Handout 13: Delivering a Presentation

The conservative approach is to use introduction/body/conclusion to: say what you’re going to say/say it/and say that you have said it. Combined with a computer projection of everything you cover this can make for a very boring presentation indeed. If your audience is guaranteed to be fascinated anyway (perhaps you’re outlining their redundancy package) this might not matter, but it’s best to assume that they will have no inherent interest in the material - so you will have to create that interest!

1. Introduction

(Only plan your introduction when the body is nearly complete).

Most of the structure types above have some built-in interest-arousing aspects. Probably the potentially most bland one is the Topical structure, where there exists no inherent tension or interest-building devices in the form alone. A good introduction however, can grab the audience by quickly arousing interest and the desire to find out more. Here are some ideas for engaging people quickly:

- Be in the room as it fills, acknowledge people as they arrive, and generally take an interest - they will be more likely to take an interest in return.
- An observation, anecdote, or an 'On the way here a funny thing happened...' story, all add a human dimension to the interaction between presenter and audience.
- Announce your topic, and make it a snappy title. Which sounds better: 'Five considerations when buying a printer', or 'Problem: To purchase the perfect printer'?
- Make it personal. 'Have you ever gone to print out the final copy of an important report only to have your printer die? Or waited for an age, only to find the pages weren't aligned properly? Or had your printer grab ten sheets of paper at once and messed up the whole job?'
- Make it timely. 'As most of you know, in three weeks we are sending you out to do state-wide training. Today we'll let you know about travel arrangements, and what to do should your aircraft suddenly lose power'. (Yes, humour is a good way to start too).
- Bring it close. 'Imagine the person sitting next to you is epileptic. If they had a seizure right now, would you know what to do?'
- Don't spoil the ending. The above question could 'hang' until towards the end. Like some movies, you can lose all the tension and impact if some spoilsport gives you too much information.
- Startle them with a novel demonstration. 'Here's a book on curing drug addiction. As you all work with young people I'm now going to drop it in the garbage bin'.
2. Body

You may have noticed that the flow of the whole presentation will largely be dictated by the structure type you have chosen. A narrative approach will have twists and turns, complications and climaxes. The problem solving and topical approaches work through one section at a time. Whatever structure you use, the following points apply to the body of your presentation, which is about 80% of the total.

- Remember you want to make about five main points overall. When you make a main point, make about 3 sub-points, and give some detail, an example, or an exception. Map out this structure, and know your topic well enough so that a glance at the headings will prompt you to talk freely about them.
- You may wish to list the five main points quickly, then work through them in detail. This can work well, depending on the chosen structure. For the topical approach it would give a useful overview. On the other hand, if the narrative approach is being used, it would ruin the emotional impact of the tension, surprises, and obstacles overcome.
- The detail of sub-points could be statistics, diagrams, photographs, facts, evidence, quotations.
- That said, statistics and diagrams can be a turnoff. Don't say 'one in three people will suffer from dementia', say 'four of you in the front row will suffer from dementia. That's one in every three'. Only use a few, preferably startling and important statistics and diagrams.
- Emphasise the relevance and importance of each point. Don't assume that just making the point and adding detail is enough. Give an application: 'Not only will this troubleshooting approach help you in a work team, it will also come in handy with your family, sports team, or anywhere a group needs to function in harmony.'
- It can be effective to start with the detail, and link back to the sub-point and main point. 'Once you're safely bobbing around in the dark ocean you may wish to attract the attention of a passing oil tanker. Here's a whistle you can blow. It's attached to your lifejacket.'
- Link sections with each other 'Ever wondered why your heart beats faster when you're afraid? That's because the nervous system is intimately linked to the circulatory system. Some of those nerves we were talking about go directly to the heart.' With a little thought you can make an elegant transition between sections while showing their interconnectedness.
- Flip out a few questions. The point is to engage the audience, not test them, or show them how you have all the answers. 'Who uses a pressure cooker at home?' Every person that answers will at least wake up the person next to them! Stick with one person for a minute or two if you can, even a mini conversation is all right.
Don’t, however, get into protracted debate and try to prove the person wrong.

- Use analogy and metaphor. ‘The relationship is like a pressure cooker. The therapist is like the regulator that sits on top. The couple is helped to safely let off some steam, but the temperature is kept high enough that things are still cooking’. To explain how something works, refer to a thing that people already understand.

- Remember there are three learner types: visual, verbal, and tactile. The visual people like to see - charts, films, diagrams, anything they can feast their eyes on - except acres of text. The verbal like to listen - which is not to say that they’re content to have someone drone on at them, but they do absorb the spoken word better than the others. They like stories, questions, discussion, and cope with verbal explanations. The tactile are ‘hands-on’ people. Ideally they are actively involved, physically doing something. In a normal presentation it is not easy to involve the audience in demonstrations, so having them see you moving about may have to do. You can also use tactile language: ‘Once you jump in you’ll quickly get a feel for how this printer works - you might hit the wrong button a couple of times but will soon know your way around and get to grips with it’.

- Put time limits on each point. You will surprise how quickly this daunting task can fly by. Scrambling to finish on time makes your presentation appear rushed and incomplete.

- Balance fun with form. A strong structure and logical sequence is necessary if you want some freewheeling spontaneity. Otherwise you’ll have a chaotic shambles. Don’t think you can just ‘wing it’ with a vague idea of what you’re going to say. Plan and rehearse the body so you know it backwards. Then, and only then, will you be able to ‘funk it up on the night’

### 3. Finale

Finale is used to mean the combination of both climax and conclusion, a climactic conclusion if you like. It is used in preference to simply ‘conclusion’ as the end of your presentation should carry some impact. In fact, it should usually motivate the audience to do something. Have you ever left a presentation or performance feeling exhilarated and inspired? Perhaps making some resolution - even if it’s just to tell someone else to go and see what you just did. As with a movie, or a sports game, it can kind of spoil the effect if you already know the ending. So keep something back from your audience. They may know what’s coming anyway (as we often do with a movie), but that needn’t make the experience any less satisfying. So, to make your finale a grand one:

- As you summarise start to build momentum, not fade down. You are like a racehorse coming into the final straight. Reinforce the main points but keep an air of expectation - you’re about to deliver each individual in the room a personal message about what they can do with this information.
• Paint a word picture, present a vision. Perhaps you can get your audience to imagine a future where young people and old appreciate each other; or where everyone uses the printer of their dreams, or where the world is free of HIV.

• Be upbeat and positive. Go out with a bang. Don't trail off with some apologetic muttering like 'Well that's about it I guess'. You want them buzzing when they leave, rushing up with requests for you to email them your notes.

• By the end the focus should be off the personality of the presenter and onto the ideas being presented. They're not waiting to see if you're going to be interesting anymore, they want the central idea reinforced with some oomph! So give it to them with feeling: 'The next time you walk by a young person just hanging out, don't shy away in fear - stop and say hello'; or, 'So if you can reach that level of honesty in the pressure cooker of your own relationship, then and only then will you be able to stand the heat of the therapeutic relationship'; or, 'Now go forth into the world, and select the printer that's right for you!'