Tips for Improving Oral Presentations

"According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death.

This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."

- Jerry Seinfeld

Never underestimate the importance of "**Speaker Preparation**" – it will help you become more confident and less fearful of speaking in front of a group. Speak every chance you can. Submit your name to every conference that you can. The more you do it - the easier it gets and the more people will want you back as a speaker. Here are a few pointers **(Excerpts adapted from http://www.pubcon.com/blog/index.cgi?mode=viewone&blog=1187123220 and http://www.cs.duke.edu/brd/Teaching/Giving-a-talk/giving-a-talk.html)**

First Things First: What Do You Want to Accomplish?

1. **Objective:** What point do you want to make? Do you want some kind of action from the audience? What is the reason for giving the presentation? Tell the audience what you are trying to achieve.
2. **Title:** Should define the subject matter but might not describe your objective.
3. **Organization:** Introduction, body, and conclusion that provides a step-by-step process to make your point.
4. **Finish:** End presentation with a clear restatement of your objective and what you expect from your audience.

The Big Opening:

1. **Gracious**: Thank your host, thank your moderator, and thank the audience for being there. This simple act will help to get a repeat invitation to speak. Always promote and thank the host up front. They got you there - thank them for the honor. Never try to upstage your host, or become the master of ceremonies - that is your moderator's job. Don't take over the session - participate in it. You are a guest in their house.
2. **Cheers Dudes**: Let the audience know that you want to meet them and they can see you around the conference and should feel welcome to come talk to you.
3. **One Theme - One Theme Only Please**: Follow one central theme and nail it. Use every slide to prop up the core theme and should in some way refer back to your overall presentation theme. Avoid including peripheral results and information.
4. **Respect the Scope**: Limit your bullet points. Be very selective. You don't want people reading your bullets, you want them looking and listening to you. Your power point is a tool - don't let it overshadow you by reading your own bullet points. Instead, read your notes about your bullet points. Try old fashioned 3x5 cards with large print for your notes.
5. **Jargon**: Speak at the level of your audience. Avoid technical jargon and acronyms.
6. **The Big Five**: Each presentation should have at least one slide for each of the big five: a chart, a graph, a list, a human picture, a funny picture, and finish with 3 take aways and your contact info.

7. **The Stunner Opener**: Start with a stunner of a statistic, a really funny experience, or a real world case study. However, don't attempt to tell a joke unless you are really really good at it. Nine out of ten jokes fail during presentations. Leave the comedy to the professionals like the one at the right.
8. **The Survey Opener**: Finding out who is in the audience with a survey question is a great ice breaker and opener. So ask for a show of hands. Some people in the audience just get giddy over being able to participate and they hang on your every syllable.
9. **Lead Them**: Let your audience know what you are going to cover and what your theme is all about. Some people even number their slides backwards so the audience can follow along to the end.

Git 'er done!

More Presentation Suggestions:

1. **One Slide Per Minute**: Use a maximum of one slide per minute. You can talk that long. If you do more than one slide/minute, the audience will follow only the screen and not you.
2. **Big Quote**: A witty saying or quote from someone always grabs attention.
3. **Work the Room**: Go clockwise around the clock and look at each of your audience members in turn. Don't fixate on one person (like a college friend or coworker). Work the room.
4. **Don't Distract**: Don't look at the projector screen and don't use a laser pointer. People find them annoying and rarely can see them in the back of the room.
5. **Stay Tech Light**: Double check your tech prep. Avoid software or tech that is nonstandard on a simple machine with Office installed. I have seen every type of technical problem. Never ever use any type of software your host doesn't explicitly say is on the presentation machine. For example, software such as movies, sounds, or flash all have problems. Never count on an internet connection and always have a *Plan B* if you do. Internet connections have a staggering 50-75% failure rate at conferences. Never count on a live internet connection. Plan for the worst.
6. **Bring A Backup**: Give your PowerPoint to your host via the accepted means. Take a copy on USB stick and/or CD (careful - many systems don't have CD's these days).
7. **Movement**: Find out if you are allowed to *walk-n-talk* while you give your presentation. If so, practice with a remote mouse/clicker and take it with you to your presentation.
8. **Bond with the Panel**: Refer to one or two of your panel members during your presentation. Then make sure to say hi, or shake their hand before your session - build a bond. You are a team and that panel member may be the best contact you make at the entire session.
9. **Leave Props at Home**: Props rarely work. Handouts work even less - they cause a distraction.
10. **Give Aways**: "*If you come up and see me after my presentation, I will give you a new pen, a new hat, sign your conference book, or give you a keychain.*" Then swap business cards. Good conversation starter.
11. **The Big Surprise!**: You will have a moment of surprise in your presentation. Watch for it and react accordingly. You will have no idea when your audience will find something you have said funny and laugh, moan, or groan. Don't panic - just smile -- pause as necessary -- and move onward.
12. **Dramatic Pause**: A pause *here-n-there* in your speech gives your audience a break and lets them think, breath, and take a drink of water. Oh yeah - always have a glass of water near the podium. Only half full because you might shake and spill it.
13. **Panel Topics**: Cross check with your other panelists about their topic coverage. Always respect the topics you are asked to speak about. There is no more solid way to end your speaking career at a conference, than by talking about apples when your host asked you to talk about oranges.

14. **Font Size**: Use one font size larger than you think you need.
15. **Speak clearly.** It shouldn't be too much of a shock, but people can't hear you if you mumble or talk really quietly. Most audiences are afraid of sitting too near the front of a class, either because they're worried about being called on, or because their third grade teacher spit during lectures. Remember the ones in the back (who are thinking of sneaking out early) and speak up and speak distinctly (so they'll stay).
16. **Three Words**: **charts**, **graphs**, **lists**. Three more words: *people love them*! Ok, fess up -- how long did you stare at the pie chart at the right, before you realized it didn't mean anything? People love charts, graphs, and lists. They will see them before they see anything else on the screen. Nine out of ten people love a good list. Tenth guy? There is a bad seed in every crowd.
17. **Eye Candy**: Be sure to leave a chart or graph on the screen for a couple of minutes for people to grasp the data. Even if the data is not necessarily what it seems.
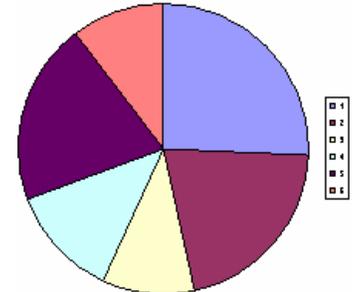
Relative Effectiveness
of a Classic Pie Chart

Fear Factor: Nerves of Steel - Prep Work

- **Know the Audience**: Ask your host who will be in the room. What is the typical attendee make up? Why do they come? Don't assume you know from just looking at the layout of conference website.
- **Visualize**: Practice, visualize, practice, record, and practice. Visualize your presentation. Stop and walk through your entire presentation in your mind. Make it go perfectly as you expect. Practice your presentation until you can almost recite it from memory. Now relax, slow down, smile and exude confidence. The old saying; *Fake it till you make it* is accurate and appropriate. No one knows your presentation better than you.
- **Record**: If you have a tape recorder, or a camcorder, then record your presentation and watch it. Yes, it can be hard to watch yourself the first few times, but nothing will make you a better presenter than watching yourself and taking action.
- **Be Casual - Stay Cool**: How should I dress? Unless your host says otherwise, business casual is the rule of today's conferences. Dress one notch above what is appropriate for your audience.

During Question and Answer Period:

- **Repeat the question** back to the audience so you make sure everyone in the room heard it.
- **Write** the question down - even if the question isn't directed at you. While someone else responds, you can formulate your own answer. It is surprising how many good speaker don't use this trick. Even more surprising is how good it works.
- **Answer** the person's question. Sound silly? I regularly see people respond to a question and finish their 2 minutes of time by asking, "*What was the question again*"?
- Answer any question you are confident about answering, but never try to fake it in the question and answer period.
- Want to ruin a great presentation? Be a blabbermouth during Q&A. This is where some great speakers die a quick death.

Presentation Strategies

On Friendly Ground: Visit the room where you are speaking. Check out the room you are speaking in, as soon as you can. If there is a lunch break and the room is empty - go up to the stage, stand there and practice your presentation from memory.

Problems: Always acknowledge problems. If there is a problem with the projector, or the sound, or room is too hot/too cold - feel free to mention it. Don't apologize for it, but do acknowledge it. It builds a bond. People like to complain together and they also like to celebrate together. If you acknowledge problems, you don't seem like you are trying to ignore it. Some speaker trainers say you should ignore problems. I think telling people what they are already thinking, deflates the issue and makes you seem like one of the gang.

Multi Speaker Order Strategy: Go first or go last, but try to avoid the middle ground. The first speakers have the attention of the room. The last speaker can add some occasional comments about the previous speakers' presentation. By the same reasoning - never give a presentation when someone else's slides are on the screen.

The Big Finish

- End with three take-aways, (don't call them take-aways, call them *real world applications* of what you just talked about or major points of interest).
- Finish on time, but if you run late - be ready to roll to your last screen at any point. Be flexible - stay loose, and don't fret if it changes.
- Put your contact information and logo on the screen last. If you go last, you can often get your last screen left on the screen during a Q&A period.

After the Panel

- When your session is over - stick in your panel chair like glue. If you have people in front of you that wish to talk - don't move - make the next people remove you. Go to the hall and continue talking with people that came up to you.
- When someone hands you a business card - follow up.