



A Seven Step Recipe for Effective Presentations

I was once asked by someone if I had any quick tips for preparing presentations. What I suggested was a seven step recipe for planning an effective presentation. The steps were:

1. Motives

• You the Presenter

- What do you want to accomplish from the presentation?
 - prestige or recognition?
 - to convince, influence or persuade the audience to agree or take action?
 - something else?
- You are informing the audience for a reason and not for the sake of filling their heads with more information they don't really want.
- What do you have to offer in exchange?

• Audience

- Who are they?
- What is their position and point of view on the issue?
- What do they value? What do they want or need? What would motivate them to listen and cooperate?
- What do they know?
- What can they do?
- What resources do they have?

2. Meaning or Point

- What is the point of your presentation?
- What are you asking them to do (agree or act) and why?
- Can you express it in one focused sentence?
- This becomes your "core" or "take-home" message.

3. Structure

- The "structure" is the reasoning or argument that the audience would find convincing. How can you make agreeing with you or acting as you suggest reasonable and worthwhile to them?
- What are the major sub-points which add up to the overall "take-home" meaning?

4. Substance

- What is the crucial/essential evidence to support your argument? Use as little information as possible! Less is more.
- Leave out anything which is not absolutely necessary. If in doubt, leave it out.

- Too much information overloads the audience and is actually less persuasive.
- If they want to know more or something else, they will ask!

5. Visual Aids

- As few slides as possible. Maximum of one slide per minute.
- As many pictures and as few words as possible.
- Make everything simple, big with strong visual contrast.

6. Delivery

• Body Language

- Make eye contact with everyone during the presentation. Never pick a "friendly face" and then stare at them for the whole presentation. That person feels uncomfortable and the rest of the audience feels ignored.
- Face the audience with your whole body and talk to them like they were people.
- Your gestures will need to be larger and slower than normal because the audience is sitting further away than what is usual for a conversation. Can you "act out" or "mime" what you are talking about? It will make your message easier to understand and more memorable.
- Interact with the audience as much as possible. Ask them if something is clear. Check if everyone can see the screen and hear you. If someone looks confused, ask them what is puzzling them. Interacting with the audience makes it more interesting for them & "humanises" them to you.

• Voice

- Speak to them naturally and conversationally, but more slowly, louder and with more pauses than you would normally use.
- Pace: speak slowly! They need time to hear it, think about it and then do the mental filing, before they can absorb the next bit.
- Pauses: use lots of them, even in the middle of sentences. Pauses give them time to do the mental processing and filing while you're not talking. Pauses can also be used to emphasise important points.
- Speak loudly.
- Enunciate your words, especially the consonants. Consonants make it easier for people to recognise the words, particularly if English is not their first language.
- Let your voice have natural variety.

7. Questions

- Question period is your opportunity to tidy up loose-ends or spots of confusion.
- If you are concerned about handling awkward, aggressive or hostile questions, then book a workshop from Ted or buy the postgraduate skills book.