Ethos---appeal based on the wisdom, virtue and credibility of the speaker
- 3) Pathos---appeal to the emotions

Some people/audiences respond to one type of appeal more than another. (Your audience research should help you make good choices here.) All three appeals are important and none should be neglected. Are you appealing to all three in your presentation?

TELL IT WITH A STORY:

Stories are great for conveying ethos (values, experience) and pathos (emotions). They also put lasting images in the audience's mind. Can you make your point better with a personal experience or a vivid workplace example?

COUNTERARGUMENTS/OBJECTIONS:

Which are likely to come up? How can you address them? (especially good for a "hostile" audience or a controversial topic, but ALWAYS good to prepare for these.) Letting your audience know that you understand their potential objections (and, in a gracious way, can offer suggestions to overcome them) can build alliance.

PRESENTATION "DESIGN":

What props, costumes, visuals or "takeaways" will make it easier for the audience to engage with you? Is there something surprising or interesting you can wear, bring or demonstrate? Would images enhance or distract from your messages? What will make it most likely an audience will actually do what you are asking? (ie, if you are urging me to write my congressman about an issue, supply me with a sample letter and/or a stamped envelope with an address.)

REHEARSAL, REHEARSAL, REHEARSAL:

There is no substitute for rehearsing "on your feet" in conditions as close as possible to the ones in which you will be presenting. Try to find supportive observers who will give you feedback on what you are doing that is working and what you might change.