**Public Speaking and Presentations**

**Tips for Success – Spark Charts**

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**Five Pillars of Success**

1. **Start planning early.**
2. **Believe in your presentation. If you don’t, no one else will.**
3. **Create realistic expectations and limitations for yourself.**
4. **Always offer something new to your audience.**
5. **Practice, practice, practice.**

**Preparing Your Presentation**

In addition to researching your topic, use the following suggestions to enhance your preparation.

**Know Your Audience**

**You’re giving the speech for your audience’s benefit. Know as much about your audience as possible and make everything in your presentation relevant to your listeners.**

1. **What are the demographics of your audience?** Take note of age, gender, religion, class, ethnicity, and educational background.
2. **What values, beliefs, or attitudes do you think your audience will have?** Do you think they’ll agree or disagree with the points you want to make?
3. **What’s an appropriate language level?** Do you need to avoid certain words or phrases? Can you use topic-specific terminology?
4. **What does the audience want or need?** Comfort? Support? Entertainment? If you know what your listeners need, you can talk about your subject matter in a way that meets their needs.
5. **Will your particular audience think that you are an authority on your subject?** If not, you may have to focus more attention on your qualifications or highlight your use of authoritative sources.
6. **What’s the occasion?** Is it light or serious? Academic, public, or professional? What will your audience’s standards and expectations be, given the occasion? How will you meet those standards?
7. **Time of day:** Are you speaking before, during, or after a meal? Will the audience be tired, distracted, or hungry? This may affect how well you can motivate them to listen.

# Content and Organization

## Selecting Content

ONE THEME SHOULD DOMINATE YOUR ENTIRE PRESENTATION

This theme is not your thesis but rather an overarching emotional idea associated with the subject that keeps both you and your audience connected to the speech. Everything else, even your visuals and jokes, should revolve around this theme. For example, if you’re giving a presentation on solar power, you might want to make your presentation in a room that has a lot of natural light.

MAKE NO MORE THAN FIVE MAIN POINTS

Assume that your audience won’t be able to remember more than five points. Use short, powerful, memorable statements to introduce these main points.

PRESENT ONLY A FRACTION OF WHAT YOU KNOW

You should know more than your audience. Include only those details that people absolutely need to know.

## Presenting Content

EPISODES

Present your content in five- to six-minute chunks, like news stories or music videos. Use each chunk to highlight a specific point and then move on.

TRANSITIONS

Make powerful and seamless transitions with strong leading words that re-engage your audience for each new point.

WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CONTENT

1. **Facts, Figures, and Statistics:** Select useful facts and figures carefully, but don’t use too many.
2. **Authoritative Sources:** Use their credibility to bolster yours.
3. **Quotations:** Use famous or lesser-known quotations to support your theme.
4. **Narratives:** An audience usually will listen to a story.
5. **Definitions:** From the dictionary, or etymologies.
6. **Humor:** Builds affinity, wakes an audience up, grabs attention. Be careful, though, because nothing can backfire more than humor. Things to avoid with jokes: making fun of your audience, off-color jokes, laughing at yourself. Keep it simple, straightforward, and based on your skills. If you can’t tell a good story or appropriate joke, don’t!
7. **Current Events:** Help your audience identify with your material,
8. **Humanize the information** with personal stories and opinions.
9. **A short brainstorm** with your listeners using nonthreatening yes-or-no questions will connect them to the content.

# Organizational Structure

**If you lose your train of thought, you need to have an overall organizational structure to fall back upon. Note: All speeches should follow the following organizational structure (even If one of the sections is only a few seconds long).**

1. INTRODUCTION

Grab the audience’s attention. Establish your credibility. Use a story, a joke, or a quote. Present provocative statistical information, a problem, or a mental image.

1. TITLE

Have a great title ready to engage your audience even further.

1. OBJECTIVE

State your thesis. Tell the audience members what you are going to tell them.

1. OVERVIEW

A simple, short agenda that details the main points you will make. Introduce important source material.

1. THE BIG PICTURE

Provide a synopsis of the subject or field.

1. BODY

This is where you make your argument, (see Body Structures, **below**)

1. SUMMARY

Summarize your five main points in a manner that relates them to your main theme. Your summary should reflect your organizational structure.

1. QUESTIONS

(S**ee** Questions from the Audience, **other side**)

1. CONCLUSION

Address any ideas that may have confused your audience. Re-emphasize your one main theme. Allow your audience to view your support materials or to contact you in the future to give you feedback or ask questions.

# Body Structures

**Use one or several of these frameworks to make your argument in the body of your presentation.**

1. TOPICAL STRUCTURE

Build up to a larger picture by looking at various aspects of one topic.

1. CHRONOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

Follow a timeline.

1. SPATIAL STRUCTURE

Create a mental map to relate your ideas, perhaps assisted by a visual aid.

1. THE FIVE QUESTIONS

Who? What? When? Where? And Why?

1. ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Move from the least to the most important details, or vice versa.

1. CAUSE-EFFECT

Good for persuasive speeches. Show a result, then explain the process from cause to effect.

1. ELIMINATION

Remove all alternatives until there’s only one remaining option—yours!

1. PROBLEM-SOLUTION

Pose a problem and then offer a solution.

1. THESIS-ANTITHESIS

Describe one possible thesis, and then argue the opposite (the antithesis).

1. LOGICAL

1+1=2. Connect several details to make a larger point.

1. YARDSTICK

Lay out a set of criteria that you can use to evaluate your topic.

1. MOTIVATIONAL

Establish a need for your audience and then satisfy that need.

1. CICERO’S SIX RULES OF DISCOURSE

Start with an introduction, state the facts, show areas of disagreement or decisions, offer support for a point of view, eliminate opposing arguments, and conclude.

1. RON HOFF’S STRUCTURE

Introduce an issue of concern, offer a new point of view, back it up with evidence, offer a resolution, and suggest the next steps to take.

# Presentational Aids

**Presentational aids include audio/visual materials, lighting effects, pictures, drawings, photos, maps, graphs and charts (pie, bar, line), whiteboards, chalkboards, marker pads, overhead projections, model replicas, inanimate objects, people, and performances.**

## Handouts

1. Always have a handout that emphasizes your main theme and your five main points.
2. Match your handout graphically to your presentation.
3. Link your handout back to yourself (use appropriate letterhead or include your contact information).
4. Distribute your handouts at the end of the presentation. (Otherwise, your audience might be tempted to skip ahead or rely too heavily on the handout.)

## Computer Slide-show Programs

**Many people use computer programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint® or WordPerfect Presentation for Windows® for professional presentations. If you do:**

1. Stay simple. Avoid wild colors and flowery fonts (use Times New Roman or Arial).
2. A slide should be on the screen at least 10 seconds and no more than two minutes. Don’t let an old thought remain on screen.
3. Break up a slide that is too long, combine slides that are too short.
4. Stand close enough to the computer so that you don’t have to jump back and forth to advance the slides.

## Using Presentational Aids

**Use presentational aids to simplify and clarify your speech, to create a picture, to focus attention, and to add color or sounds. Instead of notes, use your presentational aids to keep you organized and on-track.**

1. Think about the purpose of your aid, how it is normally used. Does it meet your needs? If you don’t need it, don’t use it.
2. Don’t go overboard: presentational aids should add to your presentation, not overwhelm or dominate the speech. You want the audience to connect to you, not to your chart.
3. Make your aids visible, legible, and audible to the audience.
4. With visual aids, use color to break up the main points visually.
5. With slides, observe the 4x4 rule (four lines per page, four words per line).
6. Use equipment that is relevant to the presentation and right for the environment.
7. Interact with your aids physically to create engaging body language.
8. Always have a backup plan in case your audio or visual aids malfunction!

# Delivery

**Most of what your so-called listeners hear is not your words but your tone and your body language. No matter how good your information is, if you don’t communicate well with your voice and body, you’ll fail to engage your audience.**

## Vocal and Breathing Techniques

1. Vary the pitch of your voice; speak in a free and relaxed manner.
2. Your chest should not heave when you breathe. Place a hand on your stomach just below your rib cage and make sure that you’re breathing from your diaphragm. Ask for feedback from others.
3. Volume: on a scale of 1 to 10, try for 6 or 7.
4. Avoid up-talking (raising the pitch of your voice at the end of a sentence), up-talking implies a question when you’re really making a statement, which diminishes your authority and weakens your point.

## Animation

1. Make sure you have points in your presentation that excite you.
2. Show your excitement with your voice, your face, your hands, your posture, and your movement.

## Eye Contact

1. Start with one person in the front—someone who supports you or from whom you’re getting positive feedback. Then move on to someone next to that person. Then to the next person, slowly move around the room, letting your eyes rest on each person for 2-3 seconds before moving on. Delivering one thought per person is a simple rule to try.
2. Avoid: staring down, looking at visual aids too much, racing around the room with your eyes, looking over people. If you lose your train of thought, take a breath, turn to your initial supporter, recompose, and resume.

## Word Selection

1. Do you often say “urn,” “uh,” “like,” “kind of,” or “Do you know what I mean?” If yes, slow down. Practice speaking without these words. Have someone listen to you and tell you when you are using them, or, listen to a recording of yourself.
2. Use active, exciting, “power” or “command” words to constantly engage your audience.
3. Address the audience as “you” in the second person, and try to avoid “I” or “me” unless you are making a personal point.

## Body Language

1. Stand up: Even for an audience of only one person.
2. Use good posture: It improves your breathing, projection, and appearance.
3. Never underdress: Present the best version of yourself for the occasion.
4. Stance: Keep your feet shoulder-width apart and balance equally on both feet.
5. Hands: Don’t put them in your pockets, behind your back, in a steeple, or crossed in front of you. Let them hang at your sides, relaxed. It may feel uncomfortable, but it looks the most relaxed and allows for easy movement. Point with an open hand at people or visual materials. Don’t use fingers or a pointing device unless you need that precision.
6. Avoid extraneous gesturing.
7. Move and gesture with a purpose: For instance, step forward toward the audience to connect on important or emotional points.

## Pace Yourself

1. Pace yourself to speak as if you’re having a regular conversation.
2. Use your slides to help pace yourself.
3. Take pauses between main points.
4. Take natural pauses; give the audience time to process presentation.
5. Experiment with different styles.
6. Practice in front of someone.
7. Practice again and again.
8. Watch what a good speaker does and copy it.

## Types of Delivery

1. Extemporaneous: No notes. Rely on preparation, practice, organization, visuals, and audio materials for a natural feel. **As a rule, this is the most effective type of presentation.**
2. Impromptu: If you’re called upon to give a speech on the spot, take a short pause to plan a mini organization and a couple of main points, write them down and have them handy to stay on topic.
3. Memorized: **This is the hardest method of speaking.** It burdens you with the added anxiety of forgetting your lines and having to start over. Not recommended.
4. Script-in-hand: use only when the wording of your speech is extremely sensitive and precision is absolutely necessary (e.g., if you’re a general, a CEO, or a foreign ambassador). Expect to be stiff, boring, and flat unless you’re a gifted public reader or have practiced a million times.

# Questions from the Audience

PLAN AHEAD

Plan the time you’d like to spend on questions, unless your audience is terribly lost and needs to ask a question during your speech, save questions for the end of the presentation. Put the information you want people to ask about near the end of the presentation. Anticipate what questions the audience might ask and practice responses to them out loud.

HANDLING QUESTIONS

Clarify the question and repeat it. Be concise, specific, and brief. Don’t bring up other issues; always focus on the question. Avoid coming across as defensive.

TO ANSWER OR DEFER?

If you’re unsure about an answer to a question, feel free to admit that you don’t have the answer, tell the questioner and the audience you will follow up, confirm when you’ll respond, and get back to them, or, if you feel confident doing so, you can seek help from someone else in the audience.

**Common Problems and Solutions**

**NERVOUSNESS?**

1. Practicing will give you confidence.
2. Don’t apologize for anything.
3. Try to develop a routine that you do to combat nervousness. Try breathing, stretching, taking a drink, taking a brisk walk, etc.
4. Don’t fight nervousness, accept that energy and try to use it.
5. Before presenting, let your body relax, let your arms dangle, tense and release your muscles from your feet to your head.
6. Breathe deeply.
7. Don’t sit with your legs crossed.

**OVER THE TIME LIMIT?**

1. Cut out material rather than talk faster. A rushed presentation always is worse. Your audience doesn’t need to know everything.
2. Plan beforehand what you’ll cut in case you start to run long.

**AUDIO/VISUAL EQUIPMENT BREAKS?**

1. Print a copy of your slide show beforehand so that you can work from it even if it can’t be projected.
2. Relax and don’t apologize or mention the malfunction unless you have to.
3. Either move on, take a short break to fix the problem, or get help.
4. If you can successfully move forward, your audience will respect you even more.

**SHOULD YOU USE NOTES?**

No. uses your visuals instead of notes and practice to give yourself confidence. If you have to, place a piece of paper with a couple of guidelines on a nearby table for support in case of emergencies. If you hold it in your hand, you’ll refer to it even if you don’t need it, which then might pull you off track.

**FOOD?**

1. Never try to compete with food.
2. If there’s food in the room, provide a break for people to get food or tell them before you begin that they should get their food first.

**RUDE OR HOSTILE QUESTIONS?**

1. Remember: you’re in control. Never lose your temper. Avoid defensiveness. Never respond sarcastically.
2. Take it in stride, try and be helpful in response.
3. Diffuse the situation. Move through the problem slowly or defer the question/comment to a later date.
4. If the question or comment is a suggestion, thank the person for it and move on.

**SKEPTICAL AUDIENCE?**

If you sense that your audience is, or will be, skeptical about your authority or material, use straightforward, logical arguments. Avoid making grand, unsupported assumptions.

**MULTIPLE PRESENTERS WORKING TOGETHER?**

1. Know one another’s strengths and weaknesses, who likes to lead? Who is better with details?
2. Listen to each other during the presentation.
3. Avoid contradicting each other.