

# **GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS**

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## **Introduction**

Occupational therapists are faced with making presentations on a daily basis (e.g. rounds, staff meetings). Therefore, during your time at the School of Medical Rehabilitation, you will be involved in making a variety of presentations in preparation for the day you graduate.

These guidelines on presentation skills have been divided into the following sections for ease of reference:

## **Preparation**

1. Needs assessment
2. Development of the presentation
3. Development of supporting material
4. Development of a check-list of requirements
5. Preparation of physical space
6. Mental preparation

## **Delivery**

1. Entrance and first moments
2. Stance and Gestures
3. Voice control
4. Eye contact and use of notes
5. Using audio-visual media
6. Timing of a presentation
7. Bringing closure
8. Answering questions

## **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Legibility Standards Appendix B –  
Voice control exercises

Time spent in preparing for your presentation will pay dividends. There are several points that need to be considered:

## **1. Needs Assessment**

This is the stage when you develop a foundation for your presentation. It is a time for developing the who, what, when and why of a presentation.

### **1.1 Analysis of Audience**

Why is this information important to the audience? What needs will it meet?  
What do they already know?

Answers to these questions will give you an indication of the level to gear your presentation at and also the amount of detail that you need to give.

### **1.2 Analysis of Time/Place/Duration**

A presentation first thing in the morning, right after lunch, or at the end of the day, would present different challenges and would need to be considered in developing your presentation.

The length and place of your presentation would also call for different factors to be considered. A presentation in a lecture theatre, or in a small seminar room, or talking to people in the middle of a shopping mall will all lend themselves to different approaches. A five-minute talk will require different preparation from a one-hour presentation.

### **1.3 Analysis of Reason for Presentation**

Take time to identify the purpose(s) of the presentation. Educating an audience about something or trying to inspire them towards a certain course of action will require different approaches.

### **1.4 Analysis of Resources**

A limited budget does not allow for a multi-media presentation with glossy brochures! Some consideration is needed in the planning of the presentation as to the resources that might be available.

## **2. Development of the Presentation**

Time spent in organizing your ideas and developing a flow to the presentation will do much to enhance your delivery of the presentation.

### **2.1 Develop a key point**

Select one idea you want your audience to be aware of or know by the end of your presentation. Write it on a card and place it in front of you as you develop your presentation. Everything you do should focus on getting this point across to your audience.

### **2.2 Develop up to 5-7 sub-points**

Research has shown that an individual can remember approximately seven points. Do not exceed this number or your audience will feel overwhelmed and remember nothing. Think about what they need to know rather than what you want them to know. Practice the K.I.S.S. approach – Keep It Short and Simple! When in doubt leave it out.

### **2.3 Develop an audience-grabbing opening**

You have approximately 30-120 seconds in which to grab the audience's attention. Think carefully how to create the kind of opening which they will not forget.

### **2.4 Provide clear direction to your audience**

Make sure that you make good use of transitional/signpost statements such as:

*"I'm going to cover these three key areas" "Here is the second of four"*

*"Having talked about" "We now move on to"*

If using more than one individual to make the presentation, try and make transitions between speakers match switches in the content being covered.

### **2.5 Reinforce your message**

Tell them what you are going to say. Say it. Then finish by telling them what you have just told them.

### **2.6 Plan for audience involvement**

An involved audience is an attentive audience. Try and create opportunities for audience involvement through the use of:

- questions to the audience
- small group activities
- focused problem solving
- fun activities that reinforce message

## **3. Development of Supporting material**

A presentation without supporting material can be like an un-spiced meal. Supplementary audio-visual aids and handouts can liven up even the most mundane presentations, as long as they are not overdone.

Audio-visual media provides realism together with efficiency. There is better retention (verbal + visual images), better comprehension (clarifies concepts), improved audience attention, and effective use is made of more than one of the senses.

A word of warning! Poor use of audio-visual media and inappropriate handouts are worse than having none. Therefore, before using audio-visual media ask yourself 5 key questions. Answers to these questions will ensure appropriate, efficient and effective use of Audio Visual media.

### **3.1 Why do I want to use Audio-visual media?**

Reasons may include: To show movement, to review information, to provide close-ups, to illustrate places or things that are not present, or to emphasize important points.

### **3.2 What resources do I have?**

The preparation of audio-visual media takes time. Depending on the type that is used, it can also be expensive. Some media require specialized equipment and an appropriate environment, such as a darkened room.

### **3.3 How often will the material be used?**

Spending five hours preparing one PowerPoint slide which will only be on the screen for 30 seconds and perhaps only used once, is probably not a cost-effective use of your time and energy.

### **3.4 What would be the results of using or not using audio-visual media?**

The key point here is whether your use of audio-visual media is essential to the success of your presentation, or whether it would just be rather “nice” to have.

### **3.5 Is the Audio-Visual media I want to use legible in that setting?**

An important component of the effective use of audio-visual media, is the ability to see it without squinting or using binoculars! Appendix A lays down some simple guidelines for legibility standards in the use of audio-visual media.

### **3.6 The Development of “Artwork”**

Whether you are planning to use overhead transparencies, posters, slides, or a computer program, good artwork is essential.

- Never copy diagrams or tables straight from a book or article. They need to be simplified and kept within legibility standards
- Keep the background simple and uncluttered
- A rough guide is to use at least 4 visuals for every ten minutes of talk. Another guideline is to use a new visual for each new idea.
- A horizontal rather than a vertical format is usually better for all visuals.

### **3.7 Handouts**

Think about the various reasons for the use of handouts and design yours to meet the needs of your presentation. For example, handouts can be used to provide:

- An outline of key points so that the audience can add their own notes
- Additional material which you won't have time to cover
- Lists of additional sources of information, such as a bibliography or useful names and addresses.

#### **4. Development of a Check-List of Requirements**

Make up a list of the requirements for your presentation. Nothing is too small to go on the list. If it is essential to your presentation, put it down!! It is easy in the stress of getting organized to forget about simple things like pens for the flip-chart and masking tape to put up your work on the wall. Never assume that the organizers of the event will have what you need.

#### **5. Preparation of Physical Space**

Arrive early enough to give yourself a chance to rearrange all the furniture and get a sense of what it feels like to be in that particular space. In thinking about how you want your physical environment organized, consider the following questions:

- Where should you stand in relationship to your audience and any audio-visual media you might be using?
- Do the audience need to have tables to write on?
- How can you arrange the room so that late arrivals will not disrupt your presentation?
- Is the view out the windows likely to distract your audience, or will the light coming in obliterate their view of you?
- Will your audience need to be able to move around during the presentation if you have group activities?
- Are you able to darken the room to show slides?
- Are the electrical points where you need them for your audio-visual equipment?
- Is the correct equipment and/or cables available to allow you to use a computer for your presentation?
- Does your laptop have the right software to be able to connect with the projector?

#### **6. Mental Preparation**

For many people, giving a presentation is as desirable as a visit to the dentist. Some tension and anxiety is normal and can lead to an effective presentation. Experienced presenters often say that the times when they have felt no anxiety have been the times their presentations have come across as rather flat and unstimulating. However, too much stress can destroy a presentation. Here are some strategies to help you control the anxiety you feel just before giving a presentation:

- Thoroughly practice your presentation until you have worked out all the problems. Always use all portions of the presentation or you may forget parts when you finally make it.
- Take the opportunity to sit in the place where you will be giving your presentation. Then when the time comes for you to speak, you will feel as if you are in familiar surroundings.
- Think positive thoughts – Think of the advantages of giving a presentation. Yes, there are some! You have people's undivided attention. It is a great learning experience.
- Visualize problems and then think through your reaction. Having gone through this exercise, nothing is likely to phase you!
- Practice relaxation techniques. Tense and relax the large muscles of your body. Get rid of excess nervousness by concentrating it where you can control it. For example, squeeze one hand as tight as possible, and then relax.

- Close your eyes and visualize your perfect presentation.
- Try to meet some of the audience and get to know them before your presentation.
- Try some quiet reflection on your material. Quickly run through it in a couple of minutes.
- Dress appropriately for the audience and for your own feelings of comfort. Avoid tight constricting clothes. Wear comfortable shoes that won't slip or cause you to be unsteady on your feet.
- Warm up your vocal cords (see Appendix B for some ideas).

## DELIVERY

A well prepared presentation can be totally ruined in the way it is delivered. Unfortunately, people do tend to judge the merits of a presentation in large part on **how** the information is presented to them. Research has shown that the following ten attributes will be found in the truly effective presenter:

- Emphatic gestures and movements.
- Relatively short simple sentences.
- Appropriate use of pauses.
- Use of blackboard/flip-chart/overhead to emphasize points.
- Speed correct and varied; remember process takes time.
- Made friendly personal references to class or themselves.
- Used task-orientated statements "Now look closely at..."
- High proportion of nouns rather than pronouns "it or they."
- Contained signposts "There are 3 main areas."
- Linked portions of their explanation "So far we have..."

### 1. Entrance and First Moments

The way you walk to the front of the room and stand and face the audience will send an important non-verbal message to everyone. The message should be that you are confident and happy to be there. To achieve this, consider the following points:

- Walk confidently up to your place at a normal pace (don't crawl or run).
- Wait a few minutes before starting to talk. You need to get used to where you are standing. Your audience needs to get a good look at you and won't be listening if you start speaking immediately.
- Take time to get yourself, your notes, audio-visual media and anything else you need to use organized.
- If you need some water, only have a half-full glass and keep it away from where you might knock it over.
- Smile at your audience and look as though you are really glad to be there. If it will help, imagine them all sitting there in just their underwear or no clothes at all.
- If the person introducing you makes small mistakes about you or your presentation, ignore them.
- If incorrect information was given which will cause problems for your presentation, make the correction but in a way that will not embarrass the person who introduced you.
- Do not start a presentation by apologizing for anything. It weakens it.

## 2. Stance and Gestures

The stance and gestures you adopt should be natural for you. Stand in a relaxed fashion, with weight evenly distributed on your feet. Move about naturally but not to the extent that the audience gets exhausted from trying to follow you around the room. If you normally use gestures, then do so. If you don't, then don't force it. Nothing is worse than watching a presenter waving their arms around in what is obviously a contrived fashion.

The following are some of the stances that you should AVOID at all cost!

<b><i>The Lifeboat:</i></b>	Gripping on to the podium as if your life depended on it
<b><i>The Fig leaf:</i></b>	Hands clutched in front of one's vital parts
<b><i>The Handcuffs:</i></b>	You wonder if the speaker is an amputee as you never see their hands
<b><i>The Anti-attack:</i></b>	Hands crossed over the chest
<b><i>Prayer or wringing of hands:</i></b>	Hand firmly clasped or in constant motion
<b><i>Leaning Tower or feather:</i></b>	All weight on one side or swaying in the wind
<b><i>Concrete Pad:</i></b>	Feet firmly planted and never moving
<b><i>Constant motion:</i></b>	Moves backwards and forwards till you get dizzy

## 3. Voice Control

Everyone has a perfect voice until they start going to school and being told to be quiet! There are a variety of techniques to help you if you have trouble with your voice (see Appendix B). Some additional pointers about voice control are:

- A lower pitch is easier to hear and sounds more authoritative than a high pitch.
- People tend to speed up their speech when nervous, so make a conscious effort to slow your speech down at the beginning of presentations.
- Do not be afraid to breathe or pause to allow time for the audience to think about what you are saying to them.
- Vary the way you use your voice rather than adopting a monotone. Your audience is more likely to stay awake.
- Think of what you want to say rather than on individual words (i.e.) "Think only thoughts and words will come rushing in".
- The more people in an audience, the slower you will need to speak. If you use a microphone:
  - check it out before hand (but don't tap it!)
  - take time to adjust the height before speaking
  - move your head instead of your body

## 4. Eye Contact and Use of Notes

A good presenter includes people by effective use of eye contact. Some people need to use notes when they make presentations, however care should be taken that these notes do not interfere with your eye contact with the audience.



Some strategies for maintaining good eye contact are as follows:

- Do a continuous slow sweep of the room – don't ignore a section
- Do not fix on one person because they look interested or you feel comfortable looking at them. Eventually, it will make them feel awkward (they won't be able to doze!) and you make the rest of the audience feel excluded
- If you do not like looking people in the eye, zero in on the middle of their foreheads, the audience won't realize the difference.

Strategies for having effective notes include:

- Using file cards held in the palm of the hand
- Using large fonts (e.g. 14 pt. or larger)
- Using only upper case letters for key parts of your notes
- Using lots of space around key points
- Using highlighters
- Putting in speaking "notes", such as when to pause, or when to use some piece of equipment
- Putting circles around material that you can delete or add depending on the time available during the actual presentation
- Making sure your notes are numbered, so that if you drop them it is not a complete disaster
- Learning to read your notes during the natural pause in your speaking rather than having your head down as you read
- Making timing notes to yourself in the margin so that you can adjust your presentation if you are too slow or too fast

## 5. Using Audio-Visual Media

Audio-visual media adds much to a presentation but it can also create many headaches if things go wrong. For example, when you turn the switch and nothing happens go through the following check-list before you panic:

- Is the machine plugged in?
- Is the machine plugged in to a working electrical outlet?
- Are the extension cords well connected?
- Has the bulb burned out?

Your use of audio-visual media can be enhanced by the way in which you use it. The following are some general hints that will make your presentation more effective and polished:

### Flipcharts

- Put titles at the top of each page, as necessary, ahead of the actual presentation.
- Use one flipchart for prepared material and one for writing on.
- Leave blank sheets between prepared material so that the words will not show through.
- Write on the paper in light pencil before the presentation if you need a guide as to the size of the lettering you will be using or you plan to write down difficult/complex material.
- Allow 20-30 seconds after writing before removing the paper.
- Use water-color pens rather than permanent ones which tend to bleed through on to the other sheets of paper.
- Red pen is more difficult to read than black or blue so only use it to highlight your text.
- Tear pages off from the corner, rather than ripping them off straight down. It will prevent tearing the page in the middle.

## Computerized presentations (e.g. PowerPoint)

Computerized presentations such as PowerPoint have many advantages. They allow for flexibility, have no cost (once the hardware/software has been purchased), provide for dynamic presentations, and can easily generate handouts. However, the ease with which computerized presentations can be created can also produce some terrible examples. The principles of effective use of audio-visual media that have been described also apply to computer presentations. However, in addition there are some other points that must be considered that are unique to this type of media.

- Have the slide show ready to go, rather than showing the audience the main menu view.
- Make sure the screen-saver is turned off.
- Ensure the power saver is disabled so the computer does not turn itself off in the middle of the presentation.
- Do not use animation techniques just for the sake of showing you can use them.
- Do not let your use of the technology distract the audience from the content of your presentation.
- Go to [www.anandnatrajan.com/FAQs/powerpoint.html](http://www.anandnatrajan.com/FAQs/powerpoint.html) for a basic list of “do’s” and don’t’s” when using computers for making presentations.

## Videotape

With the advent of the camcorder, more presenters are making use of videotapes in their presentations. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the videotape is not clearly a learning experience for the camera operator, i.e. constant zooming in and out, missing heads, jerky movements, changing focus and poor noise levels! When showing videotapes as part of a presentation, the following points should be borne in mind:

- State how long the audience can expect it to run.
- Pre-set sound levels.
- Have video/film cued to the right place to start.
- Indicate what to look for (video stop and review).
- Video viewing – no one closer than 7 feet or further than the width of the monitor in terms of substituting feet for inches (e.g. for a 14 inch set, the audience should be within 14 feet of the set).
- Nobody should sit more than 45 degree from the center axis, nor should the monitor be placed more than 30 degrees above normal eye level.
- There should be one 23-inch screen for every 30 people.

## 6. Timing of a Presentation

The ability to speak within certain time constraints is a crucial skill for any presenter. Care must be taken to find out the exact time limitations and whether there will be any flexibility. You need to know whether questions will be included in your time allotment or allowed to follow your presentation. In timing a presentation, remember the following points:

- Microphones will cause you to speak slower.
- Generally the time you take in a practice run will be approximately 20% shorter than the actual presentation time.
- One page of double spaced 10 point print with 1” margins takes just over one minute to read. For a ten-minute presentation, your notes should not exceed eight pages (unless you are using an extra large font for your notes).

## 7. Bringing Closure

An audience will usually remember the beginning and end of a presentation, so make sure that your ending is as memorable as your opening. Make sure you summarize your key points. Consider a closing statement, which leaves the audience with:

- A thought to ponder on. Some
- call for action.
- An indication of how to get additional information.
- A provocative statement to start off the question period.

## 8. Answering Questions

An important part of being able to be an effective presenter is in handling questions. Indicate at the very of your presentation whether you will welcome interruptions or whether you would rather people held their questions till the end of the session. In addition, consider the following tips:

- Listen carefully to a question and repeat it for the benefit of the audience. Repeating a question also gives you some time to think about your answer.
- Sometimes it is a useful tool to turn the question over to the audience for response.
- If you don't know the answer, say so and indicate you will get back to the questioner with the answer or invite the audience to comment on the question.
- Be prepared with a question of your own, or a planted question, in order to get the questioning process started.
- Don't let any member of the audience monopolize you with their questions or trap you into responding with long convoluted responses, which the questioner may understand, but which is lost on the rest of your audience.
- Don't comment on the value of a question. For example, *"That is a good question"*.
- Don't show with non-verbal or verbal signs your negative opinion of a question.
- Keep the rest of the audience involved when a specific narrow question is asked by expanding your answer to include points of more general interest.
- If a question is too complicated to respond to, answer briefly and suggest that time be found later to speak about it privately.

## APPENDIX A

### LEGIBILITY STANDARDS

If the visuals you use cannot be read easily, they might just as well not be used! The following are some important guidelines to use when preparing your presentations. A very rough check for legibility of material is to divide the width of the art work by 2, and stand that number of feet away from it. At this distance, it should be legible (e.g.) a diagram 4" by 6" should be easily read from a distance of 2-3".

- Use upper case for titles less than five words
- Use both upper and lower case for longer titles
- Use simple fonts rather than italic ones
- Use sans-serif fonts rather than serif fonts (e.g. **Arial** rather than **Times**)
- Use words with less than 4 syllables
- Use light letters against a dark background
- No more than 6 words to a line and 6 lines to a visual
- Use large fonts 18-20 point (3/8")
- Minimum size of lettering on a flipchart is 1/24 the height of the paper
- General rule for minimum size of lettering is 1/24 height of frame
- Lettering should be spaced optically rather than measured
- Space between lines should equal the height of an upper case letter or 1.5 times a lower case letter
- Space between words should equal 1.5 letter widths
- Optimal viewing distance is 2W to 6W where W = widths of image on the screen.
- If the viewing distance is greater than 6W, then lettering will have to be larger.

## APPENDIX B

### VOICE CONTROL EXERCISES

Rarely do people have “voice” problems. The symptoms of squeakiness, stammering, and drying up are all symptoms of “stress”. Your voice is affected by this stress. Prove this to yourself by pressing down hard on a table or countertop while at the same time saying “The University of Manitoba, Winnipeg”. Now repeat the same phrase but without pressing down. Notice the improvement when you are not stressing your body. The solution is to practice relaxation techniques and warm up your vocal cords before your presentation.

When running through your presentation, try projecting your presentation to a tape-recorder in another part of your house, i.e. stand at one end of the living room and project your voice into the kitchen.

Use exercises to get your voice ready to speak and avoid using dairy products just before a presentation, as these can sometimes cause excessive phlegm in your throat.

#### Exercises for the vocal cords

1. Roll your head like a cannon ball slowly 2-3 times then stop rolling your head and start humming a tune keeping your lips closed. (This exercise relaxes you, warms up the vocal cords and shakes down the phlegm in the throat.)

Say “Bibbity-Bobbity” repeatedly at different rates; concentrate on making excessive lip movements while at the same time attempting to smile. (This exercise gives you control over the rhythm of your speech and concentrates tension on the lips and face and not in the throat. It also puts energy into your lips.