Making Sense of Presentations Handout

Facilitator: Sarah Louise Turner, Teaching Enhancement Specialist, TLC, SFU, Burnaby

Presentation Skills Tips

1. **Start at the End**
   Begin by knowing how you want your audience to feel or think by the end of your presentation. As they leave the room, what will they be saying to the person next to them? What will they be inspired to do? Once you have decided the type of impact you want to achieve, decide how you will get there. Do you want to startle them as you begin, and reassure them as you conclude? Choose active verbs to describe your intention and use the expressions on faces to gauge whether or not you have been effective.

2. **Invest Yourself**
   Share something personal, either a story or an anecdote, or simply your reason for believing in the message of your presentation. Allow your dreams and passions to fill your material. The more you invest, the more your audience will end up investing.

3. **Ask the Big Questions**
   If you choose to include the audience by asking questions, start with the big ones and then show how they link to your material. Ask questions that you feel challenged by, ones that your audience will feel inspired to answer. Don’t be afraid of the silence that follows. Give your audience the gift of prompting reflection, even those participants who don’t choose to contemplate the question in the moment may return to it later on.

4. **Gather Information**
   Challenge yourself to gather information constantly. Your audience will be your best source for stories and amusing anecdotes. When you present, imagine that you are not only there to share information, you are collecting information that you can use in the future. The internet, books and magazines are also wonderful sources of information. Who are your role models? What do they have to say about their education and how it shaped them as people? Create a file for these anecdotes and stories.

5. **Create a Presentation Record Book**
   Record the areas of your presentation that were especially effective. Include other ideas for how you might have handled a question. Remind yourself to search out other sources. Give yourself some key areas to focus on for each presentation. It can be as simple as warming up and breathing or as challenging as creating more kinesthetic modalities to your presentation. Try each several times as each audience is different. Even if a tool or technique is less than effective with one group doesn’t mean that it won’t be effective with the next.

6. **Love your Audience**
   I know one very successful and powerful actress who is known for her charisma and passion. Each night before she performs, she does a very detailed warm-up which culminates in a grand bow she performs to the empty seats. As she bows, her full rich resonant voice proclaims, “Mes dames et monsieurs, I LOOOOOVVEEEE MYYYYY AUDIENCE!” When your audience arrives, take a good look at the faces of as many individuals as possible. If you can find one person in particular who you feel could benefit from what you have to say, use that person as a guide.
7. **Encourage Participation**
   Create a feeling of safety and group cohesion. When you ask a question, allow the group to snap, clap, stomp, drum roll or hooray their answer. Enjoy their energy and don’t be afraid to ask for more. Energy is catching.

8. **Trust**
   Trust that you know your material. Keep your notes simple and organized. Breaking the piece into three sections with supporting material is easy for you to remember and your listener to absorb. Winston Churchill’s famous, “Blood, sweat and tears” speech was originally, “Blood, sweat, toil and tears.”

9. **Appeal to Various Learning Modalities**
   Visual learners are sensitive to colour and pictures, so along with the visual images incorporated with your presentation software encourage groups to visualize concepts or ideas in their own minds. Auditory learners have excellent memory for facts and are engage more fully when asked to participate in discussion or answer questions. Kinetic learners have a need to touch and take frequent breaks or participate in role-playing activities.

10. **Provide the Unexpected**
    Keep your audience on their toes. Step into their space, away from the podium, to pose a question. Bounce a rubber band ball on the floor and ask them to guess how many rubber bands it has taken to create this ball. The answer can correspond to the amount of countries that offer programs through SFU, and at the same time be a lovely metaphor. Find a unique way to make your point. Go to the dollar store and choose the most unlikely of objects, then ask yourself how this could link up with your topic.

11. **Practice, Practice, Practice**
    Choose a very strong and clear beginning and conclusion. Make sure to practice these a few times. This will give you a greater sense of confidence and ease. Practice on a friend and get their response. Let it be exciting and maybe even require a little bravery. Your energy and enthusiasm will be palpable. If it doesn’t excite you, it probably won’t excite your listener, so alter the intro or ending slightly from time to time.

12. **Enjoy**
    Find an element of your presentation that you are looking forward to experimenting with. If you are enjoying yourself, chances are much more likely that your audience will be enjoying themselves.
Incorporating Humour

Humour can be a very effective technique in engaging an audience; however, it can also be a challenging tool to become comfortable with. In my opinion, humour is most effective when it is an effortless expression of who you are as a person and what makes you laugh.

Some ideas that I have found helpful for incorporating humour.

Draw on Past Experiences

“Humour is simply tragedy separated by time and space.”
Anonymous

If we are all honest with ourselves, the amount of mistakes we, or our friends, have made in the past, could provide us with enough material to be great stand up comedians. Answer the following questions and see if they can provide you with a comical little story:

When I was in high school

- My claim to fame was
- The dumbest thing I ever did was
- What I learned later
- What upset me the most was
- What I never told my parents
- I remember hearing that

Now not all of these will spark an idea, but usually one or two will provide at least a silly little anecdote.

Learn from the Best

“Humour is reason gone mad.”
Groucho Marx

My husband loves Seinfeld, my mother-in-law loves Mr. Bean and for me it’s Woody Allen. Steal from whoever strikes your funny bone. Don’t forget to practice, there is a rhythm to comedy. Usually the rhythm follows a “Lift, Pause and Release” formula. You set up the joke, raise the inflection, pause for a moment and then give the payoff.

Ease Tension

“How many of you would love to be on a beach in Hawaii right now?”

Often groups are asked to attend a presentation as opposed to choosing to be there. This can create a more challenging dynamic. Sometimes the best way to handle this, is to state the obvious with a sense of humour, “How many of you are here because it was someone else’s great idea?” Often this will both surprise and lighten the mood of the group, establishing a more honest relationship.

You can do the same thing, when you sense that audiences are tired. If it is pouring outside, a simple, “Thanks for choosing to be here on such a glorious day” can endear everyone to your cause.

Scary can be Funny

Ratio, in the United States, of the number of Wal-Mart employees to the number of high-school teachers: 1:1
Presentation Record

Date: Location:

Audience:

Goals or Techniques to Implement:

Reminders from Previous Sessions:

Positive key moments:
1.
2.
3.

Challenging moments:
1.
2.
3.

Alternative suggestions for next presentation:
1.
2.
3.

Ideas, Stories or General Observations:
Vocal Warm Up

ALIGNMENT: Allows you to literally find your feet and approach students from a grounded confident state.

- Feel your feet firmly on the floor, imagine the entire sole of each foot releasing
- Feel your hips balance easily on top of your thighs
- Feel your spine growing out of your hips
- Roll your head gently in a wide circle while relaxing your jaw, try doing this in both directions
- Let your head then float on top of your spine
- Press your shoulder blades together in the back and then release them feeling the gentle opening in the front of your sternum
- Imagine a long string from the base of your spine (your sacrum) lifting you up through the top of your head

BREATH: Gives you the strength and power to support your sound and sustain your energy to the end of a thought. Helps to reduce “nerves” or “performance anxiety”.

- Place one hand over your belly and the other over your chest, allow your belly to inflate like a balloon on your inhalation
- Watch the hand on your chest to make sure that it isn’t doing all of the work
- Slowly exhale on a “sss” making sure that the breath is dropping into the lower abdomen and that no excessive force is being used to push the breath out
- Repeat this several times until the sequence feels easy and unforced, watch to make sure that your shoulders stay relaxed
- Begin to move the head side to side as you gently create the “sss”

VIBRATION: Allows you to speak in a supported manner that will prevent any strain or fatigue (unless the demands are excessive and you don’t take time to rest at some point).

- Place your hand on your throat, or larynx, and make the sound “sss”. Feel the lack of vibration in that area. Now experiment with the sound “zzzzz” and feel the gentle humming in the larynx (You have now engaged the vocal folds)
- While still monitoring the lower abdomen for breath support continue to experiment with an easy “zzzz”
- How long can does this sound last? There is no need to force or push to make it last longer. The more often you do the exercise, the stronger and longer the simple sound will be
- Open the sound into an “eeeeee” and then an “oooo” and finally an “aaahhhhhhh”
- Play with different pitches on the various sounds
- Are there jumps in the sound or wobbles? Make sure that the breath support is there and know that each time you experiment, those wobbles will soften

RANGE: Creates colour and interest in the voice. Invites the student to pay close attention and retain key facts.

- Imagine that your voice is on a roller coaster and slide your voice from the highest note to the lowest and then back up again (Watch, again, for any holding in the throat or contracting in the lower abdomen)
- Now imagine that your voice, on a simple “eeee”, is bouncing up and down on a trampoline, from a high pitch to a low pitch to a mid range pitch
- Experiment with a simple phrase like, “Hello, how are you today?” allowing your voice first to ride a roller coaster and then to bounce on a trampoline
- Now speak the phrase normally and see how it may have changed
ARTICULATION & PROJECTION: Enables the listener to really hear what it is that you are saying, allows them to follow your train of thought and engage in your thought process.

- Move your lips around to wake them up
- Let your tongue relax on your lower lip and then raise it up to your top lip
- Repeat this motion quite quickly without engaging your jaw while saying “la, la, la, la, la”
- Bring the tongue inside your mouth and continue to do the same with the tongue moving from the floor of the mouth to the roof of the mouth behind the front teeth
- Find a big yawn to open up the back of the mouth
- Create the sounds P, T, K, F, S very slowly and clearly, then move on to the voiced version: B, D, G, V, Z
- Speak through one of the phrases listed below going very slowly to ensure that you are forming each and every sound
- Look in to a mirror and make sure that your lips are moving
- Sing the phrase, then return to speaking it, noticing any changes
- Visualize a spot on the wall far away from you and using your hand to guide the sound, send that phrase to the spot on the wall
- Experiment with several different spots around the room and feel your sound filling the space
- Speak the phrase one final time without the arm movement and imagine it reaching all of the spots you have experimented with at once

1. A big baby buggy with rubber buggy bumpers.
2. She sells seashells by the seashore.
3. Double bubble gum bubbles double.
4. Each sixth chick sat on a stick.
5. Of all the saws I ever saw, I never saw a saw saw like that saw saws.
6. Theophilus, the thistle sifter, while sifting a sifter full of thistles, thrust three thousand thistles through the thickness of his thumb.
7. Three gray geese in the green grass grazing; gray were the geese and green was the grazing.
8. The seething sea ceaseth and thus the seething sea sufficeth us.
9. The sixth sheik’s sixth sheep’s sick.
10. She stood on the balcony, inexplicably mimicking him hiccuping, and amicably welcoming him in.

Practice these exercises for at least ten minutes each day and you will find that your confidence in the classroom and elsewhere improves. Always enjoy them and experiment with a sense of humour. For further information regarding voice work and its applicability feel free to consult the following sources.
Presentation Check List

Below is a set of tools that speakers use to ensure a moving and engaging performance. As you review your presentation make notes in your speech. Use colored markers or symbols to ensure that you remember the techniques when you are in action. Practice several times in front of a mirror or into a tape recorder. What first may feel uncomfortable will gradually become second nature.

Getting Started

- Take a moment to breathe and assess the room
- Feel a pause while you gather everyone’s attention
- Remember what you want out of this interchange

Structure

- Make ‘em laugh – Do you make use of humour? A joke or funny story.
- Make ‘em cry—Can you incorporate a startling statistic?
- Make ‘em scream—Create the unexpected answer to the conundrum you introduced.
- Make ‘em smile—Show them how you will provide the answer,

Body Language

- Tall spine and solid grounding (Feet on the floor)—Confidence
- Shoulders back and down/ chest open—Command
- Eye contact—Credibility
- Smile and gesture with open palms —Sincerity
- Breathe and move with precision and purpose—Ease

Vocal Choices

- Clear Articulation -- Practice challenging words
- Pronunciation -- Avoid slang
- Pitch—Vary from high to low
- Speed—140 – 160 words per minute is normal for a speech. The brain can compile and decode up to 400 words per minute so you can speed up at times if you are still clear. When there are complex terms be sure to take your time for the brain to process this new information.
- Pause—Take a moment to let key concepts sit for emphasis
- Volume—Both soft and low can be extremely effective when used in moderation
- Quality—Watch breathy, nasal or chesty sounds
- Variety—Employ onomatopoeia, make the words sound like what they are
- Word Choice—Choose active and personal words, avoid “um’s”, “likes” and “okay’s”

Finally

- Finish with a breath
- Thank your audience
Resource List

Vancouver TheatreSports League
- Drop-in classes held weekly at the False Creek Community Centre
- Saturdays 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.
- Cost: $11.00
- All levels welcome
- Contact: 604-738-7013

Toastmasters
www.toastmasters.bc.ca
- Over 16 groups in the downtown area alone
- “to improve communication and leadership skills…”

SOURCES FOR VOCAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Pacific Voice Clinic, 4th Floor, Willow Pavilion
Vancouver Hospital, 805 West 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC, B5Z 1M9
www.pvcrp.com/services.html

Voice Werx
My personal blog which includes a podcast of the basic voice exercises.
http://voicewerx.blogspot.com/

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:


Presentation skills improve with further knowledge and practice. There is tremendous support for these techniques in our community, give one a try and enjoy!