

## Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know how to

- LO 19-1** Plan effective presentations.
- LO 19-2** Select and organize information for effective presentations.
- LO 19-3** Deliver effective presentations.
- LO 19-4** Handle questions during presentations.

The power to persuade people to care about something you believe in is crucial to business success. Making a good oral presentation is more than just good delivery: it also involves developing a strategy that fits your audience and purpose, having good content, and organizing material effectively. The choices you make in each of these areas are affected by your purposes, audience, and situation.

## IDENTIFYING PURPOSES IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Oral presentations have the same three basic purposes that written documents have: to inform, to persuade, and to build goodwill. Like written messages, most oral presentations have more than one purpose.

**Informative presentations** inform or teach the audience. Training sessions in an organization are primarily informative. Secondary purposes may be to persuade new employees to follow organizational procedures, rather than doing something their own way, and to help them appreciate the organizational culture.

**Persuasive presentations** motivate the audience to act or to believe. Giving information and evidence is an important means of persuasion. Stories and visuals are also effective. In addition, the speaker must build goodwill by appearing to be credible and sympathetic to the audience's needs. The goal in many presentations is a favorable vote or decision. For example, speakers making business presentations may try to persuade the audience to approve their proposals, to adopt their ideas, or to buy their products. Sometimes the goal is to change behavior or attitudes or to reinforce existing attitudes. For example, a speaker at a meeting of factory workers may stress the importance of following safety procedures.

**Goodwill presentations** entertain and validate the audience. In an after-dinner speech, the audience wants to be entertained. Presentations at sales meetings may be designed to stroke the audience's egos and to validate their commitment to organizational goals.

Make your purpose as specific as possible.

Weak: The purpose of my presentation is to discuss saving for retirement.

Better: The purpose of my presentation is to persuade my audience to put their 401k funds in stocks and bonds, not in money market accounts and CDs.

or: The purpose of my presentation is to explain how to calculate how much money someone needs to save in order to maintain a specific lifestyle after retirement.

Your purpose statement is the principle that guides your choice of strategy and content, so write it down before you start preparing your presentation. Note that the purpose is *not* the introduction of your talk; it may not be explicit

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## COMPARING WRITTEN AND ORAL MESSAGES

Giving a presentation is in many ways very similar to writing a message. All the chapters on using you-attitude and positive emphasis, developing benefits, analyzing your audience, and designing visuals remain relevant as you plan an oral presentation.

Oral messages make it easier to

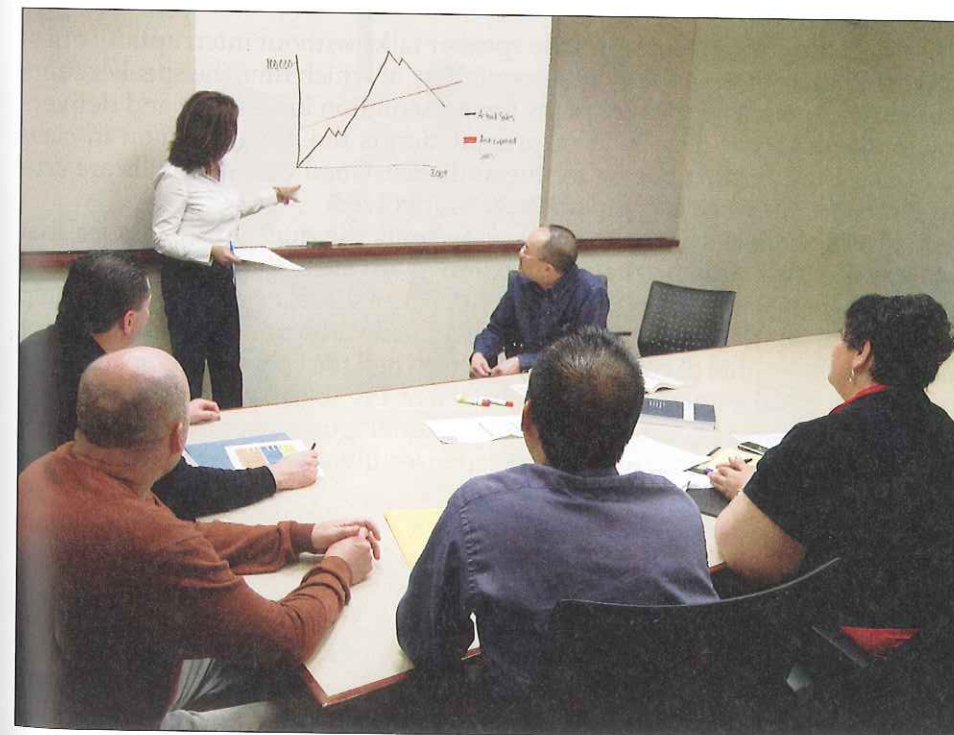
- Use emotion to help persuade the audience.
- Focus the audience's attention on specific points.
- Answer questions, resolve conflicts, and build consensus.
- Modify a proposal that may not be acceptable in its original form.
- Get immediate action or response.

Written messages make it easier to

- Present extensive or complex data.
- Present many specific details of a law, policy, or procedure.
- Minimize undesirable emotions.

Oral and written messages have many similarities. In both, you should

- Adapt the message to the specific audience.
- Show the audience how they would benefit from the idea, policy, service, or product.
- Overcome any objections the audience may have.
- Use you-attitude and positive emphasis.
- Use visuals to clarify or emphasize material.
- Specify exactly what the audience should do.



Oral presentation skills are a big asset in the business world.

### Why It's So Hard



"We may grudgingly admit that, like it or not, verbal blunders

have the inevitability of gravity. The next question is why? It's because speaking is one of the most complicated human activities that we do, at any age. The average adult English speaker has a vocabulary of around thirty thousand words. . . . Most of us in modern America, apart from the very solitary and the very garrulous, speak anywhere from 7,500 to 22,500 words a day. Grabbing these words, one every four hundred milliseconds on average, and arranging them in sequences that are edited and reviewed for grammar and appropriateness before they're spoken requires a symphony of neurons working quickly and precisely. Pronouncing words in any language requires that your brain coordinate with your body in order to turn the electricity of nerve impulses into waves of sound. . . .

"Given the speeds involved, why aren't we better equipped to puts units of language in the right order? The problem is that sounds, words, and grammatical items aren't arranged in our brains as though on a library's shelves, with all the items ordered and catalogued by topics and authors. Rather, they're associated with one another in a matrix or a web."

Quoted from Michael Erard, *Um . . . Slips, Stumbles and Verbal Blunders and What They Mean* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 61–62.



### Keeping It Simple

In a market flooded with constant updates to technologies, Apple makes its products stand out from the crowd. One reason is the simple messages provided by former CEO Steve Jobs, which are echoed consistently in online marketing, television ads, and in Apple Stores around the world. When Jobs introduced the iPad in January 2010, for example, he called it “truly magical and revolutionary.” His introduction helped catapult the iPad to a commanding share of the new tablet market.

Other technology companies have not been as successful in articulating their messages. RIM, the maker of longtime smartphone leader BlackBerry, introduced its answer to the iPad in late 2010. In his introduction of the Playbook, RIM's CEO Jim Balsillie said, “There's tremendous turbulence in the ecosystem, of course, in mobility. And that's sort of an obvious thing, but also there's tremendous architectural contention at play. And so I'm going to really frame our mobile architectural distinction. We've taken two fundamentally different approaches in their causalness. It's a causal difference, not just nuance. It's not just a causal direction that I'm going to articulate here—and feel free to go as deep as you want—it's really as fundamental as causalness.”

Remember, for successful presentations, keep it simple.

Adapted from Diane Brady and Hugo Miller, “Failure to Communicate,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, October 11–17, 2010, 76–80.

## PLANNING A STRATEGY FOR YOUR PRESENTATION LO 19-1

How will you reach your specific goals with a specific audience?

In all oral presentations, simplify what you want to say. Identify the one idea you want the audience to take home. Simplify your supporting detail so it's easy to follow. Simplify visuals so they can be taken in at a glance. Simplify your words and sentences so they're easy to understand. Researchers at Bell Labs are practicing these techniques. Where once they spent their days on basic research and academic papers, they now are condensing their scientific work into eight-minute PowerPoint presentations for potential corporate partners and venture capital as the Labs' new director seeks to make it profitable.<sup>1</sup>

An oral presentation needs to be simpler than a written message to the same audience. If readers forget a point, they can turn back to it and reread it. Headings, paragraph indentation, and punctuation provide visual cues to help readers understand the message. Listeners, in contrast, must remember what the speaker says. Whatever they don't remember is lost. Even asking questions requires the audience to remember which points they don't understand.

Analyze your audience for an oral presentation just as you do for a written message. If you'll be speaking to co-workers, talk to them about your topic or proposal to find out what questions or objections they have. For audiences inside the organization, the biggest questions are often practical ones: Will it work? How much will it cost? How long will it take? How will it impact me?

Think about the physical conditions in which you'll be speaking. Will the audience be tired at the end of a long day of listening? Sleepy after a big meal? Will the group be large or small? The more you know about your audience, the better you can adapt your message to them.

### Choosing the Kind of Presentation

Choose one of three basic kinds of presentations: monologue, guided discussion, or interactive.

In a **monologue presentation**, the speaker talks without interruption; questions are held until the end of the presentation, at which time the speaker functions as an expert. The speaker plans the presentation in advance and delivers it without deviation. This kind of presentation is the most common in class situations, but it's often boring for the audience. Good delivery skills are crucial, since the audience is comparatively uninvolved.

In a **guided discussion**, the speaker presents the questions or issues that both speaker and audience have agreed on in advance. Rather than functioning as an expert with all the answers, the speaker serves as a facilitator to help the audience tap its own knowledge. This kind of presentation is excellent for presenting the results of consulting projects, when the speaker has specialized knowledge, but the audience must implement the solution if it is to succeed. Guided discussions need more time than monologue presentations, but produce more audience response, more responses involving analysis, and more commitment to the result.

An **interactive presentation** is a conversation, even if the speaker stands up in front of a group and uses charts and overheads. Most sales presentations are interactive presentations. The sales representative uses questions to determine the buyer's needs, probe objections, and gain provisional and then final commitment to the purchase. Even in a memorized sales presentation, the buyer will talk a significant portion of the time. Top salespeople let the buyer do the majority of the talking.

Technology also continues to offer new ways for audience interaction. Audience response devices (see sidebar on this page) allow people to answer multiple-choice, true/false, and yes/no questions; software then quickly tabulates the responses into charts and graphs the audience can see. Some new audience response systems use mobile phones, twitter, and the web; they also display results in charts. The question for you will be how much such a system tempts your audience to send its own tweets instead of listening to you.

### Adapting Your Ideas to the Audience

Measure the message you'd like to send against where your audience is now. If your audience is indifferent, skeptical, or hostile, focus on the part of your message the audience will find most interesting and easiest to accept.

Make your ideas relevant to your audience by linking what you have to say to their experiences and interests. Showing your audience that the topic affects them directly is the most effective strategy. When you can't do that, at least link the topic to some everyday experience.

### Planning a Strong Opening

The beginning and the end of a presentation, like the beginning and the end of a written document, are positions of emphasis. Use those key positions to interest the audience and emphasize your key point. You'll sound more natural and more effective if you talk from notes but write out your opener and close in advance and memorize them. (They'll be short: just a sentence or two.)



Good presentations adapt their ideas to a particular audience.



### Audience Feedback

Just as when you're speaking with someone face-to-face, when you're presenting in front of a group it's important to look for feedback from your audience. Pay attention to body language, and ask your audience questions: the feedback that you get will help you build rapport with your audience so that you can express your message more clearly.

In some settings, such as when you're presenting to a large group, you might use other tools to gather audience feedback. For example, you could build a group discussion into your presentation: give your audience some questions to discuss in small groups, then invite them to share their answers with the room. Give questionnaires to your audience, either before your presentation or during a break. Have a member of your team tabulate audience responses, then build them into the remainder of your talk.

Audience response devices give you another option for getting instant audience feedback. These devices—popular with training departments—allow your audience to respond quickly to multiple-choice or yes/no questions during presentations. Software tabulates the responses as numbers, charts, or graphs for all to see. These devices are particularly good for feedback in situations where people may want anonymity.

Look at the product websites of some popular audience response devices:

- [www.meridiaars.com/](http://www.meridiaars.com/)
- [www.optiontechnologies.com](http://www.optiontechnologies.com)
- [www.qwizdom.com](http://www.qwizdom.com)
- [www.turningtechnologies.com](http://www.turningtechnologies.com)

How do these devices compare to each other? How might you use them in your own presentations?



### Mastering Toasts

To some, Toastmasters International still reflects its roots: helping nervous groomsman prepare wedding toasts. But it has grown into an organization with over 250,000 members and is growing at about 10% every year. Its 2011 International Speech Contest drew 38,000 contestants from 113 countries. So what is it all about?

Toastmasters helps its members learn and practice public speaking. But their aim is not at high-stakes motivational speaking. Rather, “We help the new supervisor who just got promoted and doesn’t feel comfortable talking to the five people working for him,” says Daniel Rex, the executive director. “We teach people skills, but what we really teach is confidence.”

Their success in teaching has been noticed. Official branches of the organization can be found in many major corporations, and other companies sponsor Toastmasters classes for their employees. The principles taught—confidence, simplicity, personal branding, and audience engagement—are important for any presenter to learn.

Adapted from Joel Stein, “Making Every Word Count,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, January 24–30, 2011, 112–13.

Consider using one of four common modes for openers: startling statement, narration or anecdote, quotation, or question. The more you can do to personalize your opener for your audience, the better. Recent events are better than things that happened long ago; local events are better than events at a distance; people they know are better than people who are only names.

### Startling Statement

Twelve of our customers have canceled orders in the past month.

This presentation to a company’s executive committee went on to show that the company’s distribution system was inadequate and to recommend a third warehouse located in the Southwest.

**Narration or Anecdote** The same presentation could also start with a relevant story.

Last week Joe Murphy, purchasing agent for Westrop’s, our biggest client, came to see me. I knew something was wrong right away, because Joe was wearing a jacket instead of his usual cowboy shirt and smile. “Ajit,” he said, “I have to tell you something. I didn’t want to do it, but I had to change suppliers. We’ve been with you a long time, but it’s just not working for us now.”

Elements such as dialogue and sensory details will give stories more impact.

**Quotation** A quotation could also start the presentation. This quotation came from Boyers, a major account for the company:

“Faster and easier!” That’s what Boyers said about their new supplier.

Quotations work best when they are directly connected to the audience, as opposed to quotes from famous people.

**Question** Asking the audience to raise their hands or reply to questions gets them actively involved in a presentation. Tony Jeary skillfully uses this technique in sessions devoted to training the audience in presentation skills. He begins by asking the audience members to write down their estimate of the number of presentations they give per week:

“How many of you said one or two?” he asks, raising his hand. A few hands pop up. “Three, four, six, eight?” he asks, walking up the middle of the aisle to the back of the room. Hands start popping up like targets in a shooting gallery. Jeary’s Texas drawl accelerates and suddenly the place sounds like a cattle auction. “Do I hear 10? Twelve? Thirteen to the woman in the green shirt! Fifteen to the gentleman in plaid,” he fires, and the room busts out laughing.<sup>2</sup>

Most presenters will not want to take a course in auctioneering, as Jeary did to make his questioning routine more authentic. However, Jeary’s approach both engages the audience and makes the point that many jobs involve a multitude of occasions requiring formal and informal presentation skills.

Your opener should interest the audience and establish a rapport with them. Some speakers use humor to achieve those goals. However, an inappropriate joke can turn the audience against the speaker. Never use humor that’s directed against the audience or an inappropriate group. Humor directed

at yourself or your team is safer, but even there, limit it. Don’t make your audience squirm with too much self-revelation.

Humor isn’t the only way to set an audience at ease. Smile at your audience before you begin; let them see that you’re a real person and a nice one.

### Planning a Strong Conclusion

The end of your presentation should be as strong as the opener. For your close, you could do one or more of the following:

- Restate your main point.
- Refer to your opener to create a frame for your presentation.
- End with a vivid, positive picture.
- Tell the audience exactly what to do to solve the problem you’ve discussed.

When Mike Powell described his work in science to an audience of nonscientists, he opened and then closed with words about what being a scientist feels like. He opened humorously, saying, “Being a scientist is like doing a jigsaw puzzle . . . in a snowstorm . . . at night . . . when you don’t have all the pieces . . . and you don’t have the picture you are trying to create.” Powell closed by returning to the opening idea of “being a scientist,” but he moved from the challenge to the inspiration with this vivid story:

The final speaker at a medical conference [I] attended . . . walked to the lectern and said, “I am a thirty-two-year-old wife and mother of two. I have AIDS. Please work fast.”<sup>3</sup>

When you write out your opener and close, be sure to use oral rather than written style. As you can see in the example close above, oral style uses shorter sentences and shorter, simpler words than writing does. Oral style can even sound a bit choppy when it is read by eye. Oral style uses more personal pronouns, a less varied vocabulary, and more repetition.

### CHOOSING INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN A PRESENTATION LO 19-2

Choose the information that is most interesting to your audience, that answers the questions your audience will have and that is most persuasive for them. Limit your talk to three main points. In a long presentation (20 minutes or more) each main point can have subpoints. Your content will be easier to understand if you clearly show the relationship between each of the main points.

Turning your information into a **story** also helps. For example, a presentation about a plan to reduce scrap rates on the second shift can begin by setting the scene and defining the problem: Production expenses have cut profits in half. The plot unfolds as the speaker describes the facts that helped her trace the problem to scrap rates on the second shift. The resolution to the story is her group’s proposal.

In an informative presentation, link the points you make to the knowledge your audience has. Show the audience members that your information answers their questions, solves their problems, or helps them do their jobs. When you explain the effect of a new law or the techniques for using a new machine, use specific examples that apply to the decisions they make and the work they do. If your content is detailed or complicated, give people a written outline or handouts. The written material both helps the audience keep track of your points during the presentation and serves as a reference after the talk is over.



### Prezi Presentations

Prezi, a free online tool, provides business communicators with another option

when planning presentations. While PowerPoint’s presentation philosophy is based on older techniques of clicking through actual physical slides, Prezi uses modern technologies to create a different experience.

Rather than a series of consecutive slides, Prezi creates one large canvas. The presenter can place text and images anywhere on the canvas, and zoom in and out on areas or pan to different areas of the canvas. This approach allows presenters to display hierarchies and spatial relationships between items in ways that PowerPoint’s linear progression doesn’t allow.

Prezi’s zooming and panning approach may be more engaging than PowerPoint, especially to viewers who are not familiar with it. But, just as with PowerPoint’s transitions and animations, Prezi’s movements can become distracting if used unwisely. Overuse of Prezi’s movements can create a dizzying effect on the audience.



### How Not to Give a Presentation

John R. Brant has some excellent advice on how to give an awful presentation:

- **Have a dull opening:** If you really want to lose your audience in the first few minutes, read a prepared statement to them from a slide or a handout.
- **Bury them in slides:** Bore your audience with more slides than they'll be able to remember, or speed through your slides so quickly that your PowerPoint turns into a blur.
- **Use the wrong humor:** Make everyone uncomfortable with self-deprecating humor.
- **Show them your back:** Demonstrate how disconnected you are with your audience by turning your back to them, and avoid the possibility of rapport-building eye contact by looking at the screen instead of at your audience.

Think about the uninspiring presentations you've seen from other students, or even from your instructors. What could the presenters have done to improve their work and gain your interest?

Adapted from John R. Brandt, "Missing the (Power) Point," *Industry Week*, January 2007, 48.

To be convincing, you must answer the audience's questions and objections. However, don't bring up negatives or inconsistencies unless you're sure that the audience will think of them. If you aren't sure, save your evidence for the question phase. If someone does ask, you'll have the answer.

### Choosing Data

As part of choosing what to say, you should determine what data to present, including what to show in visuals. Any data you mention should be necessary for the points you are making. Databases and PowerPoint have given employees direct access to ready-made and easy-to-create slides. The temptation is to overuse them rather than starting with decisions about what the audience needs to know.

Statistics and numbers can be convincing if you present them in ways that are easy to hear. Simplify numbers by reducing them to two significant digits and putting them in a context.

Hard to hear: Our 2010 sales dropped from \$12,036,288,000 to \$9,124,507,000.

Easy to hear: Our 2010 sales dropped from \$12 billion to \$9 billion. This is the steepest decline our company has seen in a quarter century.

Double-check your presentation statistics and numbers to ensure they are accurate. Mark Hurd, former chairman and CEO of Hewlett-Packard, gave as the best advice he ever got, "It's hard to look smart with bad numbers."<sup>4</sup>

### Choosing Demonstrations

Demonstrations can prove your points dramatically and quickly. Dieticians had long known that coconut oil, used on movie popcorn, was bad for you. But no one seemed to care. Until, that is, the folks at the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) took up the cause. They called a press conference to announce that a medium movie popcorn (and who eats just a medium?) had more saturated fat than a bacon-and-eggs breakfast, a Big Mac and fries lunch, and a steak dinner with all the trimmings—combined. They provided the full buffet for TV cameras. The story played on all the major networks as well as the front pages of many newspapers. Even better, people remembered the story and popcorn sales plunged.<sup>5</sup>

In their book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Chip Heath and Dan Heath say that ideas are remembered—and have lasting impact on people's opinions and behavior—when they have six characteristics:

1. **Simplicity:** they are short but filled with meaning; the demonstration above could be comprehended in seconds.
2. **Unexpectedness:** they have some novelty for us: a bag of movie popcorn is worse than a whole day's meals of fatty foods.
3. **Concreteness:** the ideas must be explained with psychological description (see Chapter 11) or in terms of human actions: the display of fatty foods was graphic.
4. **Credibility:** ideas have to carry their own credibility if they do not come from an acknowledged expert. In the demonstration above, people could see the effects for themselves.
5. **Emotions:** the ideas must make people feel some emotion, and it has to be the right emotion. Antismoking campaigns for teenagers have not been successful using fear, but they have had some success using resentment at the duplicity of cigarette companies.
6. **Stories:** the ideas have to tell stories.

The Heaths call the combination of these six factors stickiness. And the concept really works. Amounts of saturated fats are not exciting ideas, but CSPI changed movie popcorn with its demonstration.<sup>6</sup>

## ORGANIZING YOUR INFORMATION

Most presentations use a direct pattern of organization, even when the goal is to persuade a reluctant audience. In a business setting, the audience is in a hurry and knows that you want to persuade them. Be honest about your goal, and then prove that your goal meets the audience's needs too.

In a persuasive presentation, start with your strongest point, your best reason. If time permits, give other reasons as well and respond to possible objections. Put your weakest point in the middle so that you can end on a strong note.

Often one of five standard patterns of organization will work:

- **Chronological.** Start with the past, move to the present, and end by looking ahead. This pattern works best when the history helps show a problem's complexity or magnitude, or when the chronology moves people to an obvious solution.
- **Problem-causes-solution.** Explain the symptoms of the problem, identify its causes, and suggest a solution. This pattern works best when the audience will find your solution easy to accept.
- **Excluding alternatives.** Explain the symptoms of the problem. Explain the obvious solutions first and show why they won't solve the problem. End by discussing a solution that will work. This pattern may be necessary when the audience will find the solution hard to accept.
- **Pro-con.** Give all the reasons in favor of something, then those against it. This pattern works well when you want the audience to see the weaknesses in its position.
- **1-2-3.** Discuss three aspects of a topic. This pattern works well to organize short informative briefings. "Today I'll review our sales, production, and profits for the last quarter."

Make your organization clear to your audience. Written documents can be reread; they can use headings, paragraphs, lists, and indentations to signal levels of detail. In a presentation, you have to provide explicit clues to the structure of your discourse.

Early in your talk—perhaps immediately after your opener—provide an **overview** of the main points you will make.

First, I'd like to talk about who the homeless in Columbus are. Second, I'll talk about the services The Open Shelter provides. Finally, I'll talk about what you—either individually or as a group—can do to help.

An overview provides a mental peg that hearers can hang each point on. It also can prevent someone from missing what you are saying because he or she wonders why you aren't covering a major point that you've saved for later.

Offer a clear signpost as you come to each new point. A **signpost** is an explicit statement of the point you have reached. Choose wording that fits your style. The following statements are three different ways that a speaker could use to introduce the last of three points:

Now we come to the third point: what you can do as a group or as individuals to help homeless people in Columbus.



### An Alternative to PowerPoint

"Barbara Waugh was Worldwide Personnel Manager at Hewlett-Packard Labs. [Several years ago, she was researching how to make HP Labs the best in the business. Waugh's data helped her narrow the problem to three areas needing improvement: programs (clearer priorities and fewer projects), people (elimination of poor performers and more freedom for good performers), and processes (better information sharing). Next, Waugh's challenge was to present these ideas to top managers in a way they could understand and accept.] The last thing she wanted was to preach through PowerPoint. So instead of creating bullet-point slides, she drew on her experience with street theatre and created a "play" about HP Labs. She worked passages from the surveys into dialogue and then recruited executives to act as staff members, and junior people to act as executives. The troupe performed for 30 senior managers. 'At the end of the play, the managers were very quiet,' Waugh remembers. 'Then they started clapping. It was exciting. They really got it. They finally understood.'"

Quoted from Katherine Mieszkowski, "I Grew Up Thinking That Change Was Cataclysmic. The Way We've Done It Here Is to Start Slow and Work Small." *Fast Company*, December 1998, 152.



### New to Admissions: PowerPoint

The University of Chicago Business School took a novel approach to their application process in 2007 when they began asking students to submit PowerPoint presentations in addition to other admission requirements. Since knowing how to create effective slides is crucial for people in business, the inclusion of four slides into the application materials seems almost natural. In fact, Microsoft estimates that 30 million presentations are given per day using their software.

Rose Martinelli, an admissions officer, stated that "we wanted to have a freeform space for students to be able to say what they think is important." The school hopes the new medium will help attract students who can think outside the box, an ability which often bodes well in business.

If you were applying to this school, would you be excited about showing off your presentation skills? What type of material would you include on your slides? What slide design techniques would help you stand out from the pack?

Adapted from Justin Pope, "School Adds PowerPoint for Entrance," *Des Moines Register*, August 8, 2007, D5.



@<http://www.ted.com/>

TED offers "riveting talks by remarkable people, free to the world." You can sort talks by categories such as business or science, or by tags such as persuasive, informative, funny, "most e-mailed this week," or "rated jaw-dropping."

So much for what we're doing. Now let's talk about what you can do to help.

You may be wondering, what can I do to help?

## PLANNING POWERPOINT SLIDES

Once you have planned a strategy for your presentation, you need to decide if you will use PowerPoint. Not all presentations benefit from PowerPoint slides. Information design expert Edward Tufte wrote a famous essay blasting the slides. However, the slides have become ubiquitous at presentations, so your audience might expect them. And they definitely offer advantages for talks that benefit from visuals that can be seen at a distance. These visuals can give your presentation a professional image and greater impact.

Well-designed visuals can serve as an outline for your talk (see Figure 19.1), eliminating the need for additional notes. Visuals can help your audience follow along with you, and help you keep your place as you speak. Your visuals should highlight your main points, not give every detail. Elaborate on your visuals as you talk; most people find it mind-numbing to have slide after slide read to them. **If the audience can read the entire presentation for themselves, why are you there?**

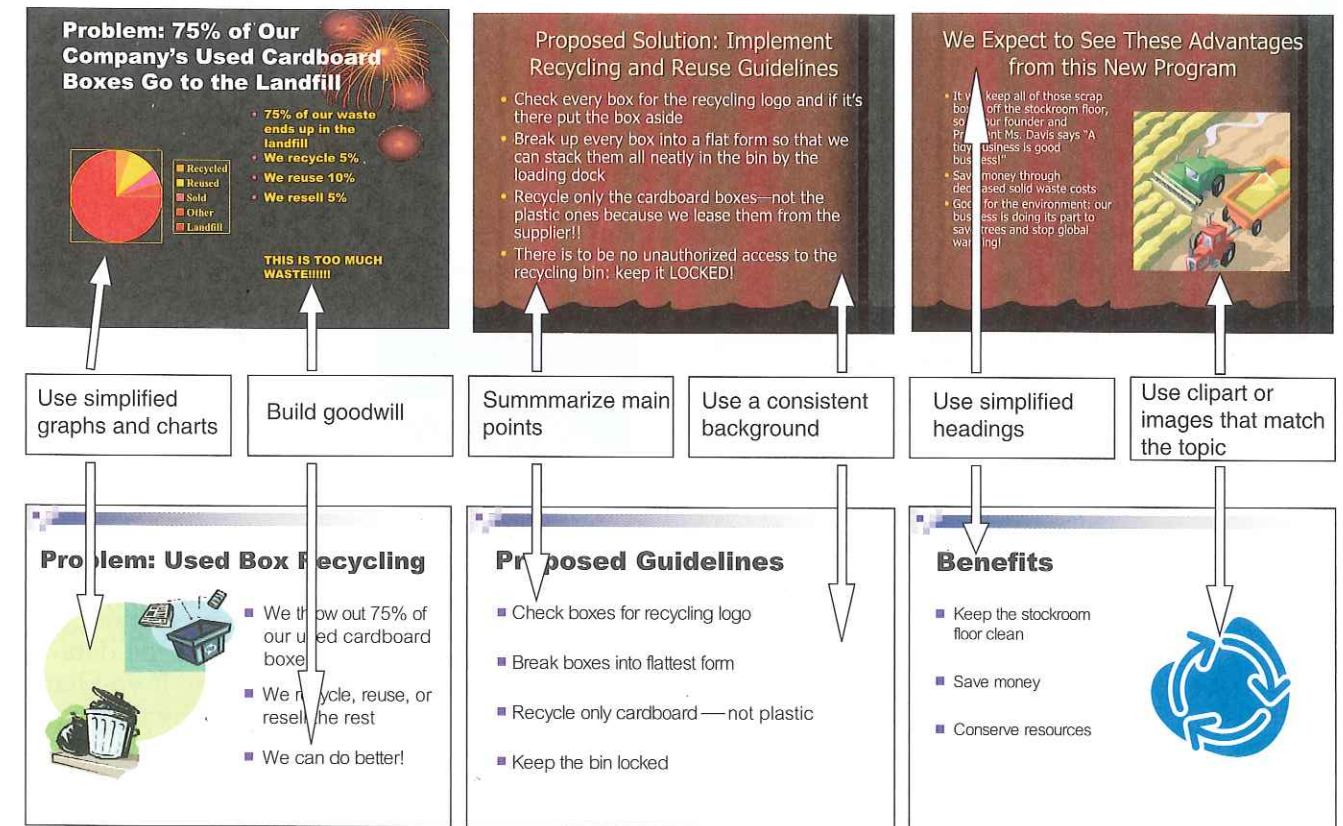
### Designing PowerPoint Slides

As you design slides for PowerPoint and other presentation programs, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Use a consistent background
- Use a big font size: 44 or 50 point for titles, 32 point for subheads, and 28 point for examples. You should be able to read the smallest words easily when you print a handout version of your slides.
- Use bullet-point phrases rather than complete sentences.
- Use clear, concise language.
- Make only three to five points on each slide. If you have more, consider using two slides.
- Customize your slides with your organization's logo, and add visuals: charts, pictures, downloaded web pages, photos, and drawings.



Figure 19.1 Poorly Formatted Presentation Slides (Top) and Well-Formatted Slides (Bottom)



Use animation to make words and images appear and move during your presentation—but only in ways that help you control information flow and build interest. Avoid using animation or sound effects just to be clever; they will distract your audience.

Use **clip art** in your presentations only if the art is really appropriate to your points. Internet sources have made such a wide variety of drawings and photos available that designers really have no excuse for failing to pick images that are both appropriate and visually appealing. Even organizations on tight budgets can find free and low-cost resources, such as the public domain (that is, not copyrighted) collections of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<http://digitalmedia.fws.gov>) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (<http://www.photolib.noaa.gov/>).

Choose a consistent **template**, or background design, for your entire presentation. Make sure that the template is appropriate for your subject matter and audience. For example, use a globe only if your topic is international business and palm trees only if you're talking about tropical vacations. One problem with PowerPoint is that the basic templates may seem repetitive to people who see lots of presentations made with the program. For an important presentation, you may want to consider customizing the basic template. You can also find many professionally designed free templates online to help lend your presentation a more unique look. Make sure your template does not detract from your information.

Choose a light **background** if the lights will be off during your presentation and a dark background if the lights will be on. Slides will be easier to read if you use high contrast between the words and backgrounds. See Figure 19.2 for examples of effective and ineffective color combinations.



<http://norvig.com/Gettysburg/index.htm>

Not every speech needs visuals. As Peter Norvig shows, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is hurt, not helped, by adding bland PowerPoint slides.



### Student Perceptions of PowerPoint Instruction

Students from various business majors took a survey assessing their perceptions of PowerPoint instruction in their courses. The survey revealed that only 27% of students thought that PowerPoint was "interesting and fresh" as an educational tool.

The researchers also discovered that those students who didn't see PowerPoint as interesting viewed traditional lecture as a better way to handle classroom discussion and encourage social interaction. Moreover, students were also likely to suggest that PowerPoint provoked boredom and attention difficulties.

What are your perceptions of PowerPoint? How effectively do you learn from PowerPoint instruction? What could make your classroom learning experience more effective?

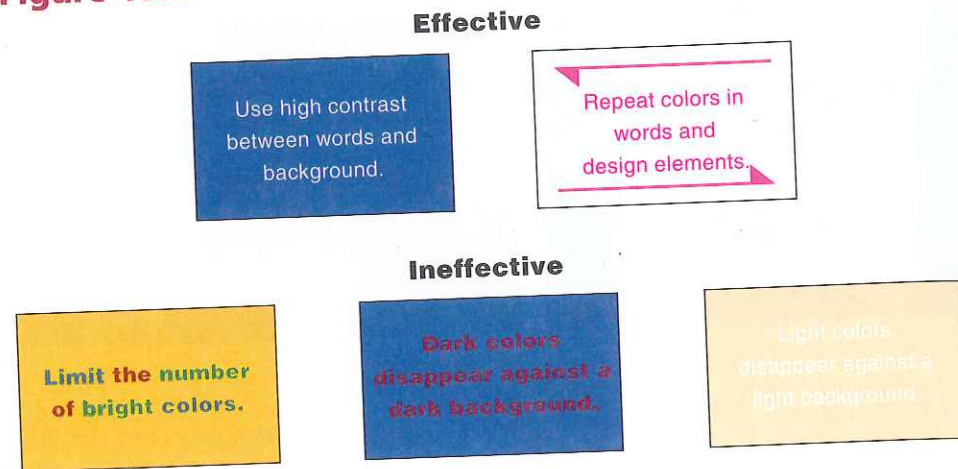
Adapted from Lisa A. Burke and Karen E. James, "PowerPoint Based Lectures in Business Education: An Empirical Investigation of Student-Perceived Novelty and Effectiveness," *Business Communication Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (September 2008): 277-96.



<http://www.authorstream.com/>

Created a great PowerPoint that you would like to share with the rest of the world? Interested in viewing some intricately crafted PowerPoint presentations? Well, Author Stream is just the place. You can join for free and upload your PowerPoint presentations on just about any topic. Author Stream also allows you to rate and comment on other users' PowerPoint presentations. An additional feature lets you keep track of people who embed your presentation on their website and the number of times it gets viewed.

**Figure 19.2** Effective and Ineffective Colors for Presentation Slides



### Using Figures and Tables

Visuals for presentations need to be simpler than visuals the audience reads on paper. For example, to adapt a printed data table for a presentation, you might cut out one or more columns or rows of data, round off the data to simplify them, or replace the chart with a graph or other visual. If you have many data tables or charts in your presentation, consider including them on a handout for your audience.

Your presentation visuals should include titles, but don't need figure numbers. As you prepare your presentation, be sure to know where each visual is so that you can return to it easily if someone asks about it during the question period. Rather than reading from your slides, or describing visuals to your audience in detail, summarize the story contained on each slide and elaborate on what it means for your audience.

### Using PowerPoint Technology to Involve Your Audience

Projected visuals work only if the technology they depend on works. When you give presentations in your own workplace, check the equipment in advance. When you make a presentation in another location or for another organization, arrive early so that you'll have time to not only check the equipment but also track down a service worker if the equipment isn't working. Be prepared with a backup plan to use if you're unable to show your visuals.

Keep in mind how you will use your presentation slides. Most likely, they will provide visual support for an oral presentation in a face-to-face meeting or videoconference. The slides should visually identify the key points of your presentation in a way that allows you to interact with your audience. Your oral presentation should always include more material than the text on your slides.

Consider ways to stimulate your audience's curiosity, invite questions, and build enthusiasm. For instance, instead of saying, "Sales grew 85% with this program," you could show a graph that shows sales declining up to the introduction of the program; invite the audience to consider what this program might do; and finally, after explaining the program, reveal the full sales graph with an animation that highlights the spike using a dramatic magenta line.

Remember that your audience can look at you or your visual, but not both at the same time. Direct attention to more complex visuals, such as figures, and explain them or give your audience a few seconds to absorb them.



**WARNING:** Be sure you have a backup plan in case of a technology failure that prevents your use of PowerPoint.

## DELIVERING AN EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION LO 19-3

Audiences want the sense that you're talking directly to them and that you care that they understand and are interested. They'll forgive you if you get tangled up in a sentence and end it ungrammatically. They won't forgive you if you seem to have a "canned" talk that you're going to deliver no matter who the audience is or how they respond. You can convey a sense of caring to your audience by making direct eye contact with them and by using a conversational style.

### Dealing with Fear

Feeling nervous about public speaking is normal; most people feel some fear about public speaking. But you can harness that nervous energy to help you do your best work. As various trainers have noted, you don't need to get rid of your butterflies. All you need to do is make them fly in formation.

To calm your nerves before you give an oral presentation,

- Be prepared. Analyze your audience, organize your thoughts, prepare visual aids, practice your opener and close, check out the arrangements.
- Have backup plans for various contingencies, including technical problems and likely questions.
- Use only the amount of caffeine you normally use. More or less may make you jumpy.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Relabel your nerves. Instead of saying, "I'm scared," try saying, "My adrenaline is up." Adrenaline sharpens our reflexes and helps us do our best.

Just before your presentation,

- Consciously contract and then relax your muscles, starting with your feet and calves and going up to your shoulders, arms, and hands.
- Take several deep breaths from your diaphragm; picture stress leaving your body as you exhale.

During your presentation,

- Pause and look at the audience before you begin speaking.
- Concentrate on communicating with your audience, not your feelings.
- Use body energy in strong gestures and movement.

### Using Eye Contact

Look directly at the people you're talking to. Make eye contact with individuals in different locations throughout the audience, because you want everyone to feel you are connecting with them. Do not stare at your computer screen or your notes. Researchers have found that observers were more than twice



### Avoiding Disastrous PowerPoints

Conference keynote presentations are notoriously boring, with long PowerPoint shows and droning presenters. Participants, bored, fiddle with smartphones and participate in electronic discussions. During one keynote presentation, bored audience members even designed a T-shirt and put it up for sale online. The shirt's message? "I survived the keynote disaster of 09."

How can you keep your presentations from ending up with their own T-shirts? Here are a few tips:

- *Use visuals and words together.* Your PowerPoint slides should augment and enhance your presentation, not distract from or displace it.
- *Keep your slides simple.* An audience should be able to completely understand each slide in two or three seconds.
- *Break complex ideas into multiple slides.* Don't try to get all the information on a single slide. Use several slides that add up to something more complex.
- *Use your slides as a mnemonic device.* Your slides should make your presentation emotionally appealing and memorable to your audience.

Adapted from Nancy Duarte, "Avoiding the Road to PowerPoint Hell," *Wall Street Journal*, January 27, 2011, C12.



<http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/tutorials/powerpoint>

Want to sharpen your PowerPoint skills? Try out this tutorial that will help improve your preparation design and delivery the next time you have to deliver a presentation. The site also features pros and cons for using PowerPoint and suggests additional resources.



### Pressure Presentations

Technology entrepreneurs routinely pitch their ideas to financial investors at the large Tech-Crunch 50 and DEMO conferences. This presentation situation is stressful for many people. These are five tips for presenting under pressure at such conferences.

- **Keep it brief:** Technology conferences charge enormous fees to present, so you are paying thousands of dollars for every minute of your talk. Besides, most audiences get bored within 10 minutes anyway.
- **Don't overload:** The human brain can absorb only so much at one sitting. What is the most important information to guide investors to a favorable decision about your idea?
- **Set the stage:** Define the problem before explaining what your product can do. If there is no problem, your idea lacks impact.
- **Rehearse:** Most people don't spend enough time rehearsing. Practice, practice, practice! Oh, and ditch the notecards, too.
- **Be prepared:** If technology fails, don't stop talking. Acknowledge the issue and move on. Your audience cares about what you have to say, not your slides.

Adapted from Carmine Gallo, "How to Deliver a Presentation under Pressure," *BusinessWeek*, September 19, 2008, [http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/sep2008/sb20080919\\_919248.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/sep2008/sb20080919_919248.htm).



Part of an effective presentation is its setting. Do you think this outdoor setting helps or hinders the presentation?

as likely to notice and comment on poor presentation features, like poor eye contact, than good features, and tended to describe speakers with poor eye contact as disinterested, unprofessional, and poorly prepared.<sup>7</sup>

The point in making eye contact is to establish one-on-one contact with the individual members of your audience. People want to feel that you're talking to them. Looking directly at individuals also enables you to be more conscious of feedback from the audience, so that you can modify your approach if necessary.

### Developing a Good Speaking Voice

People will enjoy your presentation more if your voice is easy to listen to. To find out what your voice sounds like, tape-record it. Listen to your voice qualities and delivery.

**Voice Qualities** **Tone of voice** refers to the rising or falling inflection that tells you whether a group of words is a question or a statement, whether the speaker is uncertain or confident, whether a statement is sincere or sarcastic.

When tone of voice and the meaning of words conflict, people "believe" the tone of voice. If you respond to your friends' "How are you?" with the words "I'm dying, and you?" most of your friends will reply "Fine." If the tone of your voice is cheerful, they may not hear the content of the words.

**Pitch** measures whether a voice uses sounds that are low or high. Low-pitched voices are usually perceived as being more authoritative, sexier, and more pleasant to listen to than are high-pitched voices. Most voices go up in pitch when the speaker is angry or excited; some people raise pitch when they increase volume. Women whose normal speaking voices are high may need to practice projecting their voices to avoid becoming shrill when they speak to large groups.

**Stress** is the emphasis given to one or more words in a sentence. As the following example shows, emphasizing different words can change the meaning.

I'll give you a raise.

[Implication, depending on pitch and speed: "Another supervisor wouldn't" or "I have the power to determine your salary."]

I'll give you a raise.

[Implication, depending on pitch and speed: "You haven't earned it" or "OK, all right, you win. I'm saying 'yes' to get rid of you, but I don't really agree," or "I've just this instant decided that you deserve a raise."]

I'll give you a raise.

[Implication: "But nobody else in this department is getting one."]

I'll give you a raise.

[Implication: "But just one."]

I'll give you a raise.

[Implication: "But you won't get the promotion or anything else you want."]

I'll give you a raise.

[Implication: "You deserve it."]

I'll give you a raise!

[Implication: "I've just this minute decided to act, and I'm excited about this idea. The raise will please both of us."]

Speakers who use many changes in tone, pitch, and stress as they speak usually seem more enthusiastic; often they also seem more energetic and more intelligent. Someone who speaks in a monotone may seem apathetic or unintelligent. When you are interested in your topic, your audience is more likely to be also.

**Delivery** When you speak to a group, talk loudly enough so that people can hear you easily. If you're using a microphone, adjust your volume so you aren't shouting. When you speak in an unfamiliar location, try to get to the room early so you can check the size of the room and the power of the **amplification** equipment. If you can't do that, ask early in your talk, "Can you hear me in the back of the room?"

The bigger the group is, the more carefully you need to **enunciate**, that is, voice all the sounds of each word. Words starting or ending with *f*, *t*, *k*, *v*, and *d* are especially hard to hear. "Our informed and competent image" can sound like "Our informed, incompetent image."

Use your voice as you would use your facial expressions: to create a cheerful, energetic, and enthusiastic impression for your audience. Doing so can help you build rapport with your audience, and can demonstrate the importance of your material. If your ideas don't excite you, why should your audience find them exciting?

Practice your speech over and over, out loud, in front of a mirror or to your family and friends. There are various reasons for doing so. Practice allows you

- To stop thinking about the words and to concentrate instead on emotions you wish to communicate to your audience.
- To work on your transitions that move your speech from one point to the next. Transitions are one of the places where speakers frequently stumble.
- To avoid unintentional negatives. British Petroleum continued to make negative news during the Gulf oil spill with negative public statements from its officials. Its chairman, Carl-Henric Svanberg, told the press "We care about the small people." Its CEO, Tony Hayward, said he "wants his life back."<sup>8</sup>
- To reduce the number of *uhs* you use. **Filler sounds**, which occur when speakers pause searching for the next word, aren't necessarily signs of nervousness. Searching takes longer when people have big vocabularies or talk about topics where a variety of word choices are possible. Practicing your talk makes your word choices automatic, and you'll use fewer *uhs*.<sup>9</sup>



### Your Call Is Important to Us

Companies spend thousands of dollars developing detailed automated systems to answer customer calls. Yet many callers bypass the systems to talk to a live agent, which can cost the company \$3 to \$9 per phone call. How can companies persuade customers to use the automated systems? Some believe the recorded voice can make all the difference.

Aflac, for example, replaced the many different voices on its customer service line with a consistent voice provided by a middle-aged female actress.

The insurance company Asurion conducted a similar change in their system. They coached their new voice actress to sound warmer, more competent, and more like a live customer service agent.

The new voices seem to be working. More customers are using the automated systems than before, and customer satisfaction with the systems in both companies has risen between 5% and 10%.

Adapted from Joe Light, "Automated Lines' Softer Tone," *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2010, B10.





### Deep Voice Politics

"[Political candidates'] vocal chords—as much as the substance of their words—can influence who becomes the next president, claim the people who study, measure, and coach the human voice.

"Voice matters—it's what sells," says John Daly, a University of Texas communications professor who has written a book about persuasion. University of California at Los Angeles psychology professor Albert Mehrabian even claims to have quantified how important a voice is. When we are deciding whether we like the person delivering a message, tone of voice accounts for 38% of our opinion, body language for 55%, and the actual words for just 7%, his studies suggest."

Do you believe that your impressions of public speakers are shaped by vocal tones?

Reproduced with permission of Dow Jones & Company, Inc. via Copyright Clearance Center.

Many presenters spend too much time thinking about what they will say and too little time rehearsing how they will say it. Presentation is important; if it weren't, you would just e-mail your text or PowerPoint to your audience.

### Standing and Gesturing

Stand with your feet far enough apart for good balance, with your knees flexed. Unless the presentation is very formal or you're on camera, you can walk if you want to. Some speakers like to come in front of the lectern to remove that barrier between themselves and the audience, or move about the room to connect with more people.

If you use PowerPoint, stand beside the screen so that you don't block it.

Build on your natural style for gestures. Gestures usually work best when they're big and confident. Avoid nervous gestures such as swaying on your feet, jingling coins in your pocket, or twisting a button. These mannerisms distract the audience.

### Using Notes and Visuals

If using PowerPoint, use the notes feature. If not using PowerPoint, put your notes on cards or on sturdy pieces of paper and number them. Most speakers like to use 4-by-6-inch or 5-by-7-inch cards because they hold more information than 3-by-5-inch cards.

Your notes need to be complete enough to help you if you go blank, so use long phrases or complete sentences. Under each main point, list the evidence or illustration you'll use.

Look at your notes infrequently. Most of your gaze time should be directed to members of the audience. If using paper note cards, hold them high enough so that your head doesn't bob up and down as you look from the audience to your notes and back again.

If you have lots of visuals and know your topic well, you won't need notes. Face the audience, not the screen. Show the entire visual at once: don't cover up part of it. If you don't want the audience to read ahead, use PowerPoint animation or prepare several slides that build up.

Keep the room lights on if possible; turning them off makes it easier for people to fall asleep and harder for them to concentrate on you.

## HANDLING QUESTIONS LO 19-4

Prepare for questions by listing every fact or opinion you can think of that challenges your position. Treat each objection seriously and try to think of a way to deal with it. If you're talking about a controversial issue, you may want to save one point for the question period, rather than making it during the presentation. Speakers who have visuals to answer questions seem especially well prepared.

During your presentation, tell the audience how you'll handle questions. If you have a choice, save questions for the end. In your talk, answer the questions or objections that you expect your audience to have. Don't exaggerate your claims so that you won't have to back down in response to questions later.

During the question period, don't nod your head to indicate that you understand a question as it is asked. Audiences will interpret nods as signs that you agree with the questioner. Instead, look directly at the questioner. As you answer the question, expand your focus to take in the entire group. Don't say, "That's a good question." That response implies that the other questions have been poor ones.



### Attack Responses

In their book, *Buy\*In*, John Kotter and Lorne Whitehead suggest

24 common attacks (A) on presentations. They recommend that speakers answer the attacks with brief commonsense responses (R). Here are some examples.

- A: We've never done this in the past, and things have always worked out okay.  
R: True. But surely we have all seen that those who fail to adapt eventually become extinct.
- A: Your proposal doesn't go nearly far enough.  
R: Maybe, but our idea will get us started moving in the right direction and will do so without further delay.
- A: You can't do A without first doing B, yet you can't do B without first doing A. So the plan won't work.  
R: Well, actually, you can do a little bit of A, which allows a little bit of B, which allows more A, which allows more of B, and so on.

Attacks and responses quoted from John P. Kotter and Lorne A. Whitehead, "Twenty-Four Attacks and Twenty-Four Responses," chap. 7 in *Buy\*In: Saving Your Good Idea from Getting Shot Down* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2010). Reprinted with permission.

If the audience may not have heard the question or if you want more time to think, repeat the question before you answer it. Link your answers to the points you made in your presentation. Keep the purpose of your presentation in mind, and select information that advances your goals.

If a question is hostile or biased, rephrase it before you answer it. Suppose that during a sales presentation, the prospective client exclaims, "How can you justify those prices?" A response that steers the presentation back to the service's benefits might be: "You're asking about our pricing. The price includes 24-hour, on-site customer support and . . ." Then explain how those features will benefit the prospect. The late Senator Paul Simon was admired for the way he handled hostile questions. Simon would reply, "There are two ways to consider that matter. The way you just mentioned—and a way that starts from a slightly different base." Then Senator Simon would politely explain his point of view. This kind of response respects the questioner by leaving room for more than one viewpoint.<sup>10</sup>

Occasionally someone will ask a question that is really designed to state the speaker's own position. Respond to the question if you want to. Another option is to say, "That's a clear statement of your position. Let's move to the next question now." If someone asks about something that you already explained in your presentation, simply answer the question without embarrassing the questioner. No audience will understand and remember 100% of what you say.

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. If your purpose is to inform, write down the question so that you can look up the answer before the next session. If it's a question to which you think there is no answer, ask if anyone in the room knows. When no one does, your "ignorance" is vindicated. If an expert is in the room, you may want to refer questions of fact to him or her. Answer questions of interpretation yourself.

At the end of the question period, take two minutes to summarize your main point once more. (This can be a restatement of your close.) Questions may or may not focus on the key point of your talk. Take advantage of having the floor to repeat your message briefly and forcefully.

### Checklist for Oral Presentations

- Is the presentation effective for the situation?
- Is the purpose clear, even if not explicitly stated? Is the purpose achieved?
- Does the presentation adapt to the audience's beliefs, experiences, and interests?
- Does the presentation engage the audience?
- Is the material vivid and specific?
- Does the material counter common objections without giving them undue weight?
- Is there an overview of the main points?
- Does the body contain signposts of the main points?
- Are there adequate transitions between points? Are the transitions smooth?
- Are the opening and closing strong and effective?
- Are there engaging visuals? Do they use an appropriate design or template?
- Are the visuals readable from a distance?
- Are visuals free of spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes?
- If the visuals contain data, are the data quickly assimilated?
- Did the speaker make good eye contact with the audience?
- Was the speaker positioned effectively? Did the speaker's body block the screen?
- Did the speaker use engaging vocal delivery?
- Could you hear and understand what the speaker was saying?

### Giving Feedback

Getting feedback from peers is one important part of preparing a presentation, and speakers can't get good feedback without peers who can give good feedback.

Too often peers comment just on simple things, like word choice or body posture, but the most important feedback is frequently about content. Help speakers adapt their material to the audience by asking questions about the people they expect to address. Also, summarize the presenters' message as you understand it, and repeat it back. Doing so can help presenters see where they need to clarify.

No one likes to be criticized, so phrase your critiques in positive terms. Point out changes or suggestions that will make their presentation better, and if you can, back up your advice with tips from professionals.

Think about the way you prepare your own presentations. Do you practice them in front of an audience? What kind of feedback do you get? How could you encourage a practice audience to give you more helpful advice?

Adapted from Kinley Levack, "Talking Head to Rock Star: How You Can Turn Your Top Executives into Polished Presenters," *Successful Meetings* 55, no.13 (December 2006): 28-33.

- Did the speaker use confident gestures?
- Did the speaker avoid nervous mannerisms?
- Did the speaker handle questions effectively?
- Did the presentation hold your attention? If it was a persuasive presentation, did it convince you?

### Additional Points for Group Presentations

- Were team members introduced to the audience?
- Were all team members adequately involved in the presentation?
- Did the presentation move smoothly among the team members?
- Did the individual presentations coordinate well?
- Did team members stay tuned in to the person speaking at the time?

## MAKING GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Plan carefully to involve as many members of the group as possible in speaking roles.

The easiest way to make a group presentation is to outline the presentation and then divide the topics, giving one to each group member. Another member can be responsible for the opener and the close. During the question period, each member answers questions that relate to his or her topic.

In this kind of divided presentation, be sure to

- Plan transitions.
- Coordinate individual talks to eliminate repetition and contradiction.
- Enforce time limits strictly.
- Coordinate your visuals so that the presentation seems a coherent whole.
- Practice the presentation as a group at least once; more is better.

Some group presentations are even more fully integrated: the group writes a very detailed outline, chooses points and examples, and creates visuals together. Then, within each point, voices trade off. This presentation is effective because each voice speaks only a minute or two before a new voice comes in. However, it works only when all group members know the subject well and when the group plans carefully and practices extensively.

Whatever form of group presentation you use, be sure to introduce each member of the team to the audience and to pay close attention to each other. If other members of the team seem uninterested in the speaker, the audience gets the sense that that speaker isn't worth listening to.

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- **Informative presentations** inform or teach the audience. **Persuasive presentations** motivate the audience to act or to believe. **Goodwill presentations** entertain and validate the audience. Most oral presentations have more than one purpose.
- A written message makes it easier to present extensive or complex information and to minimize undesirable emotions. Oral messages make it easier to use emotion, to focus the audience's attention, to answer questions and resolve conflicts quickly, to modify a proposal that may not be acceptable in its original form, and to get immediate action or response.

### Under the Big Top



At the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's circus, the ringmaster has always played an important role. From the early days of the circus, when consummate showman P. T. Barnum deftly directed the audience's attention to the action in the big top's three rings, the ringmaster has been front and center. Today, after 138 years of the circus, the role has changed in some ways, but the ringmaster is still responsible for managing the experience of the audience. Chuck Wagner, one of the current ringmasters, spoke about his experiences as the primary presenter in *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Here are some things he's learned:

- In both oral and written messages, you should
  - Adapt the message to the specific audience.
  - Show the audience how they benefit from the idea, policy, service, or product.
  - Overcome any objections the audience may have.
  - Use you-attitude and positive emphasis.
  - Use visuals to clarify or emphasize material.
  - Specify exactly what the audience should do.
- An oral presentation needs to be simpler than a written message to the same audience.
- In a **monologue presentation**, the speaker plans the presentation in advance and delivers it without deviation. In a **guided discussion**, the speaker presents the questions or issues that both speaker and audience have agreed on in advance. Rather than functioning as an expert with all the answers, the speaker serves as a facilitator to help the audience tap its own knowledge. An **interactive presentation** is a conversation using questions to determine needs, probe objections, and gain provisional and then final commitment to the objective.
- Adapt your message to your audience's beliefs, experiences, and interests.
- Use the beginning and end of the presentation to interest the audience and emphasize your key point.
- Use visuals to seem more prepared, more interesting, and more persuasive.
- Limit your talk to three main points. Early in your talk—perhaps immediately after your opener—provide an overview of the main points you will make. Offer a clear signpost as you come to each new point. A **signpost** is an explicit statement of the point you have reached.
- To calm your nerves as you prepare to give an oral presentation,
  - Be prepared. Analyze your audience, organize your thoughts, prepare visual aids, practice your opener and close, check out the arrangements.
  - Use only the amount of caffeine you normally use. Avoid alcoholic beverages.
  - Relabel your nerves. Instead of saying, "I'm scared," try saying, "My adrenaline is up." Adrenaline sharpens our reflexes and helps us do our best.
- During your presentation,
  - Pause and look at the audience before you begin speaking.
  - Concentrate on communicating, not your feelings.
  - Use body energy in strong gestures and movement.
- Convey a sense of caring to your audience by making direct eye contact with them and by using a conversational style.
- Treat questions as opportunities to give more detailed information than you had time to give in your presentation. Link your answers to the points you made in your presentation.
- Repeat the question before you answer it if the audience may not have heard it or if you want more time to think. Rephrase hostile or biased questions before you answer them.

- To engage an audience, you need to invest energy and enthusiasm.
- If something goes wrong, "stay poised, stay polished, stay calm, and keep that smile on [your] face."
- If something goes really wrong, acknowledge it, but move on with the show.
- In every performance, play to the back row. This means finding a way to draw the people from the top seats of a 20,000-seat arena into the action. Use your voice and motions to address each person individually.
- Be confident and professional.

Most business presentations are not like running a circus. But the lessons learned by a ringmaster have value for every presenter.

Adapted from "Playing to the Back Row: A Conversation with Ringmaster Chuck Wagner," *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009, 41-44.