



Oral Presentation & Factors Affecting Presentations

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Oral Presentation & Factors affecting Presentations

1. Introduction

A presentation has a face-to-face setting. In fact, it is a formal, well-prepared talk on a specific topic. It is delivered to the audience which is both interested and knowledgeable. The general tone is serious and businesslike. The purpose of making such presentation is to inform, explain, persuade or present a point of view. Such presentation is followed by an interactive session. The person who makes the presentation is expected to answer questions at the end and has the responsibility to ensure that there is clear understanding of all the aspects of the topic among the audience.

2. Principles of effective presentation

According to Sangeeta Magan, an effective presentation can be made by following the simple principle of 'Plan, Prepare and Practice technique'.

Plan

One needs to plan one's presentation on the basis of factors like purpose, context, central idea, content and audience. Before one starts preparing for a presentation, one should know the reason behind making the presentation.

One should also know the circumstances under which one is making presentation. The central idea as well as the content of the presentation will be determined by the occasion, the time of the day, the duration of the presentation as well as the facilities

available at the presentation venue. For instance, if it is a business presentation, then repartee should be avoided. If the presentation is to be made over dinner meeting, it should always be brief.

One must undertake audience analysis before preparing one's presentation. If the audience is highly learned and knowledgeable, then technical presentations can be made. However, if the audience consists of common people, then the presentation should be simple and general.

Prepare

One needs to make a thorough preparation in order to make an effective presentation. One should follow the pattern of introduction, main body and conclusion while preparing a presentation.

Introduction should be such that it should be able to grab the audience's attention at once and at the same time, it should allow the presenter to make a smooth transition to the main body. *Main body* contains the entire idea developed in a logical sequence. The points of the presentation can be developed in the order of occurrence or with reference to layout of physical things or in the order of importance or the cause and effect pattern or the problem and solution pattern. The presenter should conclude the presentation by either presenting his inferences or demonstrating facts or highlight benefits by showing visionary outcomes or challenge the existing situation by appealing for help.

Practice

The success of any presentation depends on how effectively the speech is delivered. One can know the appropriateness of the language, content or style on the basis of ease and comfort with which one delivers one's presentation speech. One can read out from a manuscript, speak from notes, speak impromptu or speak from memory. In any case, one should practice making presentation in front of friends or colleagues and amend one's style of delivery on the basis of inputs provided by them. Such practice sessions will make the presenter realize and understand how he can communicate his interest, enthusiasm, dynamism, intention and confidence to his audience through his appearance, facial expressions, eye contact, postures, gestures, tone, pitch and volume of his voice.

3. Factors affecting Oral Presentation: Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication can help/hinder the effectiveness of the oral presentation. Non-verbal communication can be defined as communication that takes place without any use of words. It can also be called interpersonal process of sending and receiving messages through pitch, speed, tone and volume of voice, gestures and facial expressions, body posture, eye movements and contact, appearance, time, space and silence. It should be noted that one's behaviour and one's elements of speech communicate that which one is unable to communicate through words.

Body Language

Body language stands for the way the body communicates without words, and through the movements of its parts. It is an important factor in oral communication. The study of body language is known as *Kinesics*. Interestingly, the vocabulary of body language is common worldwide. Though much of body language is instinctive, it makes a strong impact on the audience. At the same time, body language is trusted more than words because of its instinctiveness.

The presenter's words and his body language must be in sync. The presenter must not point at the audience, must not hide his hands behind or in the pocket. The presenter must not walk too much while making presentation because it detracts the audience from the message. The presenter should

make eye contact with each one in the audience for a few seconds.

Appearance

Personal appearance is a major factor used in judging a person's personality. People usually get impressed by someone who is attractive, muscular and good in shape. Such person is generally found more credible than less attractive people. Now one cannot change one's physical characteristics but one definitely impress others by one's clothing style, hairstyle and accessories. Clothes play an important role in enhancing one's personality. Shabbily dressed people may cut a sorry figure. Appropriateness for the occasion, the time of the day, the season, the cultural background, the convention of one's organization are various factors affecting one's

clothing. Good personal hygiene and neatness, care of skin, nails and hair are expected and their neglect conveys an unpleasant impression. A well-groomed presenter can not only attract the audience's attention but also inculcate interest in them. The presenter should be calm, composed, confident, sincere and friendly. Whatever one carry should be gracefully carried or else it will communicate before one has opened one's mouth.

Facial expressions

The face is said to be the index of the mind.

Whatever we feel is reflected on our face. The face can convey energy, anger, grief, sincerity and a host of other feelings and emotions. The effectiveness of communication would be negatively influenced if a face expresses negative emotions like irritation,

dejection, fear, confusion, inhibition and so on. A smile means friendliness, while a frown means anger. The presenter should always present a pleasant disposition through facial expressions while making presentation. Expressions accompany the speaker's words and also indicate the listener's reactions. An alert presenter can judge the listener's reaction by the facial expressions which act as a constant feedback.

Eye contact

Eyes are windows to the soul. Eye contact constitutes a very important factor of face-to-face communication. The comfort level for eye contact is three seconds; if extended beyond that can amount to invasion of another's space. People who are aggressive try to fix others with a stare. A person

who is lying usually blinks and avoids eye contact. Persons with lack of self-confidence often avoid eye contact. The presenter loses his/her credibility if he/she does not look into the eyes of their listeners.

Gestures

Gestures are movements of hands or head or body. They are a natural accompaniment of speech. They support and emphasize the speaker's state of mind. If one does not make any movement while speaking, one would appear mechanical and robotic. Gestures like the shaking of head, the shrugging of shoulders convey negative vibes to others. As gestures are closely related to personality, no two persons make exactly the same gestures; yet the general meaning is easily recognized.

Posture

Posture is the position adopted by the body. It can also be explained as the way we sit, stand or carry ourselves. It helps in conveying a message. It reveals a great deal about an individual. Sitting stiffly, may show tension; comfortably leaning back conveys a relaxed mood, eagerly leaning forward shows the listener's interest in the speaker. The presenter should not adopt a stiff posture. Instead he should maintain a poised, alert and communicative bearing.

Energy

It is difficult to describe energy as an aspect of body language. Yet, the fact is that the person with high level of energy leaves a lasting impact on the mind of his audience. The person with a high level of

energy communicates effectively. Energy conveys competence and inspires respect.

4. Factors affecting Oral Presentation:

Paralanguage

The non-verbal aspects of the spoken language are known as paralanguage. It talks about how words are spoken. It includes volume, articulation, pronunciation, pitch, tone, pauses and so on.

Voice

Good voice quality enhances the effectiveness of the presentation. The bad voice quality hinders and detracts the audience's attention from the message.

If the presenter delivers speech in level pitch then he may not be able to hold the audience's interest for any long. Lack of variation in speed of speech will

distract the audience's attention. Varying pitch, pace and volume of the speech can help to put across the message emphatically. Unpleasant voice quality can also affect the effectiveness of one's presentation.

Volume

Volume is the loudness or softness, which is modified according to the number of persons addressed and the distance between the speaker and the audience. The speaker's volume often decides how that person would be received by the audience. A person who speaks loudly can be perceived as aggressive and overbearing while a person who speaks softly is likely to be seen as someone who lacks confidence. One needs to learn to control one's volume depending upon the situation.

Pitch

Pitch refers to the rise and fall in human voice. It can express and convey all our moods, emotions and sentiments. A constant pitch creates monotony. If a speaker is excited, angry, nervous, tense or impatient, he may speak with a high pitch. The speaker may use low pitch in order to show affection, empathy or boredom.

Tone

Tone is the quality of the voice. In other words, it means the quality of sound produced by the voice in uttering words. It expresses the attitude of the presenter. Every language has its own pattern of intonation. The intonation pattern of one's mother

tongue constantly interferes with one's learning of second language.

Rate of speech

Rate of speech refers to the number of words uttered per minute. If a speaker is nervous then he tends to speak fast. As a result, the audience fails to comprehend and digest what is being said by the presenter. On the other hand, if the presenter is very slow then it makes the audience lose interest in the speech.

Rhythm

The modulation of stressed and unstressed elements in the flow of speech is known as rhythm. It is commonly used to express emotions. However, the use of rhythm is not encouraged and appreciated

while communicating on formal occasions like presentations, interviews, group discussions, etc.

Articulation

Articulation refers to one's ability to speak different sounds distinctly. Poor articulation can be due to physical or mental disorders beyond one's control, but most of the time it is a result of years of bad habit. Somebody who does not pronounce words clearly, who has the habit of chopping, slurring or mumbling expressions is likely to be ignored as immature and trivial by the knowledgeable audience.

Space

The study of space as a communicative system is called proxemics. This space can be defined as the distance a person creates between himself and others at home as well as office. The way one uses

space plays a subtle role in body language. The distance one keeps from the other person while speaking, indicates the relationship; one tends to keep a longer distance from a slight acquaintance and gets closer to persons with whom one has a closer relationship. For effective communication, one needs to observe the distance conventions called for by the situations. Negative impact would be created if one gets very close to others while talking in formal situations.

Time

The study of the use of time in non-verbal communication is known as Chronemics. Though it is an important factor in communication, the fact is that time perception varies from person to person and culture to culture. Time perception includes

punctuality, willingness to wait and interactions. The person who uses his own and others' time wastefully, creates an impression of being inefficient and disorganized. However, the boss in most companies hold impromptu meeting in the middle of the work day to indicate his status to his employees. Generally, a sense of timing in conducting work generates respect and goodwill.

Silence

Silence can be a very effective way of communication. Silence is not a negative absence of speech but a positive suspension of speech. In a face-to-face communication, silence indicates many things. Silence can be deliberately used to convey feelings like anger or displeasure. Sympathy with someone who has suffered loss is often expressed by keeping silent. Short silences are effective in giving emphasis to words. Silence can become a barrier in the process of communication if one does not know to interpret or break silence. Silence on the telephone as well as while making presentation can cause discomfort.