



“Stand & Deliver” — Tips for Delivering Effective Presentations

Review Guide

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“Ninety percent of leadership is the ability to communicate something people want.” – **U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein**

“Speech is power, speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.”

– **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Be Prepared: Presentation Fundamentals

Have a Clear Agenda

- Know your audience. Who do you need to reach?
- Know what they want and need to know.
- Know the three or four messages you want to convey to them.
- Know what you want them to do in response (e.g., provide permission to test the soil, contact you for additional information, keep informed, etc.)

Organize Your Presentation – The Opener, Body, Conclusion

The Opener

Make the audience eager to hear more. Depending on the nature of your presentation, here are some opener examples:

A startling statistic:

“Homeowners use up to 10 times more toxic chemicals per acre than farmers.”

A quotation:

“Public speaking is the art of diluting a two-minute idea with a two-hour vocabulary.”

-President John F. Kennedy, Jr.

Rhetorical question:

“Who is scared to death that I’m going to call on you to do an impromptu presentation? Raise your hand.”

A story:

Stories should make a point and have a purpose that’s obvious to the audience. Stories about people are best. Your own stories are even better.

The Body of Your Presentation

This is where “what does your audience need to know?” messages come in.

- Stick to three or four key messages.
- Make it simple – even for technical audiences.
- Lead from one idea to another.
- Capture attention with real-life examples, videos/graphics, interactive exercises, etc.

The Conclusion

The main job is to:

- Summarize your presentation.
- Provide closure.
- Offer an opportunity for questions.

Don't:

- Go overtime.
- Ramble.
- Add new points.
- Say you forgot to mention something.

Rules of Audience Engagement

“According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death... This means if you go to a funeral you are better off in the coffin than doing the eulogy.” – Jerry Seinfeld

What do Stakeholders Expect of the Public Participation Process?

- General Information
- Process and timeline
- A clear role
- A significant role (Note: this may depend on the stage of a clean-up process.)
- Respect
- Responsiveness
- Empathy

Why is Your Audience There?

Typically, they:

- Want to learn something.
- Want to refute something.
- Have a need they hope you'll satisfy.
- Are forced to be there by their boss, attorney, etc.

What is Your Audience's Level of Understanding?

- Am I presenting to experts? If so, assume they know the terms and basic information. If not, assume they don't always understand the terms.
- Have they heard similar talks? If so, what makes yours different?
- What do they expect to hear from you? If feasible, contact community/group leaders/organizers to find out beforehand.
- What do they need to do with the information?

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

- **Get rid of the jargon**, except when presenting to peers. (Quick what does ATSDR mean? How about ROD?)
- **Rule of three.** This is about the maximum number of key points most audiences can absorb in a single sitting. It's okay to present sub-messages under each point. Be sure to provide background information at the meeting.
- **Use analogies where appropriate.** (Level of risk, size of a particle, etc.). If presenting to a lay audience, everyday examples work best. Example: *"Removing crude oil from a mangrove marsh is a lot like trying to clean a sponge used to wipe up bacon grease from a frying pan. . ."*

Actively Engage Your Audience

Ask questions that *require* audience interaction. If the audience is small enough — Say, under 25 people — do brief roundtable introductions. The more an audience member feels like a part of the presentation, the more engaged they will be.

Make the Most of Room Dynamics

- Check out the room before the meeting. (Equipment, too!)
- Make sure you have the room key or cell phone numbers of the meeting space contacts.

- Present from the same level as the audience. Not on a stage, which can foster a perception that the speakers think they are “more important” than audience members.
- Check the background. Remove anything distracting from behind where the speakers will be presenting.
- Arrive at least an hour before the start of the meeting. Have a sign-in sheet and greet participants as they arrive.
- Be flexible. Is the audience:
 - Smaller than expected? Urge everyone to move upfront.
 - Really small? Form a semi-circle, chuck the PowerPoint, and work from your outline.
 - Much larger than expected? Apologize. Move to a larger room, if you can; bring in more chairs and ask folks to get as comfortable as possible.

Agree on the Ground Rules

- Purpose of the meeting and what will be covered.
- Meeting format and length. Allow plenty of time for questions.
- Q&A/comment format. If you expect a large audience, you may need to set a per-speaker time limit. If possible, include this information in the meeting announcement.
- Expectation of mutual respect. Stating this is important, especially if the subject matter is contentious. You may need to repeat this ground rule during the meeting.

Confidence Creates Credibility

“There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it.”

– Dale Carnegie

Body Language Speaks Volumes

Start with the right posture. To position yourself try this exercise:

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, weight equally distributed.
- Raise arms up over your head.
- Breathe in deeply.
- Exhale, slowly lowering arms down to your sides, keep your ribcage as is.

Speaker Stance

- If using a podium, beware the “death grip.” Move to the either side of the podium to engage with the audience. (Use a clip-on or portable microphone.)
- Avoid swaying back and forth. Try planting your feet in an inverted pyramid or “penguin pose.”
- Keep your hands out of pockets so that you don’t jingle change or keys.
- *About those hands!* Gesture waist to shoulder, not across your face, which can be distracting. Try gently cupping your hands at waist level. This allows you to naturally use a hand to gesture when needed.

Facial Expressions

- Smile. It relaxes your audience and makes you look and sound friendly. Also, a slight smile – not a grin, mind you – comes across as a neutral expression should your presentation be televised or captured on video.
- Use facial expressions to make a point (e.g. a raised eyebrow when presenting a startling fact, etc.).

Eye Contact

- Don't read continually from your notes or PowerPoint.
- Gaze around the room, rather than at one person or spot. Again, this increases audience engagement and also helps you gauge the level of audience understanding.
- Look at the audience – *not* over their heads.

Voice – It's Your Most Valuable Tool

- Warm your voice. Hum or talk to yourself on the way to the meeting.
- Avoid dry throat, which will make you sound raspy. Sip water or better yet some soothing warm tea with honey.
- Watch out for "speed bumps" — words and phrases easy to flub, e.g., *blood lead levels*.
- Vary volume, pitch and speed.

Exercise:

Say: "This new CERCLA policy is going to be extremely effective."

Change tone: Add surprise, irony, anger.

Speak "On the Breath"

Take in a full breath. Use it to support your words, letting your breath out steadily through the entire sentence. This helps you avoid running out of breath, which raises your pitch, and can make you sound nervous.

Exercise:

- Breathe in deeply, mentally count 1..2..3..4..5
- Now exhale as you say: "Hello my name is _____"

Avoid Chronic Upspeak or Uptalk

This is marked by a rising speech pattern at the end of any and all utterances. Try this exercise. Repeat:

*"I have something to **say**?"*

*"I have **something** to say."*

Hear the difference?

“The best speakers know enough to be scared. . . the only difference between the pros and the novices is that the pros have trained the butterflies to fly in formation.” – Edward R. Murrow

Controlling Anxiety. Here is a way to help train those butterflies before your presentation.

Stress-buster exercises:

- Stand on one leg and shake the other. Switch leg and shake. (Remove high heels or cowboy boots.)
- Shake your hands... fast. Hold them above your head, bending at the wrist and elbow and then bring your hands back down.
- Ease tense facial muscles by opening your mouth as wide as possible. Then close. Open and close.
- Do shoulder and neck rolls. Imagine you're eye level with a clock. As you look at 12, pull as much of your face up to 12 as you can; now move it to 3, then down to 6 and finally over to 9.

“Conflict is inevitable. War is not.

– Douglas Fry, Anthropologist

Myths about Conflict.

- If I'm doing my job right, there should be no conflict.
- The person or group I'm in conflict with is my enemy.
- All conflicts can be resolved.
- Conflicts are simply caused by poor communications.

What Converts Conflict to Anger?

Typically this involves:

- Differences in values leading to deep-seated distrust.
- Fear of the unknown.
 - Feelings that concerns are not validated.
 - Feeling excluded from decision making.
- Sense of powerlessness.

Dealing with a Difficult Meeting Participant – The Basics

- Be prepared. Find out in advance who might become disruptive and come up with a game plan to handle this.
- Identify a community supporter who could help ease tensions should a participant become disruptive.
- Remember, not everyone will agree with you. Don't get rattled. Remember, you are the expert when it comes to the technical information that needs to be conveyed.
- If appropriate, find a way to agree with part of the person's argument: "I understand your point, however. . ."
- Respond to the entire audience, not just the questioner.
- Do not debate. Suggest meeting during a break or after the presentation. Or have a colleague take the person aside to address their issue.
- If you know in advance the entire meeting will be highly contentious, consider another format for engaging your audience, such as a listening session or open house.
- Again, if you know emotions will be high at the meeting, retain a **neutral facilitator**. *The EPA's Conflict Prevention & Resolution Center can provide this service.*

Dealing with Difficult Participants—Least to Most Disruptive

The Rambler:

- Be patient. Allow the speaker to gather his or her thoughts.
- Validate question/comments: *It appears you know a lot about this topic. Can you help us pull a few key points that relate back to . . ."*
- If necessary, interrupt to say you would be happy to continue the discussion after the meeting.
- Consider a "parking lot" — or separate sheet — for ideas and topics that are unrelated to the meeting's agenda.

Repetitive Questioner:

- Acknowledge the speaker. Refer them to where the information was or will be discussed again.

- Confirm that the rest of group understands the information, e.g., *“Does everyone in the room feel comfortable with where we are in the discussion, or do we need to revisit some points. . .”*
- If necessary, politely, move on but say you will be available to discuss further after the meeting. Or, have a colleague offer to discuss further with the questioner outside the main meeting.
- Provide the facts in simple, clear language. Include images graphics, etc.
- Describe process, assure participants their comments will be considered.

Facts Skeptic:

- Acknowledge the questioner, but then state the facts in simple, clear language. Include images graphics, etc., for the visual-learners.
- Don’t be afraid to calmly counter a false fact or narrative, e.g. *“On the contrary, extensive soil testing has found...”*
- Do NOT become defensive. With defensiveness comes loss of credibility.
- Have a technical resource available to discuss how data was collected, analyzed, etc. Make sure this information is conveyed in simple, clear fashion. Ensure there are no unexplained acronyms.
- Have handouts available.
- Be available after the meeting to explain further.

Verbal Abuser [In addition to tips above]:

- Remind the entire group of ground rules, especially the expectation of mutual respect.
- Designate a colleague who can meet in a separate area with the person who is becoming verbally abusive.

Threat of (or Actual) Physical Attack:

- Stop the meeting immediately.
- Let participants know they will be notified about the next meeting or engagement.
- Take a deep breath and then meet with team to determine next steps.
- Consider other public involvement formats.
- If a public meeting is required, retain a facilitator and have security or law enforcement present at the next meeting.

“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.” – Ernest Hemingway

Effective Listening Tips

- Maintain eye contact to ensure no one feels intimidated.
- Minimize external distractions. Ask others in the room to let the speaker talk. Remind them of the ground rules if they try to interrupt.
- Face the speaker. Lean forward slightly. If at a public meeting: move away from the podium, closer to the speaker.
- Focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. Minimize internal distractions.
- Keep an open mind. Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree.
- Engage yourself. Once the speaker has finished:
 - **Inquire:** Ask open-ended questions.
 - **Acknowledge:** Reflect back feeling. “I realize you are upset about...”
 - **Paraphrase:** Restate. “So you’re saying...”
 - **Share:** Explain your point of view.

And Finally, When it Comes to Coping with Conflict

Fight or flight is not an option:

- Do NOT become defensive. This is not about you. It’s about the situation.
- Project Confidence. Body language counts.
- You Are Not Alone. You do have friends in the audience.
- Know Your Limitations. You do not have all the power. Accept that you have done the best you can.
- This too will pass. Plus, you will have another survival story to share with colleagues!

“Leadership has been defined as the ability to hide your panic from others.” – Anonymous

Training Instructor

Pamela Avery, a specialist in crisis communications strategies and implementation, frequently conducts spokesperson courses, including *“Present Effectively in Any Situation,”* for EPA audiences nationwide. She is a certified public participation specialist who has facilitated more than three dozen EPA-hosted public and other stakeholder meetings during the past 10 years.

As president of AveryMassey LLC, she leads national public awareness campaigns that include social media strategies for a variety of nonprofit clients and regularly works with national and regional news media and bloggers on breaking news stories. An award-winning journalist for nearly two decades, she was the editor of a rural Arizona weekly newspaper, a reporter with the *Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette*, a science writer at the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, and a medical writer and assistant news editor at the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, Colo. She launched national magazines for cancer patients and oncology specialists, and was the founder and executive producer of *EarthWire*, a nationally syndicated environmental radio program.

In addition to providing spokesperson training for the EPA for the past 20 years, she helped produce an EPA documentary on RCRA sites entitled *“My Land, My Legacy,”* the EPA Brownfields Program 20th Anniversary video, and a documentary-style video released in January 2017 highlighting the benefits of the public participation process at a major Superfund site in Silver Valley, Idaho. Pam resides in Billings, Mont., with her husband and three cats, and when she is not on the road working with EPA staffers is a violist with the local string ensemble.

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