Handout 19: Presentation Types and Structure

Step 1: Write the goal statement.
Step 2: Research the topic
Step 3: 'Chunk' the material into sections
Step 4: Analyse the audience
Step 5: Choose a structure type

**Step 1: Write the goal statement.**

In this step you decide the purpose of the presentation. Try and make it a SMART goal, even if you don't intend to measure it.

Here are four example goal statements, that all begin...

"Following this presentation participants will:

- Be able to safely evacuate the aircraft in an emergency"
- Be able to describe five benefits of, and five potential problems with, a database of other agencies that all our staff can add to"
- Demonstrate a commitment to making this service an inclusive, rather than a discriminatory one"
- Achieve at least 95% accuracy when filling out the new data collection forms"

You can see that these goal statements are outcome based. They do not describe a process (Participants will learn how to....)

These goals are primarily either to inform or persuade. Some presentations are primarily to entertain, and although we won't focus on this it is important to realise that most presentations should be designed with all three in mind.

- A presentation whose purpose is primarily to inform will also need to persuade people of the importance of paying attention. It won't hurt to make it entertaining either, if this is appropriate.
- A presentation whose purpose is primarily to persuade will also need to provide supporting information to convince people
- A presentation whose purpose is primarily to entertain will effectively be providing information so people are persuaded to laugh! (Or otherwise enjoy themselves).

Look at the four example goals given above, and decide for each whether the purpose is primarily to inform or persuade.

At some point in designing your presentation you should decide whether you are there to inform, or to persuade. If you are having difficulty deciding, consider the attitude of the audience toward the topic. If they are negative, you will need to persuade; if positive, to inform.
Step 2: Research the topic

You will need to find both theory and application, abstract and practical, dry stuff and real stuff. Not all people find theories and models inherently interesting - they need to see them applied in practice. If you are presenting a section on, say, conflict resolution, you would talk about the stages of conflict and an actual example (or two. You could start with a current events' example like the Middle East, then explain the stages of conflict, then give a workplace example.)

By giving a presentation you will be assumed to be something of an authority on the topic, so be prepared to answer challenging questions. Read as widely as you can from books, articles, and the internet. Find out the latest trends in your topic area. Ask experts. Find some statistics, case-studies, media examples, and quotations. Even if you don't use everything (and you won't), the information will serve as a fertile 'compost' of ideas to grow your presentation from. (Like normal compost it keeps working while you sleep. Start reading now, and your subconscious will get half the job done for you.)

Look for novel, juicy, even bizarre facts and case studies. Look for stories, including those from your own life. People respond well to a real story.

Watch for themes and sections starting to take form.

Step 3: 'Chunk' the material into sections

This is where you begin to organise the body of the presentation. You order your material so all the 'bones' are in place - you can flesh it out later. As you research (and your subconscious compost heap warms up) the structure begins to show itself. For example, if you were finding out about the main points to include in an aircraft safety talk, your thoughts would begin to order themselves:

- Plane depressurises...oxygen mask...self first...then children
- Plane going down...crash position...can hold seat in front...can't reach seat in front
- Life jackets....beneath seat....correct wearing of.....inflation......whistle
- Exits....note nearest.....using escape slide

Even getting down a basic bunch of sections like this will boost your confidence enormously. Make a mind-map of it:
Don’t feel you have to include everything. (Do airline stewards play you scenes of crashing aircraft? No. It does not suit the purpose of the presentation. If, however, you were trying to sell an airport fire engines such footage might come in handy). Always compare your material with your goal statement. Let it guide what you use and discard.

At this point decide on the five things that the audience must know by the end of the presentation. (eg Oxygen mask, crash position, life jacket, exits, escape slide).

**Step 4: Analyse the audience**

This is the next 'filter' your material should pass through. Think carefully about their attitude - will they be curious, indifferent, positive, or negative? Are the concepts, language, complexity, and degree of formality appropriate to the occasion and the audience?

Consider now how to establish with your audience:

- credibility ("I have been a mental health worker for 12 years, and have written the book OCD - Cleaning Up Some Misconceptions")
- rapport (Be in the room as people arrive. Smile, and welcome them before you begin. An 'On my way here...' story is a good way to establish that you have much in common)
- interest (You can start with a surprise: "Schizophrenia affects more people than diabetes and heart disease combined")
- motivation to stay attentive (People don't readily concentrate for more than twenty minutes)
- understanding (Define key terms, build on what the audience already knows, explain and clarify as required)
Step 5: Choose a structure type

Think about your material, and your audience and what they would best respond to. To what degree do they need to be persuaded/informed/entertained?

After considering your information, audience, and intent, choose a structure for your presentation. It could be:

- Narrative, or story structure. People love stories, and you will notice that even the worst movies (except X-Rated ones), need some sort of plot to carry all the goings on along. Most movies, fairytales, stories, have a similar overall plot structure. Let's (inappropriate though it may be) apply it to an airline safety demonstration. Before you write your masterpiece, write a one sentence summary of the story, thus: "Man survives plane crash by following emergency procedure, and saves everyone".

  1. Background - Joe is on a plane home.
  2. Disturbance- The cabin depressurises, the plane heads for sea.
  3. Plan - Joe sets a goal, he will survive this crash
  4. Surprise! - Joe can't breathe, and what should drop down but an oxygen mask!
  5. Complication/Solution - Joe can't swim, where's the lifejacket? Under the seat.
  6. Complication/Solution - Joe's plane has hit the water, but how does he get out? Great, an exit and an escape chute.
  7. Climax - Joe, having slid out of the plane into the water, is attacked by a giant squid. Luckily, blowing his whistle attracts the attention of a passing oil tanker, which rescues everyone.

Silly though it may be, with a little more detail all the sections of the demonstration could easily be covered in this narrative format. It is fun to listen to and easy to remember.

- Topical, where the material is divided into sections by topic. 'Today will we look at the systems of the human body: the digestive, the nervous, the immune...'
- Chronological, or time sequenced structure. 'I will cover the historical development of the Centre, what we do at present, and our plans for the future'.
- Compare & Contrast, in which one state of affairs is compared to another. 'Under the old award, you were paid holiday loading as well as shift penalties. Under the new award you get paid one or the other, but not both'.
- Problem solving, which is an approach you should be getting used to by now! This could be used to persuade by showing the process of how a way of doing something was selected. For example:
1. **Background** - The old printer was breaking down a lot, and we decided to replace it.

2. **Map the issues** - We could buy laser or bubblejet, fast or slow, colour or black & white.

3. **Facts and value judgements** - A survey of the office showed that people wanted crisp, clear black & white prints, delivered quickly and reliably. Colour was not seen as necessary, though it would be useful occasionally. Printers were priced, and ranged from the very expensive (fast, high volume laser colour) to very cheap (slow, low quality bubblejet). Brands were checked for value, reliability and service in a computer magazine survey.

4. **Define the problem** - We needed a fast (at least 8ppm), affordable (less than $800), and reliable black and white printer that produces sharp prints.

5. **List and evaluate possible solutions** - We looked at three printers - the Sister L300 (laser B&W), the IQ5000 Deskjet (bubblejet B&W), and the Shotgun BJC (bubblejet colour). The sister L300 was selected for speed and sharpness. Though slightly more expensive it won awards from three computer magazines for reliability and value. Colour jobs would be done by the local print shop.

6. **Evaluate decision** - so far the Sister L300 has performed well, with no breakdowns and to the satisfaction of all staff.