Communication Module

How to Organize Your Presentation

Every presentation has a similar skeleton. There should be an introduction that describes the purpose and objectives, a body that describes take home messages, and a conclusion which ties everything together. Concepts introduced should be well developed and build on each other.

Before attempting a presentation, think about who your audience is, what you would like them to learn from this opportunity, what may captivate their interests, and how you can engage them into discussion or thinking.

Tips

1. **Create an Outline**

   Draft an outline of what you want to talk about. There should be flow to ideas, like a story. Using a flow chart is also a useful way to lay out your ideas to see how they can fit together.

   Other logical ways to order your presentation are to use a time line, starting with what happened in the past to what is happening in the present; moving from simple to more complicated; presenting a problem and working toward a solution; inductive or deductive reasoning where you use examples to find a general concept or vice-versa.

2. **Time**

   Plan for the time allotted. It is best to err on the side of being too short than too long. Keep an eye on the clock. If you find you are moving too quickly, you can always ask your audience questions at regular intervals or if you have time at the end of your presentation, be prepared to lead a short discussion.

3. **Lumping together**

   While there are many similarities between oral presentations and written reports, presenters need to be aware that their audience cannot simply skip sections or take more time to contemplate ideas. Therefore it is important that you lead your audience through a sequence that makes sense.

   Most scientific reports follow the order of Abstract - Introduction - Experimental Methods - Results - Discussion - Conclusions - References. This structure is best adapted to a presentation by breaking up each idea and its general conclusions, rather than lumping all results together and all conclusions together.

4. **Setting the stage**

   Each presentation should include the reason for why your audience would want to know the information presented, introductory content that helps create an interest and understanding about the topic, and an indication of how the talk will evolve. Tell the audience your objectives for the presentation.

5. **The body**

   Key points should be presented in a variety of different ways to help people with different learning styles comprehend your ideas. You will want to refer information presented in the past and indicate how this will tie to future information.

6. Conclusions

Closure to each section should summarize the major points, repeat the take-home message, and not introduce new material. This is not the same as suggesting future implications or considerations of the topic discussed. People want to leave the presentation knowing what they can do and what is planned for the future.

7. Audience participation

Plan for ways to encourage audience participation. This may be as simple as taking a survey with a show of hands to getting people together in groups. It also may include thinking time for people to write down their own thoughts.

If you have asked your audience a question, allow some time for them to put together an answer, or for people whom English is a second language, they may require additional time to compose an answer.

Activities to Do On Your Own

- You can ask yourself some simple questions such as:

  Are my key points easy to identify and are they presented early?
  Have I provided a context for the material I am presenting or does it need more background information?
  Have I kept my material and ideas focused on the main points of the presentation?

- If your presentation is tied to others in a series, list the ways that it ways it can tie together with the other topics.

Related Topics

- The Attention Curve - Why do people get distracted?

- Maximizing Impact

- Building a Rapport with your Audience

Other Resources

- How to Give Successful Oral and Poster Presentations by J.W. Niemantsverdriet

- Presenting At Your Best. Guidelines and Tips for Preparing and Delivering a Presentation by Adrian D.C. Chan

- Flinders University Teaching for Learning Teaching Strategies - Lecturing

- University of Kentucky - Effective Lectures

- Purdue University Online Writing Lab - Who is My Audience and What Should I expect

- Northeastern University College of Business Administration - Making Effective Presentations by Edward Wertheim