

## UTSG Conference Quick Tips on Preparing and Delivering a Good Presentation

*Making a technical presentation at a UTSG session? As a UTSG speaker, your presentation will reflect the professionalism of the Group and its members. Your audience has registered for the meeting to listen to you. They deserve a well prepared presentation. The key to a successful presentation is clear thinking and good planning. Here are some tips (adapted from "Speak like the Best of Them", by Daniel A. Cirucci, Association Management, May 1993) to help you prepare and deliver your presentation successfully.*

### Write to the Audience

The first step in finding the right words and delivering an effective presentation is the audience. Ask certain questions to pin down for whom you're writing.

- Who is the audience?
- What do the members of the audience have in common? Are they mostly engineers? Planners? Are they mostly from the same country?
- Why has the audience been brought together?
- Why have they invited me to make a presentation? What makes it unique?
- How much time do I have?
- Do they expect or want me to talk about a specific subject and, if so what?

Identifying the audience is extremely important. It will set the tone and the technical level of your presentation. The more you (or your presentation writer) know about all of the questions listed above, the better your presentation will be.

At UTSG for example, you can expect the audience to be highly educated, with knowledge of transport terminology and concepts. If the audience is internationally diverse, you should avoid jargon, acronyms, and colloquial terms. Never make assumptions about what audience knows. If you are not sure, it is better to start at a lower technical level.

Regardless of the type of audience, waste no time in making a quick, clear, and simple connection. Find something in common with your listeners and lead with it.

### Be Careful with Humour

The all-important link with the audience can often be established with humour. Many speakers use humour by telling a joke or anecdote. But this technique is not as simple as it may seem. Leading with a joke has become almost a cliché and sometimes the joke can fall flat. Unless you've tried the joke or anecdote before with a similar audience and know it will trigger laughs, caution is the byword. Test the story out with a few friends or colleagues. Ask them to be particularly frank with you in assessing its impact. Your presentation will be remembered by the knowledge it imports, and not by the jokes it contains.

## A Three-act Play

A good presentation is actually a three-act play: a beginning, a middle, and an end (introduction, body, and conclusion). Each part of the presentation must be clear and distinct, but at the same time, the three parts must work as one. The theme or topic is what holds all three parts together.

The best presentation can be summarised in a single sentence. Often, an even shorter single phrase within the presentation will come to describe your topic.

## Tell Them, Tell Them, Tell Them

Regardless of the nature of the presentation or the composition of the audience, the speaker owes it to his or her listeners to plan, write, and deliver the presentation in a professional, convincing manner.

An effective way to make the beginning, middle, and end of the presentation work together is to remember this three-pronged rule of clear communication: Tell them you're going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them.

In the beginning of the presentation, preview what is to come. This approach grabs the audience's attention and opens the door to the main body of the presentation: the middle. It is also a good idea to tell them for how long you will speak: "For the next 15 minutes I will..." This will give the audience an idea of the scale of your presentation to avoid the guess work.

In the middle, present most of what you have to say. Simple, declarative lists ("First, the purpose of the study was...") can organise the middle of the presentation to help the listener move along. In the end, wrap up ("To summarise..."). Approaching the three parts of the presentation this way is the simplest and easiest way to organise yourself and make your thoughts understandable to all and easy to follow.

## Dynamic Techniques

Many other techniques can be employed to make a presentation work especially well. All recognise one fact: A presentation is prepared for the ear. To be effective, the words and ideas must be retained in the listener's mind. The following techniques can be particularly effective while delivering your presentation:

- **Repetition.** Besides helping your audience remember something, repetition builds greater awareness of central points of the main theme. Often, repetition contributes to the flow of the presentation. Do not be afraid to repeat the main point of your presentation.
- **Quotes.** The best quotations not only say something meaningful, but they say it clearly. Good quotes work on several levels, forcing the audience to think. Make sure the quote is clearly attributed and that it was said by someone your audience will probably recognise. Quotations are often particularly effective at the beginning or end of a presentation but can work well almost anywhere.

- **Startling or surprising moments.** Surprise is used to draw attention to the point you are about to make. Saying something the audience is not expected to hear can reawaken the audience. Use all of these devices sparingly in your presentations. If overused, the presentation becomes exaggerated. Used with care and to move the presentation along, they usually work exceedingly well.

## Time Challenges

It is very important to adhere to your allocated time limit. The overall session must end at a certain time. Exceeding your time will make the audience wander and lose their concentration. It can ruin your presentation. As you write and edit your presentation, the general rule to follow is to allow about 90 seconds for every double-spaced page of copy. Rehearsing your presentation will tell you approximately how long it will be.

To stay within the allocated time, it is very important that you write the presentation that you are going to deliver. If you have prepared a written version of your presentation (for the conference proceedings for example), **NEVER** read it. Take your time to prepare a custom presentation, one that incorporates some of the techniques described above. Your written paper and the presentation you deliver should NEVER be the same.

## Delivering a Presentation

Planning carefully, organising your thoughts, and composing a good presentation constitute only part of the process. You have to be able to deliver the presentation well to carry it all off. Follow these six tips to achieve success.

- **Get comfortable with it.** Read the presentation silently a few times. In your mind, listen to yourself delivering the presentation. Then read it aloud several times. Hear the sound, flow and cadence of it. Get to know the presentation so that you can quickly recall its sounds and words. Time it.
- **Watch your timing.** Know where the beginning, middle, and end of the presentation click in. Identify the climax - the single most dramatic point in the presentation - which usually comes about two thirds of the way into it.
- **Mark it up.** Give yourself notes and clues, if needed, along the margins or in the body of the presentation, to tell you where to slow down, modulate, raise your voice, speed up, and so forth. Highlight the points that have to be made.
- **Deliver the presentation just slightly above the conversational mode.** Speak calmly and clearly in a manner that makes it seem like you are in control, with total confidence. If you get nervous, slow down.
- **Maintain frequent eye contact with the entire audience.** Look down at your notes, not to read the presentation but to remind yourself where you are.
- **Keep a glass of water at the podium.** Anxiety can create an instant dry mouth. If necessary, steal a moment (when folks are laughing or applauding) to take a drink. Also, don't be afraid to take a moment to catch your breath. The audience will wait. A long pause is also a good technique to regain the audience's attention.