

# Speaking and presenting in public

Whatever organization you work for, a key role for managers and decision-makers is good communication. This includes listening to people, but also speaking to them. Much of that communication will be informal, but there is also a need for formal communication to ensure that information, views and decisions are openly shared and recorded.

This guide provides guidance on how to prepare a formal presentation. It looks at the key to making a successful presentation, how to prepare suitable visual aids as well as providing useful tips for making the presentation itself.

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## Introduction

You may find yourself having to make presentations at a number of stages in your career and for a number of reasons. You may need to 'sell' your organization, projects and ideas to local stakeholders, or to a wider audience of clients. Communicating to your colleagues and to larger audiences is a management task and a skill that needs planning, preparation and practice – it does not just happen.

## Presentations

Meetings can provide a good forum for many points of view to be exchanged, but the audience is usually restricted – many issues may be discussed and many points of view shared. Presentations allow a particular matter to be explained in more depth and in a structured way.

Speaking in public will, on many occasions, require the use of slides to accompany your talk. Slide presentations are useful for managers to communicate information to a wider audience.

Learning how to make a good presentation comes through experience, but there are a number of tips to help you get started.

## First steps

Before you start with detailed preparation of the presentation, you should be clear about its purpose and who it is aimed at.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- **What** is the purpose of the presentation – is it to inform, persuade, address concerns or educate?
- **Who** will my listeners be and what is their current level of knowledge about the subject, or subjects, to be presented?
- **How** are they likely to react to what I have to say?

Answering the 'what' question will help to ensure that the presentation remains focused and does not include largely



irrelevant information that will distract your audience.

Answering the 'who' question will help to ensure that you pitch the presentation correctly, using language that is understandable to your listeners and explaining any terms or concepts that may be unfamiliar to them. It may also affect how you make the presentation.

Answering the 'how' question will be particularly important when you are hoping to persuade the listeners to either accept new ideas or make important but potentially controversial decisions.

## Preparation – the key to success

Good presentations are prepared presentations. Very few individuals can stand up and present complex ideas with little or no preparation – do not assume that you are one of them!

If you have prepared well for a presentation, you will:

- know what you want to achieve from the presentation;
- be clear about the main points that you want to present;
- have a structure for the presentation and know what you are going to say in each section of the presentation;
- know which visual aids you are going to use and how you are going to use them; and

## Addressing controversy

If you are making a presentation that could be seen as critical or controversial, it is possible that some members of your audience will not welcome some of the information you want to present.

For example, the mid-term review of a sanitation project may reveal a need for changes and improvements in some aspects of the project management structure or financial arrangements. Those responsible for the project may not have recognised the need for change and may see your views as criticism. In such cases, think very carefully about what you are going to say.

- have checked the equipment you will use as best you can and know that the chances of something going wrong have been reduced to a minimum.

We now turn to the actions that you will need to take to ensure that you have covered each of these points.

## Deciding what you want to achieve

The first step in preparing for a presentation is to decide exactly what you want the presentation to achieve. Your main objective may be to share information with your audience, in which case you need to decide what the key pieces of information you wish to share

are and ensure that they are clearly articulated.

It is important to:

- ensure that the facts that you present are correct – particularly if your findings are likely to prove controversial;
- choose your words carefully so that you avoid, as far as is possible, being seen to criticise individuals. Such criticism is better stated in private than in a public forum;
- focus on possibilities and opportunities for improvement, not just on what has gone wrong; and
- focus on the causes of problems rather than on the part played by particular individuals.

## Developing the structure of your presentation

You will probably find it useful to think of your presentation as having three stages, a beginning, a middle and an end.

### Beginning

During this stage, you should aim to achieve some, or all of, the following:

- Introduce yourself, giving your name, outlining your background and a brief summary of your experience.
- Explain the background to the presentation – briefly covering the key issue to be presented and your association with the issue.

- Explain, in general terms, the purpose of the presentation – e.g. are you aiming to share information, to present findings, or to make proposals about a way forward?
- Explain, in broad terms and very briefly, how you have structured the presentation.

You could allow a short time at the end of this stage of the presentation for the audience to clarify any points that are not clear to them.

### Middle

This is the heart of the presentation, including any key findings and recommendations you have reached and want to share. You must structure this part of the presentation giving consideration to the material to be presented. However, you are more likely to produce a persuasive presentation if you:

- identify different subjects to be covered by the presentation and divide the presentation into sections that correspond with these different subjects;
- match your visual aids, such as overhead or PowerPoint slides, to the material that you are presenting – making it clear when you finish one section and begin another; and
- recap on the key findings of each section at the end of the section. This can be done verbally, but you

might want to reinforce key points by summarising them in writing and presenting them on a visual aid.

Again, allow time for questions for clarification from the audience and also for any comments on points of fact. As far as possible, aim to reserve more detailed discussion about findings, principles or future options to the last stage of your presentation.

If your presentation is developing an argument rather than presenting information, this part of the presentation is likely to be structured around your main findings and conclusions. There are two ways to present these.

- You can use a *deductive* sequence, starting with a presentation of the main point or finding, then moving on to explain how you arrived at it. A deductive sequence ensures that listeners focus on the main points from the beginning, so you are more likely to gain their attention from the start.
- Alternatively, you can use an *inductive* sequence, starting with the basic issue to be addressed and then working through an explanation of how you arrived at your response to this issue. An inductive sequence ensures that the existing situation is taken into account before you go on to present your interpretation, or findings, associated with that situation.

There is no right and wrong way of arranging ideas. The important point is to be clear about whether you are following a deductive or an inductive sequence and not to shift from one to the other in the course of the presentation.

## End

The end of the presentation is perhaps the most important stage, as it gives you an opportunity to present your main findings and conclusions clearly and hopefully convincingly. You should aim to:

- briefly restate the theme/objective of the presentation;
- recap on the main points already made;
- draw conclusions and make recommendations; and if appropriate,
- give your view on what will or should happen next.

This is the point in the presentation at which you are most likely to receive questions and comments so make sure you allow time for these.

## Deciding the content of your presentation

Each part of your presentation should proceed from or lead up to a key point. The first task in deciding the content of the presentation should be to decide what these key points are and how they should relate to each other. When you have considered what your key points are,

### Deciding who should present

It will often be best for one person to make the whole presentation. However, if you are going to divide responsibilities for presentation, think carefully about the logistics of moving from one presenter to the next. There is a real danger that the flow of the presentation will be disrupted by changes in presenter.

Do not use too many presenters and make sure that the change in presenter comes at a natural break point in the presentation.

Whenever possible, make sure that the various presenters are using the same medium. Otherwise, the audience may be faced with long breaks while one presenter finishes and the next presenter sets up a different set of equipment.

group them according to subject, remove any duplicate points and look for cause and effect links between the points. These will help you to structure your thoughts by allowing you to distinguish between the primary and secondary causes of problems.

These main points should provide you with section themes and suggest section headings to you. Write these section headings down, then consider how they might fit into the overall structure of your presentation. Arrange the headings in

accordance with the structure. Your aim is, as far as possible, to develop a logical flow of ideas and arguments.

A good question to ask yourself is 'Does this presentation tell a story?'. Look for gaps in the flow of ideas and/or the argument you are making and add other headings to fill these gaps. Where there is a clear switch from one subject to another, look for ways of marking the change.

The presentation itself cannot and should not consist only of a series of key points. Each will have to be developed and justified. If you know your subject well, you will normally find that a series of key points will be sufficient to prompt you to remember and present the more detailed issues that surround these points.

Once you have finalised your presentation, you will usually find it useful to transfer the key themes and points to overhead

### Providing a structure

If you are reporting back on a project then a simple structure could follow the 'STAR' approach.

- **Situation:** provide some context and background
- **Task;** explain what was planned, what the goal was
- **Action;** describe what actually took place
- **Result:** summarize the outcomes

slides or a PowerPoint presentation. In addition to providing information to the audience, these will also provide you with an aide memoire for the points that are to be covered in the presentation. You may wish to add written notes reminding you of the more important subsidiary points on a print out of the slides.

Do not underestimate the time required for preparation! Depending on the complexity of the subject and the type and quality of the visual aids used, it may take anything up to 2 days to prepare a 30 minute presentation.

In summary:

- Think about your audience
- Focus on the important points in your presentation.
- Keep the presentation simple.
- Keep within the time allowed, with enough time for questions and clarification.
- Make good preparations.

## Preparing and using visual aids

### Why use visual aids?

It is possible to make a presentation without using any visual aids. However, it will normally be wise to use visual aids for the following reasons:

- A visual aid provides the audience with time to grasp your main points. When you make a point verbally the audience has no way of going back to it and thinking about its meaning. A visual aid containing summaries of your main points will act as an aide-memoire for the audience, helping them to see the overall structure of your argument.
- Visual aids can also act as an aide-memoire for the presenter, reminding you of the main points to be covered and giving warning of the points to be covered next.

Visual aids should never be an exact parallel of the full presentation content. An audience will soon get bored if the presenter puts up a series of slides and proceeds to read them one by one.





## Visual aids

Options for presenting information visually include:

- flipcharts,
- fixed whiteboards,
- overhead projectors (OHPs)
- data (PowerPoint) projectors
- and possibly notes to be taken away for reading later.

Rather, they should be used to:

- summarise the overall content of the presentation, reinforcing key points;
- provide information that is best presented in visual form, for instance photographs of facilities, existing conditions and activities and graphs illustrating trends and/or comparisons.

## Visual aids – when to use them

Remember the basic principle that visual aids are there to support a presentation. They are not a substitute for it.

Flipcharts and whiteboards should normally only be used either:

- in support of other visual aids to make or record key points; or
- as an aid to fairly small and low-key presentations, typically those that are made within the team itself, perhaps as part of a team meeting.

Before using any of the options, consider what you hope to achieve through them and try to use them accordingly.

## General principles for preparing visual aids

Whichever method of presentation you use, it is important to pay attention to the preparation of visual aids. They are of no use if they cannot be understood or if the writing on them is so small or untidy that it cannot be read. One sure way of losing the interest and support of your audience is to present them with visual aids covered in lines of writing that they cannot read.

The following general principles will help to ensure that your visual aids add to your presentation rather than detracting from it.

- Write clearly – for overhead slides, it is best to use a computer.
- Keep to the important information.
- Use a large font – generally font size 20 or over for overhead slides and font size 28 or more for PowerPoint slides.
- Lay the information out clearly. Make sure that each point is separated on the slide, perhaps using bullet points or numbers.
- Never mix unrelated points on the same slide or page. Do try, as far as is possible, to group related points on one slide or page but do not do this at the expense of font or letter size.

- Restrict the number of words, using short headings and short sentences. (This will help you to achieve the previous objective).
- Use diagrams and graphs where possible to present figures.
- Take care to ensure that diagrams are clearly legible and understandable. Avoid back-of-the-envelope scrawls that look as if they were prepared in the five minutes before the workshop began.
- Use colour to highlight key points.
- Use no more than about 1 slide per minute.

In order to emphasise the theme and structure of your presentation, it may be useful to display information on the objectives and structure of the presentation on a flipchart that can be seen by all the audience.

## Checking the set-up

If you assume that you can walk into a presentation room and use visual aids without any preparation you are almost certain to find that something goes wrong. Take time before the presentation to check the set-up. Consider:

- Power sources: are the power points compatible with the plugs on the electrical equipment you intend to use? How does their location affect where you can and cannot position equipment? If the best place for a projector is some way from the nearest power source, get a suitable extension lead in good time.
- Setting up and testing electrical equipment before the presentation starts: There is nothing worse when making a presentation than to find that nothing happens when you switch the equipment on!
- Know how to use the equipment: Run through a section of your presentation to check you are familiar with the equipment controls.
- Visibility for the audience: Go to the back of the seating provided for the audience and make sure that your presentation is visible and readable. If not, consider the following options to improve the situation:
  - move or re-arrange the seats to bring the audience closer to the presentation;
  - increase the magnification, by moving the projector away from the screen or wall on which the image is displayed
  - change the size of the text used for your visual aid, if possible.
- Checking that your equipment does not obscure the view of members of the audience: Rearrange seating if necessary to ensure everyone can see.

**Table 1.** Advantages and disadvantages of visual aids – some examples

Overhead projector	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively easy to use</li> <li>• Flexible – you can easily add points in response to comments and return to a slide that has already been shown</li> <li>• Points can easily be masked so that they are only shown when the presenter gets to them</li> <li>• Prepared slides can easily be carried</li> <li>• Produce a reasonably large image</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a power source</li> <li>• Can break down</li> <li>• Sometimes difficult to position projector so that it does not obscure the view of some audience members</li> <li>• Photographs cannot be reproduced easily</li> <li>• Requires a screen or suitable wall</li> <li>• Keeping slides in order can be difficult</li> <li>• Care needed to produce good images. Poorly written OHP slides can be illegible</li> </ul>
Powerpoint presentation	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looks professional</li> <li>• Can incorporate both writing and images</li> <li>• Once set up, easy to move backwards and forwards in the presentation</li> <li>• Can be animated so that points are displayed in order, at the time that you want them</li> <li>• Equipment relatively easy to transport</li> <li>• Unlike OHP slides, slides cannot be mixed up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need power source</li> <li>• Need powerpoint projector</li> <li>• Some skills needed to use (but these can easily be learnt)</li> <li>• Might be seen by some as rather impersonal</li> <li>• Tendency to use small print</li> <li>• It may be less flexible to use</li> </ul>

Table 1 ... continued

Flipchart	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively easy to use</li> <li>• Cheap</li> <li>• Not reliant on a power source</li> <li>• Can be used by anyone with the basic ability to write and draw</li> <li>• Allow the use of colour</li> <li>• Quite easy to transport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not very flexible</li> <li>• Will tend to look 'unprofessional' unless considerable care and effort used in preparation</li> <li>• Cannot show photographs and images</li> <li>• Some listeners may view as 'low-tech' and so beneath them and will not take you seriously</li> </ul>
• Whiteboard	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful for 'workpad' noting to aid group discussion</li> <li>• May already be available in a training room or meeting room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need special pens</li> <li>• Not easily portable</li> <li>• Not easy to write on</li> <li>• Limited space</li> <li>• Time required to erase writing before additional writing</li> </ul>

## Using visual aids

Visual aids will only be useful if they are used well. Some key points to consider in this respect are given below:

- Talk to the audience not to your presentation. Do not look at the screen, as this means you have your back to the audience.
- Make sure that you do not stand in front of visual aids and obscure the view.
- When you put up a new piece of information, give the audience a short time to absorb it before starting to talk about it.

For presentations to larger groups, it may be necessary to use a microphone.

## The presentation itself

Start by introducing yourself and explaining the purpose of the presentation. Explain the ground rules that you propose to adopt for questions – at what points in the presentation you propose to accept questions and whether this will be restricted to points for clarification only.

## Rehearsal

Rehearsal allows you to check your timing, make sure that visual aids work properly and that your notes for the presentation make sense. It will also help you to identify and correct weaknesses in your presentation before you deliver it to your audience. Rehearsal helps overcome nervousness because it increases your confidence and removes some of the uncertainties about how you will perform during the presentation.

Rehearse out loud rather than running through points in your head, as this gives you a picture of how the presentation will sound in reality. It helps you hear mistakes and become more aware of points that you omit and/or points in the presentation that are likely to cause you problems.

Do not worry if your first attempt at making a presentation is rather disjointed. Your presentation skills will improve as you practice, the more you rehearse and by making more presentations to a wider range of audiences.



## Some basic points about the presentation

Following the basic points listed below will help to make you a better speaker.

- Be positive about what you have to say, without overwhelming the audience with your enthusiasm.
- Do not apologise for anything that you are saying. This will give the audience the impression that you have doubts about your material.
- Make sure that you define any terms that may be unfamiliar to some or all members of your audience. Spend time thinking about terms that you use regularly in your work and consider whether members of a non-specialist audience will understand them.

- Speak slowly and clearly, and breathe naturally. Do not worry about periods of silence while you collect your thoughts and prepare for the next section of your presentation. The biggest enemy of good public speaking is the notion that you have to fill every single available space with words. Allowing short breaks in your speaking gives you a chance to collect your thought and the audience the chance to absorb what you have been saying.
- Be tidy, particularly when you are using overhead slides. Keep overheads and notes in order and numbered, so that you know where to find the relevant slide or note if you have to go back to recap on a point.

### Inviting and using feedback

A good presenter will invite feedback from the audience and a good presentation will provide the grounds for that feedback. Presentations should not be seen as a one-way flow of information. The response from your audience is important, as:

- It shows that your audience was listening.
- It reveals whether or not you have put across the points that you set out to make.
- It can provide you with additional information, which enables you to amend and/or refine your understanding.
- It allows you to gauge the acceptability of any proposals that you have made.
- It shows listeners that you are prepared to listen to their point of view.

### Dealing with questions

Deal with questions when you said you would deal with them.

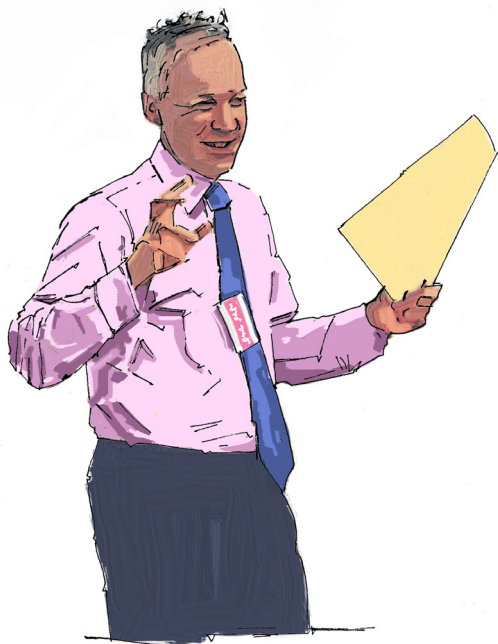
Try to take questions from a variety of people – do not allow only one or two people to dominate the discussion. If possible, ask someone to act as a facilitator or chairperson, with the responsibility for indicating who should speak next.

Do not rush into answers to questions – give yourself time to think about the answer.

Deal with questions and comments as openly and honestly as you can. Accept the possibility that you may be wrong or misinformed on some points. On the other hand, insist politely but firmly that your facts are correct when you are sure of this.

### Reference

WELL, 2004. *Learn@WELL Consultancy Skills Module, Unit 5 – Presentation Skills*. Loughborough University, UK. Loughborough University, UK: WEDC/ LSTHM/IRC.



### Be aware of your audience's expectations!

When considering the best way of presenting information, be aware of the expectations of your audience.

- You may prefer to use flipcharts and overhead transparencies to PowerPoint slides, because you feel they are more flexible.
- Senior government officials and academics however may be rather dismissive of presentations that do not use PowerPoint and so may not take you seriously if you do not use it.

### Presentation checklist

- The following checklist should help you to assess your performance.
- Did I explain the structure of the presentation clearly at the start?
- Did I use reasonably simple language?
- Did I keep the flow of the presentation going?
- Did I speak clearly to the audience rather than to the projection screen, the floor or the ceiling?
- Did I speak clearly, without too many awkward pauses, 'ums' and 'ers'.
- Did I speak too fast?
- Were my visual aids visible?
- Were they used in a positive way to enhance the flow of the presentation?
- Did I use my prompt notes and were they useful?
- Did I gauge the time correctly and not either over or under-run?

## About WEDC

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We are committed to the provision of effective, evidence-based and appropriate solutions for the improvement of basic infrastructure and essential services for people living in low- and middle-income countries. With over 45 years of experience, we offer expert advice and quality learning opportunities for sector professionals.

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