

Welcome to HP's Great Presentations Podcast. We would love to hear what you think of this format. Let us know at www.hp.com/go/feedback_pod2.

Stun audiences with your presentation skills

Few people think of giving a presentation as something enjoyable. Even fewer think of it as something easy to do. But armed with the right information, just about anyone can improve their presentation skills. That's what you'll hear in this podcast — a lot of information that will help you give an effective and stimulating presentation.

[Lesson 1]

Set Your Expectations and Goals

When it comes to planning a presentation, you need to answer two important questions:

- What do you want out of this presentation?
- What does your audience want?

Most presentations are one of two general types: informative and persuasive. In an *informative* presentation, you introduce a new subject or re-examine a familiar one. Your intent is to inform and present the facts as objectively as possible. In a *persuasive* presentation, you try to change the listeners' views or actions. Your objective is to present a clear opinion on the subject, and then convince your audience that you're correct.

Although your presentation will have much of the same information whether you intend to inform or persuade, you'll need to follow through with one approach or the other. Starting off a presentation in an informative way and then switching to a persuasive tone halfway through — or vice versa — just won't work. It will confuse your audience and waste their time — and yours. Figuring out which approach to take and sticking to it will make your presentation, and the visual aids you prepare for it, much stronger.

Size Up the Crowd

In addition to the approach you'll take, another important consideration is your audience. We all know that people subconsciously tailor their speech to changing situations. You may have the same argument and the same points to get across. But you tend to state your case differently depending on the makeup of your audience and the context. The same holds true for presentations. If you consciously groom your message for the people you're addressing, you'll make your presentation much more meaningful.

Find a Way to Relate

You could be a super presenter in most respects. But if you can't make your message relate in some way to the lives and experiences of your listeners, you'll never win them over.

To make your presentation as relevant as possible, consider five factors about your audience.

- **Size:** Will the group be large or small? Formality and structure work well for presentations to big groups. But in small settings that same formality and structure may seem stifling — and so a more casual approach usually works better.
- **Demographics:** Who will be listening to you? Age, career, ethnic or cultural background, socioeconomic status, educational background, gender — all these factors play a role in what you can and should say to your audience.
- **Knowledge level:** What do your listeners already know about the subject of your presentation? Whether you're informing or persuading, you may need to prep the audience with some background.
- **Motivation:** What do your listeners hope to get out of your presentation?
- **Appealing audio-visual aids:** Is this a techno-savvy crowd who have all "been there, done that" with anything remotely high-tech? Or is it a group who will be wowed by PowerPoint and a digital projector?

Visual Aids

What can visual aids contribute to your presentation? Quite a lot. They enable *sensory contact* with your audience — and that helps you get your message across on levels beyond the verbal. They can also add variety and improve topic comprehension.

A few of the most commonly used visual aids include images, posters, physical objects, charts, graphs, flip charts, white boards, and handouts. Which options will be most effective for your presentation depend on the topic, audience, and venue. More details about some of these visual aids are coming up.

Electronic Audio-Visual Tools

Audio-visual tools can greatly enhance your presentation. And, besides, modern audiences now expect at least some form of electronic aids. Look to laser pointers, overhead projectors with transparencies, films and audio, computers, and presentation software to liven up your presentation.

Power Point has become widely used as presentation software, in large part because it's made by Microsoft and included with the company's popular Office suite. Among its

many features, the application includes templates that let you quickly incorporate images, charts, graphs, and text. Later, we'll further explore presentation software.

Handouts Are *Not* Passé

You might consider handouts a thing of the past. Not true. They can actually do double-duty: serve as a presentation aid, and also as take-away materials.

Since handouts aren't intended to be read as you're speaking, you can include more information in them than in other visual aids. If you plan to distribute handouts afterward as a take-away package, feel free to load them up with information.

Be sure to compile your take-away materials in an attractive package. For handouts, use professional-quality covers and binding, and print them in color.

[Lesson 2]

Organize and Assemble Your Presentation

After pinpointing the message you want to get across, you need to determine how you'll present it. A good way to prepare is to create an outline of the most important points you want to make throughout the presentation, and then add some brief scripting to help prompt you through a mind "blank." But, beware! Don't script your entire presentation word for word, gesture by gesture. Doing this can lead to anxiety on your part, and a potentially boring, cold presentation for your listeners.

This isn't to say you should show up for your presentation completely unprepared and expecting to wing it. In any presentation, it's essential to get to the point quickly and stay on topic throughout. The best way to sustain this oral efficiency is to outline what you have to say beforehand.

Gather Your Points, Facts, and Supporting Evidence

Before you can create an outline, of course you need ideas and points to organize. Determine which points best support your message and which facts are the most relevant. Then throw out anything that doesn't support that message and facts.

A presentation simply isn't credible without supporting materials. Without evidence to back up your claims and show that what you say is true, no one will buy it. Evidence provides the substance for what would otherwise be nothing but an outline of ideas.

Think about how much support each of your salient points may need. The types of evidence at your disposal include facts and figures, statistics, statements by authority, testimony, narratives, humor, and definitions.

Of these evidence types, only facts and figures, statistics, and testimony can actually prove anything. If you really want to prove something, you'll need to include one or more of them in your presentation to strengthen your argument. You may want to also include other types of evidence as well — such as a narrative or two to show the subject in human terms, or humor to ease the crowd.

Select an Organization Structure

The next trick after gathering your information is to organize it. The body of your presentation needs some kind of order. Yet the *type* of organization you use depends on your overall topic and purpose. Certain subjects lend themselves naturally to certain structures, the most common of which are:

- **Topical**, which relates distinct ideas to the theme and makes each a main point. It's the most useful for informative speeches.
- **Chronological**, which is framed around a time sequence. It's useful for both informative and persuasive speeches because each requires background information.
- **Classification**, which puts material into categories. This is useful for both informative and persuasive speeches.
- **Problem and solution**, which describes a problem and presents a solution. This is useful for persuasive speeches.
- **Cause and effect**, which describes the cause of a problem and then presents its effects. Most useful for persuasive speeches.

Whichever organization structure you choose, just make sure you stick with it throughout the presentation. Jumping from one type to another can be almost as confusing as having no organization structure at all.

Transitions Make the Presentation Go Round

Transitions play an important role in a polished and engaging presentation. They keep your audience from getting confused as they absorb the information you provide. If your points have no markers between them and run together with no distinction, listeners may not realize that you've moved on to a new topic — or why the current evidence you're providing is relevant.

Think of transitions as the cement that bonds the parts of your presentation together. They come in two flavors: the kind that reinforces the organization by emphasizing where your presentation has been and where it's headed, and the kind that demonstrates how your ideas relate to the theme of your presentation by pulling the listeners back for a moment to remind them of the main topic that brought them to your presentation in the first place.

Working Visual Aids into the Mix

Now that you've assembled your ideas and transitions into a cohesive plan for a presentation, you're ready to decide where the visual aids will go. Visuals serve to focus attention, arouse and sustain interest, and help you quickly get ideas across that are complicated and difficult to comprehend with words.

Go through your outline to see which ideas would be best expressed by the power of an image. Keep in mind that effective visual aids can accomplish several objectives. They improve your listeners' understanding of the topic, support your evidence, reinforce your points, provide variety, and make an impact so that your presentation will be memorable.

When it's time to select visual aids, you need to consider your audience and the type of information you're presenting. Let's explore predigital, then digital options.

Generally, predigital materials such as posters, flip charts, and white boards are low-cost, simple solutions that are best suited for smaller crowds. Flip charts and white boards are a great way to interact with an audience and keep them involved. They can be prepared before the presentation but still be altered or expanded upon during it, which increases your interactivity with listeners.

Here are a few tips for specific visual aids:

- **Handouts:** If you plan on giving out handouts before your talk, make sure they're brief. A concise, skeletal outline of your presentation will give listeners something to take notes with and help them stay engaged. PowerPoint has a feature that prints your slides in handout format, allowing your listeners to have an exact copy of your slides with space to add personal notes.
- **Charts and graphs:** The heading should point out what you want the viewer to see in the numbers. Whatever style of chart you use, don't get hung up on the numbers during your presentation. Instead, state clearly what the numbers are saying.
- **Flip charts:** When you're using a flip chart, get the height of the easel right, and come loaded with paper. Use markers of dark colors, write legibly, and try not to vary the size of your letters. Keep drawings or other doodles as simple as possible. For the best visibility, don't write or draw in the bottom third of the page.

Digital Tools

Using computer-projected presentation software is a versatile option. You can create a pleasing, all-in-one visual aid, incorporating multiple types of materials in one seamless presentation. Since everything in your computer can be projected, you don't need to bring

several bulkier types of visual aids. Plus, an electronic presentation is easy to transport, and you can make last-minute changes in a snap.

[Lesson 3]

Set the Stage

Once you've organized your presentation, it's time to turn your attention to the venue. It's important to size up the physical surroundings because they will affect both you and your audience. For example, you'll have to work harder to keep the attention of a small crowd in a large space.

When you're looking for a space for your presentation, you should consider the important factors of capacity, seating, opportunities for audio-visual equipment, and potential distractions.

In some cases, you'll have little or no control over your venue. But knowing what to expect will at least let you work around the shortcomings.

Design Your Materials

The visual aids you prepare for your presentation should be so simple that your audience will "get" them at a glance. But that doesn't necessarily mean they'll be simple to make.

As you gather and create the materials, it's important to keep good design in mind. Here are a few universal rules:

- Use visual aids to illustrate main points, and not details.
- Don't include too many visual aids. Remember — pictures talk louder than words.
- The best visual aids require little text, if any at all, to convey a concept. If you do include text, make it very brief.
- If your listeners can't grasp the point of a visual aid in ten seconds, then you need to rethink it.
- Your audience should be able to see your materials from anywhere in the room. Keep this in mind as you figure out the size of graphics and text.
- Your goal is to select images that will grab an audience's attention. So try to use artwork — and, by all means, avoid common clipart that your audience has seen over and over again. There are many resources for finding unique clipart. HP has partnered with iStockphoto to provide high-quality stock images. Visit www.hp.com/go/stockphotos for more information.
- Visual aids will get a better response if they have a similar look. Avoid varying the color schemes, fonts, or other elements among them, unless you have a very good reason.

Presentation Software

PowerPoint is probably the most commonly used presentation software. It includes tools for the following:

- selecting colors, fonts, formats, and styles
- importing content from word processing programs or charts from spreadsheet applications
- creating your own graphics
- templates
- outlines based on presentation type
- presentation wizard – step-by-step help

PowerPoint can be an effective tool to help audiences remember your message while allowing you to support your claims. But use it judiciously. Its flashy graphics can disconnect the materials from the presenter.

You know the importance of word transitions. However, they're just as important with images. PowerPoint comes with a number of transition effects between slides. These transitions can go a long way toward reflecting and reinforcing the tone of your presentation. In addition, they can affect the pacing of your speech. For instance, fade through black always seems to take a lot longer than a quick wipe or split, building momentum for your next point.

One final note about PowerPoint. The Notes section is a handy place to dump any unwanted information that didn't make the cut as a visual. This area is also frequently used for speaker notes. You can print this text out later as a handout.

High-Tech Packing

High-tech packing involves packaging your PowerPoint presentation for sending off to an audience prior to an event or to a remote client who can't attend your presentation, or to save on a CD or flash drive to use on a different computer at an event venue. Packaging saves all of the files and fonts you or anyone else needs to properly display your presentation at a remote site. Microsoft PowerPoint features an easy “Pack and Go” tool that does this for you.

Practice Presenting

Even if you plan to have your outline handy during the presentation, you'll still need to do a few run-throughs beforehand. It's better to practice in a secluded setting — maybe in front of friends, family members, or a mirror. You could even record yourself on video and play back the tape to see how you look and sound.

Practice from your outline as well as present from it. As you go over the outline, you'll get used to the way your wording changes every time, and the way you refer to the keywords.

Don't run through the entire presentation over and over each time you practice. Focus instead on the opening and closing. Those are the most crucial to rehearse because starting and stopping are the hardest parts of any presentation.

Finally, focus on your pacing, delivery, and transitions. Try to re-create — at the very least, in your mind — the conditions in which you'll be speaking.

[Lesson 4]

Deploy Presentation Materials the Right Way

When you check out a venue, look for items and situations that can impact your presentation. These might include a dimmer switch for lighting and the type of microphone available.

If the venue for your presentation proves less than pleasant for your listeners, you'll be the one held responsible. That's why it's essential to arrange the room to your greatest advantage. Make sure you arrive well before your start time. Then you'll have a chance to figure out which setup will work best and be most comfortable for you and your audience.

You want everyone in attendance to comfortably see your visual aids. One way to do this is to arrange seats in a semicircle. Just be sure you leave enough room between your podium and the first row so that no one has to strain a neck to see you.

If you're presenting in a small room, feel free to get rid of the podium or the first row of seating. Just keep in mind that standing behind a table or podium reminds listeners that you're the speaker and they're the audience. If you're a less experienced speaker and need this credibility and power, keep the barrier around.

Stage presence tips

Presentations aren't lectures. They're performances. So you need to learn a few things about stage presence to perform well.

Stage presence includes poise, movement, projection of desired emotions, and ease in front of a crowd. For laypeople, there are two important elements of stage presence to work on to give a good presentation: vocalics and body language.

Using Vocalics

Through vocalics — also known as vocal techniques — you can create emphasis and achieve a conversational tone that will help win over your audience. A good delivery conveys emotion and brings words to life, while being natural, believable, and not forced. Consider applying a few simple vocalics to your presentation — namely, voice volume, pitch, and speed techniques. They can produce some startling effects.

Using Body Language

For a presentation, eye contact, gestures, posture, and movement are among the more important parts of body language to consider. Try to look into the eyes of your listeners to make them feel included. Maintain good posture — but don't overdo it or else you'll appear rigid and anxious. Feel free to walk around while you speak — but make sure you feel comfortable so you can look as natural as possible.

Establish a Tone and a Rapport

Listeners react to carefully chosen words and rhetoric much more favorably when they're partial to the speaker. This means that in the first seven to ten seconds of your presentation, you've got to win over the audience on sheer personality alone.

But there's something you can do to help win them over — even before you say the first word of your presentation. Work the crowd as people flow into the room and get seated. Talk one-on-one to as many of them as possible. Chatting with even a small percentage of the largest crowd will ease the air for everyone.

Talking to audience members ahead of time will also help you refine whatever information you've already gleaned about them — as well as how best to communicate. Later, during your presentation, you can bring up an anecdote or share a personalized tidbit about someone you just met. Such personal touches show an audience that you understand them. And everyone likes to be understood.

More importantly, talking with individual audience members beforehand shows that you care about them. And that's a helpful first step toward creating rapport and trust, which, in turn, improve your chances of a good reception as you deliver your opening.

A Presentation Is Not a Chat

Inflicting your everyday communication habits on a group that expects to be addressed, not chatted with, is a surefire way to have listeners lose interest. A few key methods exist for establishing a good first impression. They include acting enthused, letting people see

your hands, and avoiding slang. Also, if you have to clear your throat, explain this to the audience — you don't want them to think you're clearing your throat to silence them.

Open Wide

Make sure your presentation's opening is effective. Then you'll accomplish much more than simply introducing your topic. You also grab the attention of all listeners, build rapport with them, and set the tone for the rest of the presentation. Your opening should take no longer than a fraction of your overall presentation time. For instance, if you're giving a fifteen-minute presentation, the opening should be no longer than one or two minutes.

Introduce Yourself

Start by introducing yourself. Establish yourself as an expert on your topic — or at least as someone who has experience related to it. If you're not an expert, draw on the expertise of others. Quote bigwigs in the field — especially someone the audience has heard of — to illustrate your major points.

If you're a presenter on a particular topic, audiences will naturally assume you have something to say about it. But they'll listen all the more closely if they know from the start that you have something worthwhile to say about the topic.

Make 'Em Laugh

In presentations, humor isn't an end of itself. Instead, it's a vehicle to get attention and usher an audience toward your main point.

People like to laugh, and they're more than willing to cut a speaker some slack if he or she tries to make them laugh. You shouldn't be discouraged from using humor just because you're afraid a joke will bomb. As long as you don't overdo the joking and do follow it up with the useful information your audience came to hear, even mediocre gags and quips can go over big.

In a business setting, many presenters are only too willing to throw out the pleasantries and jump right into the information. Such a tactic can make the information seem more mind-numbing than it might otherwise be. Yet most people crave even the hokiest pun. Delivering a quick joke or two shows that you care enough about the audience to slip away from the main topic for a moment and engage them as real people.

That being said, one way to meet blank stares is to tell a joke or story that doesn't relate to the audience. Any joke you tell should have some relationship to the rest of your presentation or to your audience, however tenuous. If your joke is completely off-topic, it

will sound as though you found it in a book about public speaking. The result? Your listeners will feel as though you didn't care enough about them to personalize your presentation.

Customize your Message

A customized presentation portrays the highest level of professionalism and tells your audience, "I created this just for you." When you customize presentation materials with your logo or a key client's logo, you make it clear that the presentation you are giving has a high priority and you have put a lot of effort into it. Customized materials also have a sense of uniqueness about them that make participants feel like they are receiving a message or information that no one else has received. Ways you can personalize your presentation include:

- Add your logo and, if appropriate, a client logo to the cover page on your presentation.
- Create a separate cover page for each participant with their name and title so they know you prepared the materials just for them.

A Note on Notes

Notes can help you keep track of your place in a presentation. However, they can prove to be a dangerous crutch. Keep them helpful instead of harmful by making organized notes that include points from the outline, and an estimate of the time you will take to cover each point.

[Lesson 5]

Moving Right Along

Now that you've introduced yourself and have everyone's attention, continue your opening by stating your topic. This statement is your oath to the audience about what they'll get out of your presentation. To make sure you promise something you can deliver, define your topic based on your intent.

If your presentation is informative, state what you're going to cover. Since you probably can't talk about everything related to your topic in the time allowed, be sure you state something realistic. For example, you're not going to be able to discuss everything to do with destroying Superman in one presentation, but you can cover strategies that have failed, approaches that have come close, and promising tactics currently under development.

If your presentation is persuasive, state what the problem is, which group cares about the problem, and what the solution is. You also should be clear about why your listeners should care about the topic.

Finish the opening phase of your presentation by giving an overview of what you plan to cover. Do this with the use of a written outline that you've created in advance. Think of this outline as a kind of verbal map for your listeners. Don't give away all the details and specifics of the presentation ahead — just the organizational structure.

An effective outline covers the main points of a presentation and makes references to evidence. The best way to make such references in an outline is to write down a keyword only — one that will trigger your memory. An exception to this is when you'll need to state statistics or give a quotation. Then you'll want to insert numbers and quoted material in full in your outline. And if you're afraid you'll forget transitions, you can include them in your outline as well.

Transition to the Main Body

With the overview finished, all you need now is a bridge to take your audience from the opening to the body of your presentation. You don't have to be overly clever in your transition. Simply stating that you've arrived at the main topic will do the trick.

Audience Participation

As you work through the main body, try to engage your listeners as much as possible. One way to do this is by simply asking them to hold up their hands in response to a question. Taking a poll accomplishes two things at once:

- It lends you the authority you need to capture listeners' interest.
- It fires up listeners and gets them thinking about how the topic at hand relates to them.

Holding a mini-brainstorming session can work just as well. Ask a question that you know will generate responses you intend to discuss. Then write down the pertinent suggestions. These suggestions will likely parallel topics you already plan to discuss. And touching on them throughout the presentation gives the audience a personal stake in what you're saying.

Presentation Aids

During your delivery of the main body, you're almost certain to use some type of presentation aids or materials. The way you use them gives the audience a true impression of how well you've prepared them — and how well you know your subject.

Here are a few tips on using presentation aids effectively:

- Before using any presentation aid, introduce it first, even if in passing. You can simply say, "As you can see on the screen . . ." or "Take a glance at the handout and you'll note that . . ."
- Pointing is the simplest way to emphasize the message on a visual aid. Use your finger, a laser pointer, or the mouse pointer arrow on the computer screen.
- Audio-visual aids take a lot of prep work before a presentation. But after that, they run themselves. All you'll have to do is adjust the volume, tweak the brightness and color of the monitor and projection system, and — if it's interactive with your talk — learn your cues.

[Lesson 6]

Closing Your Presentation

The conclusion of a presentation is similar to the opening in some respects. In fact, you could think of a conclusion as an opening in reverse. It transitions from the main body, summarizes the points you've covered, and offers a parting shot designed to grab the audience.

In addition, a conclusion deserves a significant amount of planning, just as an opening does. Since the conclusion is the last thing you tell your listeners, it's what they'll remember most — making it the final impression they'll have of you and your speech.

Of course you want that impression to be positive. One way to accomplish this is to close your presentation at the right moment. And that moment is when you've covered all your main points in the body of your presentation.

Keep It Short and Sweet

No matter how well your presentation is going, never talk too long. In fact, try to wrap it up before the audience starts to drift. Also, don't keep talking just because you've been given thirty minutes but have said everything in half that time. If you sense that you've gotten through to the crowd, end your presentation. The audience members will appreciate your consideration of their time. They'll also leave with a more positive impression of you and your message.

Give Them Something to Talk About

After a transition alerting listeners that your conclusion is coming, simply tell them what you've already said. You've developed and elaborated on the main ideas in the body — so now you should be able to summarize each idea very succinctly.

At this point, if it's appropriate, suggest additional sources of information about your subject. Listeners who write them down will be reminded of your presentation every time they consult either their notes or the source itself. Also, if you're willing, let the audience know how you can be contacted at a later date.

And now it's time to deliver the parting shot — that last message that leaves your audience with something to think about. Make a joke, tell a story, give a statistic, quote an expert. Use evidence that maximizes the bang for the buck. Remember — this is your last chance to convince your audience that what you've been talking about is important.

Another way to help your message sink in is to come full circle — that is, finish something you started in the opening. It might be completing an anecdote, giving an answer to a specific question, or revealing the speaker of a quote. You could also simply restate any evidence you brought up in the opening.

Rally the Troops with a Call to Action

If you can think of something for listeners to do in response to your presentation, by all means ask them to do it. A call to action gives them a goal and forces them to think about your presentation after it's over.

This isn't to say you should demand an uprising. A simple suggestion of something they could easily accomplish is sufficient. Just make sure your call to action is one that resonates with listeners.

Take-Away Materials

You may want your audience to leave with not only a positive impression, but also with something tangible — that is, information on handouts. Don't limit yourself to traditional handouts printed on paper. You could give out pamphlets, reference books, or print-outs of Web sites on your subject. You could even burn your slideshow onto DVDs and give those to departing listeners.

Finally, thank listeners for attending your presentation.

The Conclusion to This Podcast

We've covered the basics of giving a presentation — from planning the content, to selecting and using visual aids, to delivering the speech through its conclusion.

All this information may seem a little overwhelming. But don't sweat it too much. As long as you remember to have fun in front of your listeners, they're likely to have fun too.

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