

## EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION SKILLS

Most managers need to make presentations, whether formal or informal, one-to-one or to a group of people. It is vital that your audience understands the message, but you don't have to be a great orator to achieve this. This Section will look at the skills - all of which can be learned - in making an effective presentation.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- ❑ Structure a presentation
- ❑ Explain how to deliver it convincingly
- ❑ Identify ways of building rapport with your audience
- ❑ Explain how to check that your message has been understood.

To make a good presentation, you need to consider the 4Ps:

- ❑ A well defined **purpose**
- ❑ Thorough **preparation**
- ❑ A well structured **presentation**, with clear delivery
- ❑ Careful **post-evaluation** of how well it was understood.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

### PURPOSE

Clear objectives are invaluable. They will:

- ❑ Guide you in the planning and delivery of your presentation
- ❑ Enable you to structure what you say
- ❑ Help you assess your performance.

Objectives also hold your audience. People have short attention spans (about ten minutes at the start of a lecture, for instance!), so it is very important to be clear from the beginning about what your purpose is, in order to plan a short, clear and interesting input.

Before you start your preparation, a good tip is to write down what you want to achieve – your objective – in a single sentence. Think about what the audience should gain from the presentation: “At the end of this presentation you will understand/be persuaded...” You can then use these objectives to provide the basis for the structure and evaluation of your performance.

Imagine that you have been asked to give a presentation regarding the introduction of a new procedure for handling telephone enquiries. Will you need to:

- Persuade staff to adopt it?
- Ask for their help?
- Outline how it works?
- Test understanding?

As you can see, the presentation may not be a one way process. Questions or even practical role-plays or tests may need to be included.

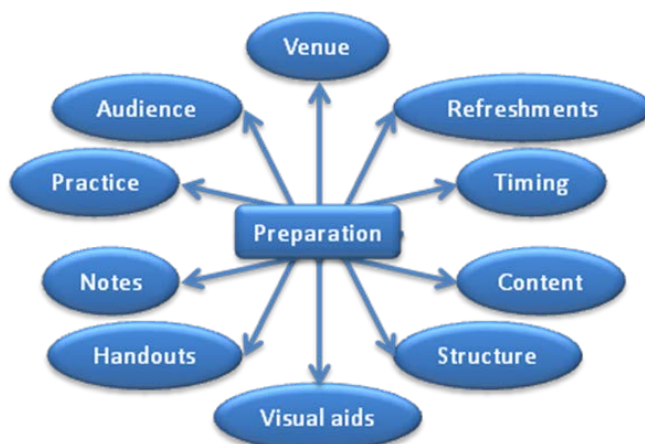
#### ACTIVITY 1

What would you need to think/write about when preparing this presentation? Write down your thoughts.

### PREPARATION

Adequate time for preparation is vital to give you time to think through what you need to say and how best to put it over. There is a lot to consider.

#### TOP 10 PREPARATION POINTS



## AUDIENCE

This is your starting point. You need to tailor what you say to meet their needs:

- ❑ Prior knowledge – What do they know about the subject already? How familiar are they with the technical language of the subject? How can you relate to them?
- ❑ Responsibility and status – What are the areas of responsibility and status of the individuals who make up your audience?
- ❑ Learning styles – People learn in different ways: some through the written word, some through pictures and some by actually trying something out. If you have sufficient knowledge of who will be there, you are able to incorporate appropriate methods and visual aids into our presentation.

## VENUE

You need to check - and preferably choose - the room:

- ❑ Size – How big does it need to be?
- ❑ Noise – Will you be undisturbed?
- ❑ Resources – Does it have the facilities that you need?

## REFRESHMENTS

Do you need to offer refreshments, and can they be provided?

## TIMING

When is the most convenient time and/or the best time to gain everyone's attention? If the presentation is at work, will the audience be able to take the time? How long will they be able to pay attention for?

## CONTENT

What are the key points that you want to make? Get these clear in your head. What is the best order for making these points? You can use the method we described for structuring reports to help you plan.

Make sure that you don't overwhelm your audience with material - keep to the main points. What do you want to emphasise? What examples could you quote? You may need to give the most important facts in the early stages while everyone is more alert.

## STRUCTURE

A logical sequence will take your audience from where they are (in a blissful state of ignorance) to where you want them to be. When planning the structure you may wish to include activities or questions for the audience to encourage participation. When would this be appropriate? If we consider again a presentation to introduce a new procedure for handling telephone enquiries, an appropriate structure might be:

- ❑ Why? The reason / need
- ❑ What? The new procedure
- ❑ How? An example and practice of the procedure.

A clear structure is vital for an effective presentation. An oral presentation needs the same three sections as a written communication:



## ACTIVITY 2

Think about a presentation that you have got to make. If you cannot identify one, think about making a presentation to a group of participants contemplating starting on a distance-learning programme. Produce a plan for the presentation:

- 1) Define your purpose
- 2) What do you think your audience will want to know? How much do they already know on the subject?
- 3) What structure would you follow - identify your main sections in the presentation and the key points you would make in each section?
- 4) What should be the duration of the talk? Will you allow questions as you go along or at the end?

Good preparation can take away many of the anxieties of presenting. If thinking about presenting to prospective students on a distance learning course it would be important to consider how much they would already know. Would they all have received a brochure about the course structure, costs etc? If you were a student making the presentation, your purpose may just be to inform. If running the course, your purpose may be to inform and persuade. It may be appropriate to present for about 20 minutes and then invite questions. The structure may be for such a talk as a current student may be:

- ❑ Introduction
- ❑ Structure and requirements of the course
- ❑ Completing the modules and reading
- ❑ Undertaking assignments
- ❑ Benefits and limitation of the course
- ❑ Summary and questions.

The introduction should provide a route plan for the journey they are about to take:

DO...

- ❑ Chose an interesting title
- ❑ Find a way of arousing interest or curiosity
- ❑ Advise if they need to take notes or if there are handouts
- ❑ Indicate the structure that you will follow.

DON'T...

- ❑ Make contentious statements at the beginning that will alienate your audience.

The main body is where the details are. It should be carefully ordered and appropriate for your audience, and include visual aids so that the audience can see as well as hear what you are saying.

DO...

- ❑ Give examples, anecdotes, stories or anything that will show that you know what you are talking about and that what you are saying makes sense
- ❑ Think of the subject from the point of view of the audience

- Sell your topic to them.

#### DON'T...

- Make it too complicated (perhaps use a handout instead).

The conclusion needs to sum up the main points.

#### DO...

- State what action or response you want, now or in the future
- Check that the conclusion matches with the introduction.

#### DON'T...

- Be afraid to emphasise important points.

### VISUAL AIDS

Aids to illustrate your message can be very useful. They are used to achieve something in your presentation that you cannot manage as effectively via the spoken word.

You can select from various resources as available, e.g. chalkboards, whiteboards, videos/films, demonstrations, overhead projectors, flipcharts, slides, PowerPoint etc.

To ensure that what you choose is an integral part of the presentation, think about this aspect from the earliest stages of planning.

Visual aids should give a clear message. If you use pre-prepared slides or overhead transparencies, they need to be bold and uncluttered; use a limited number of key words. The possibilities for colours and designs are now almost endless if you have access to the right technology.

### HANDOUTS

Handouts can serve important purposes of providing additional detail and summarising presentation content for those people who were not there as well as those who were. Use them as visual aids - i.e. during your performance - with great care, however; you want your audience to look up and listen rather than read, while you are speaking.

## NOTES

Most people find that notes act as a trigger, reminding you what to say, are all that is required. There are two ways to handle notes: using cards or visual-aid-based headings.

## CARDS

A series of cards that you can hold in your hand, and refer to as you move about, is an effective way of organising your notes. Remember to tie the cards together or number them prominently, otherwise, according to Murphy's Law, they will inevitably get muddled.

## HEADINGS

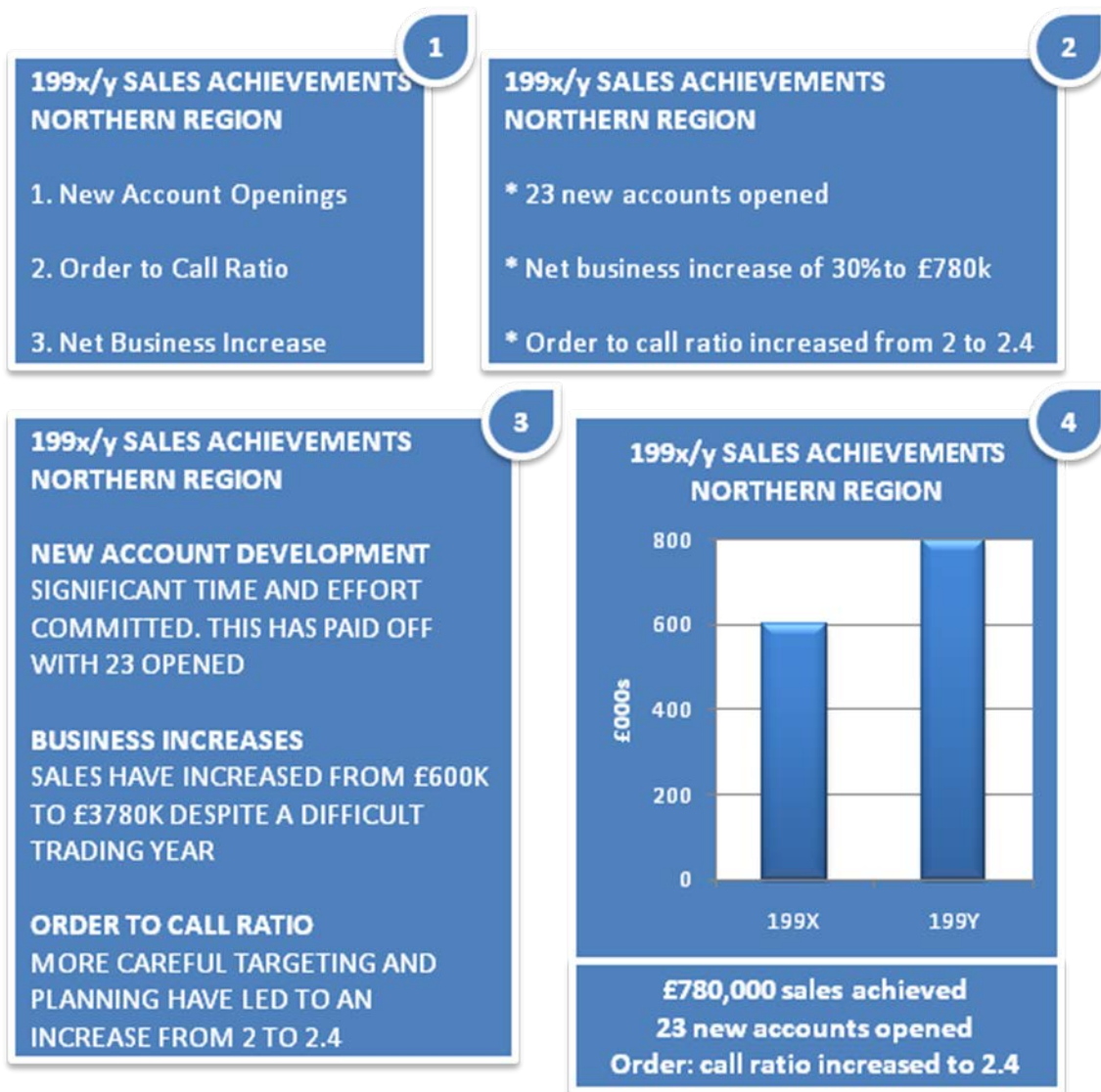
Headings written on paper to match OHP slides are a practical solution. As you talk, you can reveal the next point on the slide, while following your key words on paper.

Find a way which suits you and which will give you the confidence to know that you will not dry up. Don't read your words straight from a script; this is guaranteed to sound like a bedtime story and send your audience to sleep!

## ACTIVITY 3

Compare the four overhead slides below and evaluate which one works best and why.

Feedback for this activity can be found at the end of this guide.



## PRACTICE

Practice makes perfect. How many times have you heard this saying? It is only by practising that you will establish that you have the knowledge, skills and facts to provide a convincing presentation.

Check through the following points:

- Have you the right skills to do a good presentation?
- If not, what do you need to do to prepare yourself?
- How can you give yourself sufficient confidence to do yourself justice?
- What do you need to do to find out about your audience?



- How much will you need to rehearse?
- Do you need to write it all out to help you practise?

Most people are not as fluent and articulate as they think they are, and many have verbal mannerisms that are better avoided.

It is a good idea to record yourself on a tape or video recorder so that you have more of an idea of how you perform.

Finally, put all your material on one side for a couple of days, if you have that time available, and then go through it again. Does it make sense? What can you improve? Can you deliver it fluently, without hesitations and distracting mannerisms? It is also useful to anticipate what questions you may be asked.

## PRESENTATION

### THINK POINT

Think of presentations you have observed. What is the key to delivering an effective presentation?

Now we reach the event itself.



### ROOM/EQUIPMENT

To alleviate last minute nerves, try to arrive early so that you can prepare yourself. Are the seats as you would like them, is the OHP working, are there pens for the flipchart? There is nothing as unnerving as finding that you can't operate the video recorder, or that the projector is faulty, when the equipment is a key support to your performance.

If you are using something like PowerPoint, have you checked the slides are in the right order?

A presentation is a performance. No matter how well you have prepared, if you perform badly you will not have the attention of the audience, and you will not be pleased with yourself.

### THINK POINT

How does the presenter's body language affect reaction?

### RELAX

You may find it helpful to deliberately slow down your breathing, and to tighten then relax your muscles. While you are waiting to begin, it might be a good idea to talk to someone in the audience that you know, rather than wait for the dreaded moment when you have to open your mouth. Above all, smile and look as if you are going to enjoy the session. Think about something that went well in the past to put your mind in a positive state, and be enthusiastic. Make yourself think only positive thoughts.

### AWARENESS

Look at each member of the audience in turn as you talk. They will all appreciate being noticed and will feel included. Keep an eye on them, watch their body language and behaviour - it will give you a clue as to what they are thinking and how well you are putting your message over. If they are looking bored you could change the pace, ask a question, or get them to participate in some way. Eye contact is very important and can build a bridge between you and your audience.

Whether you stand or sit will depend on the message, the situation, the audience and what is normally done in your organisation. In either case, try not to be stiff in posture. Move about, not too much but sufficient to help you to be normal in your style.

#### VOICE

Try to use a conversational style of speaking and modulate your voice, and vary your pitch to put life into what you are saying. Try to talk as you would normally. If you wish to emphasise a point, you may need to speak a little more slowly. Also, be careful not to speak whilst writing on a board or flipchart with your back to the audience.

#### GESTURES AND MANNERISMS

Gestures and movement can reinforce what you are saying. Too many gestures can be distracting, but to be wooden with no gestures is not good. Be conscious of your movements and use them to support what you are saying. For example, an expansive gesture may help to show the breadth of opportunity available if the audience are prepared to commit to your ideas.

Watch how television personalities and politicians use gestures to emphasise their points. Mannerisms if not controlled can be distracting. Try not to fiddle with object such as keys, coins or pens.

#### NOTES

Keep your notes where you can see them without having to strain our eyes or twist your body to read them.

#### TIMING

Don't go on too long! If your audience is tiring then cut some of the material if you are able to. If the deleted information is contained or summarised in a handout to be issue at the end, direct them to this.

## QUESTIONS

Decide beforehand whether you will take questions during the presentation, or at the end. In either case, plan time for them. Questions can be very helpful in building understanding, so encourage them. You know your material and if you are unable to answer a question, then say so and add that you will get back to them with an answer.

Don't flannel if you are unsure. Honesty is the best policy.

Don't put someone down if they ask a question that shows they have not been listening; treat them with respect. Be brief, but not abrupt.

Do be clear about what your opinion is and what is policy, and be careful how you answer the question if there is a difference.

Do check that the questioner is satisfied with your response. If the point is not of interest to most people, then suggest that you both discuss it afterwards.

## VISUAL AIDS

Visual Aids help to take the spotlight away from you a little, so encourage the audience to look at those colourful slides and supporting material that you have prepared.

## VARIETY

If it is a long session, try to break it up every 20 minutes or so. You could use questions or an activity, or other change of pace or topic - anything to let them take a break from your voice.

## POST-EVALUATION

Below is a checklist that you can use. Complete it yourself, or ask someone you know to do it for you. What you need is constructive feedback so that you can learn from each experience.

Alternatively, you could ask someone in the audience that you trust to give you some comments.

Reflect on what you hear about your performance, then decide if what has been said is worth taking notice of, or should be ignored.

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**ACTIVITY 4**

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Use the checklist either a) to evaluate a presentation you are due to make in the near future, by giving it to certain members of the audience or if you cannot find an opportunity to make a presentation b) to evaluate someone else's presentation.

If you have undertaken a), what have you learned about your presentation skills? What are your strengths and areas you need to work on?

If you have undertaken b), what have you learned about making presentations from your observation? What were the strengths of the presentation? What were the limitations? What could you usefully apply when you have to make a presentation?

If you have not undertaken many presentations you may find the whole idea very daunting but do seek out opportunities, in low risk situations, to do some. If you feel very confident in this area try to identify ways in which you could enhance your skills.

You need to check whether your purpose, objectives and outcomes have been met. For example, did you make a good case for the proposal? Do they understand what they have to do?

How did you come over? Lively, interesting, and positive? Were your visual aids and handouts well received?

	Yes	No	N/A
Did the introduction...			
Catch the audience's attention?			
Identify purpose and objectives?			
Lay out the agenda for the presentation?			
Did the main body...			
Present the content logically and progressively?			
Have a clear structure?			
Make the content interesting?			
Have clear OHP slides and flip charts?			
Did the conclusion...			
Succinctly sum up the key points?			
Relate back to the purpose?			
Make clear what the audience were to do/think?			
End up on a memorable, positive note?			
Personal style...			
Was eye contact maintained?			
Was rapport with the audience gained and maintained?			
Was the speed of delivery appropriate?			
Was the tone of voice varied?			
Was the voice clear and audible?			
Was there any non-verbal behaviour that detracted from the presentation?			
Was appropriate use made of notes?			
Question handling...			
Were the questions handled confidentially?			

### ACTIVITY FEEDBACK – VISUAL AIDS

An overhead needs to be:

- ❑ Easy to read
- ❑ Clean and 'uncluttered'.

This usually means that there is room only for key points. Additionally, it must be designed with the audience in mind.

Number 1 would be suitable as an agenda for a monthly sales meeting with the team; however, unless numbers are required, bullet points as in Number 2 are more effective.

Number 3 is not easy to digest; there is too much text, and capital letters are harder to read than lower case. Use large, bold type, and check that your slides can be easily seen from the back of the room.

A picture, as in number 4, is worth a thousand words.

### SELF CHECK QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the four Ps of a good presentation?
- 2) Describe a basic structure for a presentation.
- 3) How might your body language affect your audience?
- 4) What aspects should be considered when evaluating a presentation?