

Speaking Conventions

Oral presentation skills are a must in today's world. To be successful when speaking, a person should be well prepared. That preparation includes analyzing the situation, audience, and material, developing the presentation, and practicing the delivery.

Guidelines for a quality oral presentation:

1. Know the content and the audience. Analyze the situation. Information may be presented in a variety of ways. The audience's knowledge and familiarity with the topic will dictate the appropriate level of technical complexity of the presentation.
2. Check out the equipment and the room ahead of time for lighting and compatibility. What looks terrific in one environment may look terrible in another one. What works on your computer at home may not be compatible with the equipment in the presentation room. Always have a back-up plan in case the equipment malfunctions. This plan may include a handout of the slide show.
3. Have handouts for the audience. Handouts are a way to keep information in front of the audience after the presentation is over. Be certain handouts are dated so the recipient knows how current the information is when reading it at a later date.
4. Dress professionally. First impressions are important. Your dress and demeanor will be part of the audience's first impression.
5. Do not use slang when speaking in front of an audience. [FYI "Guys, gunna, drivin', and yup" are all examples of slang.]
6. Face the audience. Do not speak to the screen or look down at your computer or notes. Maintain eye contact with the audience. One helpful technique when using a computer is to position the computer screen so that you can see it out of the corner of your eye. You can then glance at the computer screen occasionally to help you keep on track, while never putting your back to the audience.
7. Do not read your notes. Be familiar enough with the material that you are comfortable looking at the audience rather than your notes. Practice, practice, practice.
8. Use natural gestures to emphasize the content. People remember gestures that enhance content.
9. Keep sentences short and strive for clarity. Short sentences have more impact and are easier to remember when presenting.
10. Do not talk too fast. Talk at a normal rate, pronouncing words clearly and distinctly. This tip is particularly important if you have an audience with diverse language skills.
11. Be enthusiastic. If you are excited about your product/topic, your audience will sense it and react more positively to the content.
12. Repeat important information. Tell your audience what you will be discussing (introduction), repeat the information with details (main body), then repeat your main points with one significant fact for each point (conclusion/summary).
13. Ask for audience questions. Give your audience time to ask questions to clarify questions about your information and to request more information. Questions about the topic keep the focus on your content.
14. Turn off the cell phone. Having the cell phone ring while you are presenting interrupts the flow of the presentation and sends the message that being connected is more important than the people with whom you are conversing.
15. Practice, practice, practice. Oh, did I mention the need to practice? Not only does practice give you confidence, it helps contribute to your overall knowledge of the material and makes focusing on the audience rather than your notes easier.
16. Keep in mind that nervousness is not always bad. If it prompts you to practice and be prepared, nervousness will give you the edge.