



# Making Presentations in Groups

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### Presentations in Groups

#### Presentation Guidelines

*Purpose*  
*Audience*  
*Logistics*  
*Content*  
*Organization*  
*Credibility*  
*Performance*

#### Group Presentations

*Public Group Presentations*  
*Team Presentations*

#### Questions and Answers

#### Presentation Aids

*Creating Presentation Aids*  
*Pitfalls of PowerPoint*  
*Using Presentation Aids*

#### Balanced Presentations

#### GroupWork: A Practice Presentation

#### GroupAssessment: Presentation Rating Scale

 PRESENTATIONS IN GROUPS

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The spontaneous, give-and-take nature of group discussions enhances a group's ability to share information and solve problems. There are circumstances, however, in which groups may set aside time for less spontaneous and more structured communication. Individual members or a selected spokesperson may be asked or required to make an oral presentation. The following related scenarios illustrate how such presentations become part of the group process:

- *Debating the tuition proposal.* The student government association has been asked to discuss the college's proposal to increase tuition by 10 percent. In order to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to speak at the meeting, student representatives are limited to three-minute statements.
- *Opposing the tuition proposal.* The student government association selects a spokesperson to make an oral presentation opposing the proposed tuition increase at the monthly meeting of the college's board of trustees.
- *Appealing for state funding.* The college president asks the student government association's spokesperson to be part of a group presentation to the state legislature's appropriations committee in which a team of administrators, faculty, staff, and students will be given thirty minutes to present a request for increased state funding.

Whether it is within a group, on behalf of a group, or by an entire group, a **presentation** occurs when a member is given the opportunity to speak, uninterrupted, to a group of people. During the course of any group discussion or meeting, a presentation by one or more group members may be required. In other situations, a group member may be asked to make an oral presentation to an outside group or audience. In such situations, the reputation of a group may be judged by how successful its members are as speakers.

This chapter offers specific guidelines that can help you prepare and give a successful presentation that is adapted to the needs and characteristics of a group and its goals. These guidelines can also be used in the event that you or your group has to make a presentation to an outside audience.

 PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

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Most experienced speakers do not follow a strict set of rules. Instead, they use a set of guidelines to direct them through critical decision-making steps. The guidelines shown in Figure 13.1 represent essential decision-making points and questions that should be addressed when developing an oral presentation.<sup>1</sup>

FIGURE 13.1 Presentation Guidelines

Order	Guideline	Key Question
1	Purpose	What is the goal of your oral presentation?
2	Audience	How will you adapt to the members of your audience?
3	Logistics	How will you adapt to the occasion and setting of your presentation?
4	Content	What ideas and information should you include?
5	Organization	How will you organize and support your ideas?
6	Credibility	How can you enhance your believability and perceived competence?
7	Performance	How should you practice and deliver your presentation?

## Purpose

The first and most important step in developing a successful presentation is identifying your purpose—much like the need for groups to identify and agree upon a common goal. Your purpose is not the same thing as your topic. Your purpose is what you want your listeners to know, think, believe, or do as a result of your presentation. For example, the proposed tuition increase is the discussion topic for the student government association. A student speaker's purpose, however, may be to support or oppose the increase. When someone is making a presentation in a group setting, the general topic is usually predetermined by the group and its agenda. Thus, when a student rises to speak for or against higher tuition, everyone is well aware of the topic but may be unable to predict the speaker's position or arguments. Having a clear purpose does not necessarily mean that you will achieve it. Without a purpose, though, little can be accomplished and much can be lost.

Dr. Terry Paulson, psychologist and author of *They Shoot Managers, Don't They?*, cautions speakers against making a presentation without a purpose:

There are so many messages and memos being hurled at today's business professionals [that] they are in information overload. It's like sipping through a fire hydrant. Don't unnecessarily add to the stream by including unnecessary fill, fact, and fluff. Volume and graphs will not have a lasting impression: having a focus will. Ask yourself early in the process: What do I

want them to remember or do three months from now? If you can't succinctly answer that question, cancel your presentation.<sup>2</sup>

Know your purpose, drop what is unimportant, and focus on the essentials.

## Audience

If the first and most important guideline in developing a presentation is identifying your purpose, the next most important is to analyze and adapt to your listeners—the members of your group or the people in an outside audience. This process begins by seeking answers to two questions: What are your listeners' characteristics? What are their opinions?

**Characteristics.** Two characteristics to consider when analyzing a group of listeners are demographic traits and individual attributes. **Demographic traits** include age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and marital status. If you have been working in a group for a long time, it will be easy for you to catalog the demographic traits of group members. For a presentation to a new or a large audience, however, the task is more difficult. Take a good look at your listeners to note visible demographic traits, such as age, gender, and race. At the same time, assume that there is more diversity than similarity among your audience members.

Within a group, **individual attributes** take into account the distinctive features of particular group members, such as job title and status, special interests, personality traits, relationships with other members, and length of group membership. Demographic traits and individual attributes can affect how your listeners react to you and your message. For example, students who support themselves on limited incomes may oppose a tuition increase more strongly than students who can afford the increase.

**Opinions.** There can be as many opinions in an audience as there are members. Some members will agree with you before you begin your presentation, whereas others will disagree with you no matter what you say. Some listeners will have no opinion about an issue and will be quite willing to accept a reasonable point of view or proposal. Effective presenters try to predict who or how many listeners will agree, disagree, or be undecided (see Figure 13.2).

If most of your listeners agree with you, are undecided, or have no opinion, your presentation should focus on introducing new information or summarizing the most important ideas and arguments. When people share the same opinions and goals, the presentation should update listeners who are in need of information and motivate them to work as a cohesive group. For example, if the members of the student government are universally opposed to a tuition increase, a speaker could focus on motivating the audience to take political action.

If audience members disagree with you, make sure that you have set realistic goals. Asking students to storm the president's office may get the administration's

FIGURE 13.2 Adapting to Audience Attitudes



attention but may be too radical an action for most students to support. A second strategy is to work at getting audience members to listen to you. You can't do that by telling them that you're right and they're wrong. You can't change their minds if they won't listen. Instead, try to find **common ground**. Find a belief or value that you share with those who disagree with you. Emphasizing shared ideas, feelings, history, and hopes can help you overcome resistance. For example, if a student speaker tells the board of trustees that the student government wants to help it find a solution to the financial crisis, the board may be more willing to listen to student concerns about the proposed tuition increase. Finally, when you address a controversial issue, make sure you support your arguments with fair and reasonable evidence. If your arguments and evidence are weak, your opponents are likely to use those weaknesses against you.

## Logistics

Deciding how to adapt to the occasion and setting of a presentation requires more than taking a quick look at the seating arrangements for a meeting. Ask questions about *where* and *when* you will be speaking.

**Where?** Where will you be delivering your presentation—in a large conference room, an auditorium, a classroom? What are the seating arrangements? Are there any distracting sights or sounds? Can the lighting be changed? Will you need a microphone? Will special equipment be needed for presentation aids? Once you have the answers to such questions, the next step is figuring out how to adapt to where you will be delivering your presentation. For example, a request for a microphone would be in order if a student government spokesperson learns that several hundred students plan to attend the board of trustees meeting.

**When?** Will you be speaking in the morning or in the afternoon? Are you scheduled to speak for five minutes, twenty minutes, or an hour? What comes before or after your presentation—other presentations, lunch, a question-and-answer session? The answers to questions about timing may require you to make major adjustments to your oral presentation. If you are given a time limit for your presentation, that

## TOOLBOX 13.1



### Adapt to Key Audience Members

Sometimes an audience may be so varied that it's impossible to find one best way to reach everyone. In such cases, it helps to identify and concentrate on key audience members—the people who have the authority or ability to make things happen. They may be opinion leaders or other respected audience members. Other audience members may take their cues from the ways in which these people react to a presentation or speaker. If the key people seem interested and responsive, others will mimic their behavior. If they seem bored or annoyed, others will be too.

If you cannot reach everyone in the audience, try to reach those who have influence. How do you identify these key individuals? Observe the nonverbal behavior of audience members: Who gets the most handshakes? Who is given a prominent seat or is accompanied by an entourage? Who commands attention? If you can't tell who is most important by observing the audience, ask the person who invited you or your group.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isa N. Engleberg and John A. Daly, *Presentations in Everyday Life: Strategies for Effective Speaking*, 2nd ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), p. 106.

limit should be respected. Whether you are scheduled to speak for five minutes or one hour, never add more than 5 percent to your allotted time. Even better, aim for 5 percent less. Most people lose patience with someone who speaks too long.

### Content

As soon as you know you have to make a presentation, start collecting ideas and information. Gathering materials can be as simple as spending a few hours thinking about the purpose of your presentation or as complicated and time-consuming as spending days doing research on the World Wide Web and in the library. Regardless of the topic or your purpose, research multiple sources and include more than one type of information in your presentation. Houghton Mifflin Company, the publisher of this textbook, provides an online web site that includes a chapter titled “Informed Groups.” This Web-based chapter provides models and advice for doing effective and ethical research. These recommendations also apply to gathering and assessing content for a presentation.



#### **Online Study Center General Resources**

Read the online chapter “Informed Groups” for more information.

### Organization

Planning a presentation requires organizing your ideas and supporting material in a way that will help you achieve your purpose. Ask yourself whether there is a natural structure or framework for your message. What common ideas have appeared in most of your materials? What information seems most interesting, important, and relevant to the purpose of your presentation?

**Organizational Patterns.** Fortunately, there are many organizational patterns that can help you put your ideas and information in order. Figure 13.3 summarizes some common patterns.

Regardless of whether you choose one of the patterns shown in Figure 13.3 or create a different organizational structure that is better suited to your needs, you should always focus on your purpose. Consider whether a pattern lends itself to achieving the purpose of your presentation. If it does, you can move on to connecting your supporting material to the organizational pattern you have chosen.

**Outlining Your Presentation.** Outlines for a presentation start with a few basic building blocks. The following outline can be used as a model to organize almost any kind of presentation.

- I. Introduction
- II. Central Idea or Purpose (Preview of Main Points)
- III. Body of Presentation
  - A. Main Point 1
    1. Supporting Material
    2. Supporting Material
  - B. Main Point 2
    1. Supporting Material
    2. Supporting Material

**FIGURE 13.3** Organizational Patterns

Organizational Pattern	Example
REASON GIVING	Three reasons why we should increase the dues are...
TIME ARRANGEMENT	The college's hiring steps must be complied within the following order...
SPACE ARRANGEMENT	The following membership increases occurred in the east, south, west, and central regions...
PROBLEM-SOLUTION	This research method avoids the problems we encountered last time...
CAUSES AND EFFECTS	Here's what could happen if we fail to increase our dues...
STORIES AND EXAMPLES	I've contacted four community associations in this county and here's what I found...
COMPARE-CONTRAST	Let's take a look at the two research methods we considered...

## TOOLBOX 13.2



## Order the Main Points

In many cases, the organizational pattern you have chosen will dictate the order of your key points. If, for example, you are using time arrangement, the first step in a procedure should come first. If you are discussing a historical event, you can begin at the beginning and work your way forward to the finish. In other instances, your format may not suggest an order. In these cases, identify your strongest ideas and place them in strategic positions. Do you “put your best foot forward”? Or, do you “save the best for last”? Your answer to these questions depends on many factors, such as the audience’s attitude toward you, your group, and your message. The following strategies can help you make the right decision:

- *Strength and familiarity.* If one of your ideas is not as strong as the others, place it in the middle position. This sequence avoids beginning or ending the presentation with a weaker point.

- *Audience.* Consider what you know about your audience and what it expects from the presentation. For example, if your audience is not very interested in your topic, don’t begin with detailed technical information. Instead, begin by explaining why the topic is important.
- *Logistics.* If you are one of a series of speakers, you may end up having less time to speak than you expected. Plan on discussing your most important points first. That way, if you have to shorten your presentation, your audience will have still heard your key points.

There are no absolute rules about ordering your main points. Just make sure that they follow a logical progression and are ordered in a way that helps your audience to understand and remember them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Isa N. Engleberg and John A. Daly, *Presentations in Everyday Life: Strategies for Effective Speaking*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), p. 206.

### C. Main Point 3

1. Supporting Material
2. Supporting Material

### IV. Conclusion

Naturally, every outline will differ, depending on the number of main points you want to make and the amount and type of supporting material you use. Once you have outlined your presentation, the major sections should be filled in with more specific ideas and supporting material.

The introduction of a presentation should be used to gain the audience’s attention and interest. An effective beginning should direct the audience’s attention toward you and your message. An interesting example, statistic, quotation, or story at the beginning of a presentation can “warm up” your audience and prepare it for your message.

The “central idea or purpose” section of a presentation lets you explain your basic purpose and gives you an opportunity to preview your main points. This section should be brief, no more than a few sentences. It simply reveals your purpose and, in some cases, the organizational plan you will use in the body of the presentation.

The heart of your presentation is the “body” section. Here you add your supporting material to each main point. No matter how many main points there are, each should be justified or backed up with at least one type of supporting material. If you can use several different types of material, your presentation will be more interesting and impressive.

The end of a presentation should have a strong and well-planned conclusion. An effective conclusion can help listeners remember the most important parts of your message. A quick summary, a brief story, a memorable quotation, or a challenge to the group can leave a strong final impression. Figure 13.4 shows the organizational structure and notes that could be used for a presentation by a student spokesperson to a college’s board of trustees.

## Credibility

In a presentation, your personal credibility depends on how well the audience can identify with you and your message. No matter how much you know about the subject or how sincere you are about your purpose, it is your audience that determines whether you are perceived as qualified and believable. Your **credibility** as a speaker represents the extent to which an audience believes you and the things you say.<sup>3</sup> This guideline may sound simple—improve your credibility and the audience will believe you—but it depends on many factors. Two important factors that have been identified by researchers are competence and character.

**Competence** refers to your expertise and abilities.<sup>4</sup> If you are not a recognized expert on a subject, you must demonstrate that you are well prepared. There is nothing wrong with letting your group or the members of your audience know how much time and effort you have put into researching the topic or with sharing your surprise at discovering new ideas and information. In both cases, you would be demonstrating that you have worked hard to become a qualified and competent speaker.

**Character** reflects your goodwill and your honesty. Are you trustworthy and sincere? Do you put the group’s goal above your own? “Do you make a special effort to be fair in presenting evidence, acknowledging limitations of your data and opinions, and conceding those parts of opposing viewpoints that have validity?”<sup>5</sup> If your audience or the members of your group don’t trust you, it won’t matter what you say.

## Performance

By the time you start asking questions about your delivery, you should know what you want to say and have given some thought to how you want to say it. David Zarefsky writes that “*how* a speaker says something affects *what* is really being said, and it also affects what listeners actually hear and understand”<sup>6</sup>

**Forms of Delivery.** In many group and public audience settings, you will be asked to speak **impromptu**—a form of delivery without advance preparation or

FIGURE 13.4 Sample Presentation Outline

**SAMPLE PRESENTATION OUTLINE**

Hold the Line on Tuition

- I. Introduction
 

*Story: Student who had to choose between buying shoes for her children and paying tuition for her nursing courses.*
- II. Central Idea or Purpose
 

*Because a tuition increase will have a devastating effect on many students, we ask you to search for other ways to manage the college's financial crisis.*
- III. Body of Presentation
  - A. Another tuition increase will prevent students from continuing or completing their college education on schedule.
    1. *More students are becoming part-time rather than full-time students. (College statistics)*
    2. *Students are taking longer to complete their college degrees. (College statistics)*
    3. *Students are sacrificing important needs to pay their tuition bills. (Quotations and examples from college newspaper)*
  - B. There are better ways to manage the college's financial crisis.
    1. *Consolidate areas and reduce the number of administrators and support staff. (Compare to college of same size that has less staff)*
    2. *Seek more state and grant funding. (Statistics from national publication comparing funding levels and grants at similar types of colleges)*
    3. *Re-evaluate cost and need for activities and services such as athletic teams, the off-campus homecoming and scholarship balls, intersession courses, and full staffing during summer sessions. (Examples)*
- IV. Conclusion
 

*Money is a terrible thing to waste when students' hearts and minds are at stake. Let's work together to guarantee that all of our students become proud and grateful alumni.*

practice. For example, a member of the board of trustees may ask a student spokesperson a question after an oral presentation. The student must respond impromptu. Being well informed and anticipating such requests is the best way to be prepared for impromptu speaking.

When you do have advance notice, you will be more effective if you speak extemporaneously. **Extemporaneous speaking**—the most common form of delivery—involves using an outline or a set of notes to guide you through your

presentation. Your notes can be a few key words on a single small card or a detailed outline that includes supporting materials. These notes will reflect the decisions you have made during the preparation process, but they will also give you the flexibility to quickly adapt your presentation to the audience and the occasion.<sup>7</sup>

Unless the situation is very formal or your words are intended for publication, avoid reading a manuscript version of your presentation. Even though your manuscript may be well written and well read, such a delivery is too formal for most settings. Moreover, reading from a script prevents you from observing listeners' reactions and modifying your presentation as a result of those reactions. If you must use a manuscript, write it as though you are speaking; that is, avoid long sentences, complex words, and formal term-paper grammar. Also, do not memorize your manuscript and try to deliver it without any notes. What if you forget or go blank? Unless you have the skills of a professional actor and can memorize a script and make it sound as if you just came up with the wording, forget about memorizing a presentation.

**Vocal and Physical Delivery.** The key to a successful performance is practice. After you have begun your presentation is much too late to make delivery decisions. Moreover, the only way to predict the length of your presentation accurately is to practice it out loud and time it. The place to work on how you sound and look is during rehearsal sessions.

Vocal characteristics such as volume, rate, pitch, articulation, and pronunciation can be controlled and practiced. Rehearse your presentation in a voice loud enough to be heard, but without shouting. Even in a small-group setting, an oral presentation requires a bit more volume than you would use in a normal conversation. Also, monitor the rate at which you speak. Many listeners have difficulty following someone who speaks at a rate that exceeds 180 words per minute. The most tolerable and useful all-purpose rate is 140 to 180 words per minute.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes speakers are difficult to understand because their articulation is not clear. Poor articulation is often described as sloppy speech or mumbling. Generally, it helps to speak a little more slowly and a little louder and to open your mouth a little wider than usual. Similar problems can occur when words are mispronounced. Because it can be embarrassing to mispronounce a word or a person's name, look up any words you are not sure of in a dictionary or ask someone how to pronounce them correctly.

The single most important physical characteristic in an oral presentation is eye contact. Look directly at the individual members of your audience, eye to eye. Even before a large audience, "the only kind of eye contact that successfully establishes the feeling of connection with members of the audience is a reasonably long, in-focus look at specific individuals."<sup>9</sup>

There is more to body movement than thinking about how you sit in a chair or stand before a group. Your gestures, appearance, and actions can add to or

detract from your presentation. If you are well prepared and have practiced, your gestures and movements should be natural. At the same time, try to avoid distracting gestures such as pushing up eyeglasses, tapping the table with a pencil, or pulling on a strand of hair. Such annoying movements can draw attention away from the content of your presentation.

## GROUP PRESENTATIONS

The seven guidelines discussed so far—purpose, audience, logistics, content, organization, credibility, and performance—apply to any presentation you might make to your small group or to external audiences. If, however, you are asked to make a presentation as a member of a public group or as part of a team presentation, there are additional factors to consider.

### GROUPTECH



#### Presentations in Virtual Groups

Presentations are no longer the sole domain of people who speak, uninterrupted, to an audience that they can see and hear in real time. Groups use technology to communicate across time, distances, and organizational boundaries. Learning how to prepare and deliver a virtual presentation is an essential skill for anyone working in a virtual group. The following suggestions can strengthen your ability to “perform” effective presentations in audioconferences, teleconferences, and text-based computer conferences.

In audioconferences, you must use your voice to communicate your meaning and emotions. Speak as clearly as you can. Use changes in rate, pitch, and inflection to emphasize particular ideas and communicate your feelings. When video is added to the virtual mix, your appearance sends a powerful message to those who are watching. Dress appropriately. Avoid busy patterns, noisy jewelry, and stark white or black clothing. If someone asks you a question during a video-

conference, look at that person as if he or she were in the room with you. If the question comes across the television screen, look at the camera (not at the person’s image) when you respond. If you are the only person in a room talking to an audience at another location, speak directly to the camera as though it were a group member instead of a machine. Try to keep your delivery natural and sincere. This isn’t prime time live; it’s a group at work.

If you have to make a “presentation” in a text-only computer conference, you have two options: You can write a report and send it to all members, or you can write minipresentations to make your point. Think of your writing as a substitute for speech. Also, remember that the basic requirements of any good presentation still apply—you need a clear purpose, audience analysis, logistical planning, thorough preparation, good organization, personal credibility, and a well-rehearsed delivery.

## Public Group Presentations

Chapter 1 describes four different types of public groups: panel discussions, symposia, forums, and governance groups. In all these settings, group members are speaking to a public audience. In addition to following the presentation guidelines described in this chapter, make sure you have considered the unique requirements of a presentation by a public group for a public audience. As a member of a public group, you have a responsibility to yourself, your group, and your audience.

When you are participating in a public group, remember that you are “on stage” all the time—even when you are not speaking. If you look bored while another member is speaking, the audience may wonder whether what that speaker is saying is worth sharing. During a presentation by a public group, an attentive audience will notice other group members’ “gestures, facial expression, and posture. They deliberately look for unspoken disagreements or conflicts.”<sup>10</sup> For example, if a member of the college’s board of trustees rolls his eyes every time another board member speaks in support of student concerns, the audience will receive a mixed message about the board’s commitment to serving student needs. Try to look at and support the other members of your group when they speak, and hope that they will do the same for you.

## Team Presentations

When a solitary group member prepares an oral presentation, dozens of decisions must be made. When an entire group is charged with preparing a presentation, the task becomes enormously complex. Unlike a panel discussion, symposium, forum, or governance group, a team presentation is not necessarily designed for a general audience; its goal is to inform and influence a very special audience. A **team presentation** is a well-coordinated, persuasive presentation by a cohesive group of speakers who are trying to influence an audience of key decision makers. Team presentations are common in nonprofit agencies and international corporations. They are seen in marketing presentations, contract competitions, and organizational requests for funding.

- A professional football team seeking backing for a new stadium brings a well-rehearsed group of executives and players to a public meeting, at which they explain how the stadium will enhance the economic development and prestige of the community without adversely affecting the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Companies making the “shortlist” of businesses being considered for a lucrative government contract are asked to make team presentations to the officials who will award the final contract.
- In a presentation to the state legislature’s appropriations committee, a state college’s board chairperson, college president, academic vice president, and

student representative are given a total of thirty minutes to justify their request for more state funding.

Team presentations are used to decide whether a group or a company is competent enough to perform a task or take on a major responsibility. They are also used to present a united front when organizations are seeking support and endorsements. Thomas Leech describes how significant a team presentation can be:

Team presentations are important; the stakes are often high. There generally has to be a significant reason to gather a diverse, highly paid, and often influential group together to hear a team of presenters. And whether the presentation involves the company president or a junior designer, the presenting team has to put forth a great deal of time and money in getting ready, reflecting the importance an organization places on team presentations.<sup>11</sup>

A team presentation is not a collection of individual speeches; it is a team product. Although a symposium is a coordinated presentation, symposium speakers do not necessarily present a unified front or have a strategic goal as their purpose. In many ways, the team presentation is the ultimate group challenge because it requires both efficient and effective decision making and a coordinated performance. Groups that work well in the conference room may fall apart in the spotlight of a team presentation.

Fortunately, the oral presentation guidelines described in this chapter can direct a group through the critical decision-making steps needed to develop an effective team presentation. Much like an individual speaker, a team should:

- Determine the team presentation's overall purpose or theme.
- Adapt the presentation to a specific group of decision makers.
- Adjust to the place where the team presentation will be delivered.
- Prepare and share appropriate content and supporting materials.
- Plan the introduction, organization, and conclusion for each team member's presentation as well as for the entire team's presentation.
- Enhance the team's credibility by demonstrating its expertise and trustworthiness.
- Practice until the team's performance approaches perfection.

In addition to these guidelines, a team must make sure that everyone, including management, knows what the team is going to do and that every detail has been considered. Marjorie Brody, author of *Speaking Your Way to the Top*, writes:

To be effective, team presentations must be meticulously planned and executed. They must be like a ballet, in which each dancer knows exactly where to stand, when to move, and when to exit from the stage. . . . If a team works like a smooth, well-oiled machine, if one member's presentation flows into

the next presentation, and if all members present themselves professionally and intelligently, the impression left is one of confidence and competence.<sup>12</sup>

Team presentations require a great deal of time, effort, and money to prepare and present. The payoffs, however, are high. For instance, following team presentations by several companies, the Department of Energy awarded a \$2.2 billion contract for environmental cleanup to a team headed by Fluor Corporation. Fluor made the best impression. “All the firms had capabilities, but how the team works as a team in the oral presentations is a key determining factor.”<sup>13</sup> The awarding of a \$2.2 billion contract should convince anyone who doubts the value of effective team presentations.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Once you or your team has completed a well-prepared presentation, you may not be finished; group or audience members may have questions or comments. The key to making a question-and-answer session a positive experience for everyone is to be prepared to answer a variety of questions and to know what to do when you don't have an answer.

If there is a single rule, it is this: Answer the question. One way to practice for a question-and-answer session is to follow these guidelines:

- *Be brief.* Respond to questions with no more than three sentences.
- *Be honest.* If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it. Don't change the subject. The audience will know if you are avoiding the issue.

How can group members prepare to answer audience questions efficiently and effectively?  
(© Michelle Gabel/Syracuse Newspapers/The Image Works)



- *Be specific.* Provide appropriate information. Have some ready-made remarks, including interesting statistics, stories, examples, and quotations, that you can use in your answers.

If you run into difficult or hostile questions, remember that just because one listener disagrees with you doesn't mean that everyone is against you. If you encounter an antagonistic question, remember the listening guideline "listen before you leap." Take your time before answering, and do not strike back in anger. Try to paraphrase the question to make sure you understand what the person is asking. If you are prepared and ready for questions, you should have little difficulty dealing with the unexpected.

## PRESENTATION AIDS

**Presentation aids** are supplementary audio and/or visual materials that help an audience understand and remember what is said in a discussion or oral presentation. Effective presentation aids can make a dull topic interesting, a complex idea understandable, and a long presentation endurable. Studies sponsored by the 3M Corporation found that group "presenters who use visual aids are perceived as

### TOOLBOX 13.3



#### Encourage Questions

Effective presenters use a variety of techniques to encourage audience members to ask questions. Never open a question-and-answer session with "Are there any questions?" This requires only a *yes* or *no* response. If audience members do not have any questions in mind, they may just sit there. Instead, begin by asking a question that assumes that there are questions, such as "What are your questions?" or "Who has the first question?"

If no one answers at this point, pause and wait. Inexperienced presenters often feel uncomfortable waiting the several seconds it takes for audience members to come up with questions. Keep in mind that just as you may need a few seconds to organize your thoughts for an answer, the audience members may need time to frame their questions. If you still don't get any questions after a significant pause, be prepared

with some of your own. For example, "One of the questions our group often hears after our presentation is . . ." or "If I were in the audience, I'd want to know. . . ."

Once an audience member asks the first question, you may find yourself facing the opposite situation: You may get an overwhelming number of questions and not have enough time to answer them all. As you near the end of your allotted time, or when you determine that the question-and-answer session has gone on long enough, bring the questioning to an end by saying, "I have time for two more questions." Then do just that: Answer two more questions and thank the audience for its participation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isa N. Engleberg and John A. Daly, *Presentations in Everyday Life: Strategies for Effective Speaking*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), p. 499.

better prepared, more professional, more highly credible, and more interesting than those who do not.”<sup>14</sup> At first, these findings may be difficult to believe. Can something as simple as an overhead transparency make that much difference? The answer is *yes*.

## Creating Presentation Aids

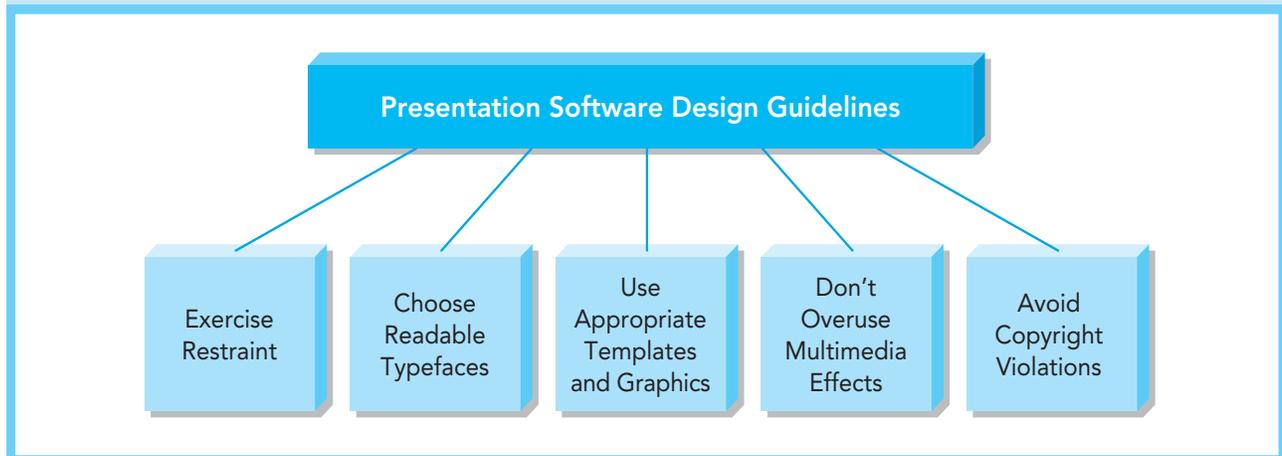
Only a dozen years ago, a hand-drawn poster would have been an acceptable presentation aid in most situations. This is no longer the case. The availability of presentation software makes it possible for speakers to create more professional-looking presentation aids. You are probably familiar with some presentation software. The most popular product is Microsoft’s PowerPoint®. **Presentation software** is a computer program that is used to create slides that can be displayed on an overhead projector, on a computer monitor, or directly from a computer onto a screen. Most presentation software packages also contain features for printing a speaker’s notes and handouts.

The first question you should ask yourself is whether you even need a slide to make a particular point. Sometimes a message can be communicated more effectively through words alone. Many listeners complain that even the simplest presentations have become dull displays of unnecessary slides that waste everyone’s time. Although we cannot provide comprehensive instruction on how to use presentation software, we suggest that you follow some basic design principles (see Figure 13.5) regardless of what software you use.

**Restraint.** Presentation software offers such a dazzling array of graphics, fonts, colors, and other visual elements that one’s first inclination is to use them all. Resist the temptation. More often than not, a simple slide will be much more effective than a complex one.

Two recommendations can help you decide how much is “just right” for a presentation using computer-generated slides: (1) Make only one point on each

FIGURE 13.5 Presentation Aid Design Guidelines



slide, and (2) follow the six-by-six rule. Each slide should make only one point, and the title of the slide should state that point. Everything else on the slide should support the main point. It takes less time to present two well-structured slides than to load up one slide with a muddled message.<sup>15</sup> In addition, aim for no more than six lines of text with six words per line. This rule of thumb allows your slide to contain the main heading and several bullet points below without bloating or information overload.<sup>16</sup> These recommendations also apply to other types of presentation aids, including hand-drawn posters and flip charts.

Remember that an aid is only an aid; slides are not a presentation. They are not meant to be a script that is read word for word. Useful presentation aids balance “tersity” and diversity. In other words, make slides compact and concise, while using them to add variety and interest. Finding this balance depends on understanding the value of presentation aids and the pitfalls to avoid when adding technical “sizzle” to your presentation.<sup>17</sup>

**Type.** After deciding what you want to put on a slide, you will need to select a typeface or font. “Users of presentation software have instant access to a veritable candy store of typefaces with tempting names like Arial, Calypso, Gold Rush, and Circus.”<sup>18</sup> Again, exercise restraint. Using too many typefaces looks amateurish. As a general rule, never use more than two different fonts on a single slide. As much as you may be tempted, avoid the fancy, but difficult-to-read, fonts. You are better off choosing common typefaces such as Helvetica, Arial, or Times Roman.

The size of type is as important as the selection of font. The best way to determine if your type is large enough is to prepare a few sample slides and project them in the room where your group will be meeting. Generally, you should try to avoid type that is smaller than 24 points. If you find that you have more text than will fit on a slide, don’t reduce the size of the type. Doing so is an indication that you are trying to put too much text on one slide. Textual slides should contain just a few key words. Reducing the size of the type to include more text not only makes for a poor presentation aid, but also makes the aid less legible.

**Templates and Graphics.** On a slide-by-slide basis, use a consistent style and background. From within your presentation software, you can select any of several dozen backgrounds or templates. Here, too, it is important to exercise restraint. In most cases, it is better to choose a modest background that will spruce up your slide but not compete with your words, charts, or graphics.

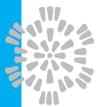
In choosing graphics, the first question you must ask yourself is whether group members really need to see the picture you want to use. If, for example, you are making a presentation about a new medical device, it may be useful to show the actual device or a picture of the device. On the other hand, showing a picture of a doctor during the presentation would probably not be useful. A picture of a doctor does not help explain the medical device.

Artwork that doesn't have a specific purpose can get in the way of your presentation. Presentation software often comes with numerous clip-art images that you may be tempted to use. Resist the temptation to use graphic elements just because you can. More often than not, clip-art graphics get in the way of messages when the graphic is not the reason for displaying the slide.

**Multimedia.** Multimedia technology allows you to use words, charts, graphics, sounds, and animation in a single presentation. It is possible to create presentation aids so dazzling that group members remember more about the slides than about you or your message. Although there are times when animation or sound may enhance understanding, these multimedia components are frequently no more than window dressing. They can be extraneous items that get in the way of the message rather than increase understanding. The last thing you want is for your audience to leave a presentation wondering how you got the *Tyrannosaurus rex* to eat the pie chart instead of discussing the data that were represented in the pie chart.

Multimedia effects are often misused by presenters. Some such effects are so overused that they have become clichés. Beginning a presentation with the theme from *Rocky* or *2001: A Space Odyssey* is not only unnecessary, but also tired. If you decide to include multimedia effects in a presentation, you should be able to articulate a reason for doing so other than “it’s neat.” The fine line between “adding

## ETHICAL GROUPS



### Respect Copyrights

Technology not only makes it easier to create professional-looking presentation aids, but it also makes it easier to appropriate the creative work of others in a presentation. When the creation of visual or audio images is a person's livelihood, the uncompensated use of such images raises ethical questions. Such unfair use may even be a violation of federal copyright laws. A discussion of whether a particular use of an image is illegal is far beyond the scope of this book; however, you should be aware of the legal and ethical implications of using unlicensed images.

A whole industry has developed to provide clip art and clip audio to computer users. A user who purchases such a package has the right to make copies of the images and use them in presentations. Likewise, the visual and audio images that are included with presentation software can be used in your presentations. On the other hand, if you create a computer image by scanning an image from another source or if you obtain an image from the Internet, your conscience and your knowledge of copyright law must act as your guide.

enough to spice up the presentation” and “overpowering your listeners” is often trampled by enthusiastic presenters.<sup>19</sup> Multimedia presentations may be fun to put together, but they must be well designed, well rehearsed, and well presented.

### Pitfalls of PowerPoint

PowerPoint is everywhere. Unfortunately, many presenters use PowerPoint (or other brands of presentation software such as Lotus Freelance<sup>®</sup> or Corel Presentations<sup>®</sup>) without thoroughly investigating whether it enhances the listeners' comprehension and helps the speaker accomplish her or his purpose. Some corporations have even banned PowerPoint presentations by employees who have not had extensive training in visual design and its relationship to audience comprehension and reasoned analysis. The 3M Corporation discourages the use of PowerPoint because “it removes subtlety and thinking.”<sup>20</sup>

Edward Tufte, the writer of several books on graphic design, notes:

Presentations largely stand or fall on the quality, relevance, and integrity of the content. . . . If your numbers are boring, then you've got the wrong numbers. If your words or images are not on point, making them dance in color won't make them relevant. Audience boredom is usually a content failure, not a decoration failure. . . . PowerPoint cognitive style routinely disrupts, dominates, and trivializes content. PowerPoint presentations too often resemble a school play: very loud, very slow, and very simple.<sup>21</sup>

A survey of college students concluded that students like technology when it is used well, but some gave professors failing grades when it came to using PowerPoint. They complained that many professors cram slides with text and then recite the text during class, which some students say makes the delivery flatter than if the professor did not use the slides.<sup>22</sup> As one student put it, “The majority are taking their lectures and just putting them on PowerPoint. . . . With a chalkboard, at least the lights were on and you didn't fall asleep.” One professor reported a 20 percent drop in attendance when he posted his PowerPoint slides on the Web. Now his slides are “riddled with blanks and missing information, which he fills in aloud during lecture.”<sup>23</sup>

In many cases, paper handouts can show text, numbers, data, graphics, and images more effectively than slides can. Images on paper have a higher resolution. Content can include more words and numbers. Thoughtfully planned, well-written handouts tell your audience that you are serious and thorough, that your message has consequences, and that you respect their attention and intelligence.<sup>24</sup>

### Using Presentation Aids

Presentation aids can take many forms: handouts, posters, flip charts, overhead transparencies, computer-generated slides, and videos. The following list of do's

and don'ts can help you avoid some of the common pitfalls that speakers encounter when using any type of presentation aid.

- *Explain the point.* A presentation aid does not speak for itself. You may need to explain why you have chosen it and what it means.
- *Wait until it's time.* Prepare listeners for a presentation aid so that they will want to see it. Give them enough time to look at it so that they don't mind turning their attention back to you.
- *Don't talk to your aid.* You control the presentation aid; it shouldn't control you. Talk directly to the people in your audience, not to the poster, flip chart, or slide.
- *Be prepared to do without.* Presentation aids can be lost or damaged; equipment can malfunction. Have a backup plan. Be prepared to make your presentation without your aids.

Above and beyond these do's and don'ts, there is one more piece of advice that should not be ignored: practice, practice, practice. Not only can practice improve your overall performance, but it can also alert you to problems with your presentation aids. For example, we once watched a consultant put almost everything in her talk on transparencies. As soon as she projected something onto the screen, she would turn around and point out the numbers that she thought were important. Unfortunately, she stood right between the screen and the projector, so that most of the information was projected onto her back. If she had practiced in front of others before making the presentation, the problem could have been avoided.

## TOOLBOX 13.4



### Don't Leave Them in the Dark<sup>1</sup>

Although adjustable lighting has considerable advantages over simple on/off switches, use it carefully. If you are going to display videotapes, overhead transparencies, or computer-generated slides, turn the lights down, but don't leave your audience in the dark. You never want the lights any dimmer than they need to be. If the room is too dark, your audience may drift off to dreamland in the glow of your beautiful slides.

If you intend to turn off your projector when you are not displaying slides, remember that the room will become even darker without that light source. Another problem may occur if you dim

the lights sufficiently to let everyone see your slides or overheads: The room may become too dark for you to read your notes.

Obviously, you need to find a middle ground. Dimming the lights only partially is one solution. Getting a lectern with a light might be another option. The more you know about the lighting system in a room, the better you can plan how to speak and how to use your presentation aids effectively.

<sup>1</sup> Isa N. Engleberg and John Daly, *Presentations in Everyday Life: Strategies for Effective Speaking*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), p. 151.

 **BALANCED PRESENTATIONS**

“Having the floor” in a group discussion is not the same as “being on stage” for a public presentation. When you are preparing and delivering an oral presentation, you should adapt to the needs and expectations of the audience. In an oral presentation, listeners may expect to hear accurate information but not a long-winded technical report; that can be made in writing. In an oral presentation, listeners may want to understand every word but not be exposed to a dramatic performance; that should be done on the stage. Finally, an audience may expect to hear a well-developed argument but not an impassioned plea; that should be made in court.

The guidelines outlined in this chapter cannot produce a successful presentation—only *you* can. Regardless of whether you are talking to a group of friends or to the state legislature, you should try to make informed decisions about your purpose, audience, logistics, content, organization, credibility, and performance. Understanding and balancing these factors will guide you toward an effective and impressive oral presentation.

**GROUPWORK****A Practice Presentation**

**Goal:** To practice your delivery skills and gain experience in impromptu, extemporaneous, manuscript, and memorized speaking

**Participants:** All members of the class

**Procedure**

1. Each student should prepare a short presentation in which four forms of delivery are used as follows:
  - *Memorized.* Recite thirty seconds of something you have memorized—a poem, the Pledge of Allegiance, song lyrics, or something else.
  - *Manuscript.* Read thirty seconds of any piece of prose—for example, a book or a newspaper or magazine article.
  - *Extemporaneous.* Spend sixty seconds talking to the audience about a personal experience or opinion—what hobbies you have, what you think about a campus or political issue, or some other topic.
  - *Impromptu.* After you have completed these presentations, someone in the audience should ask a question. Answer the question in thirty seconds or less.

2. Assess each speaker's performance and answer the following questions about all of the oral presentations: Which forms of delivery
- Were the most natural?
  - Had the most eye contact?
  - Were the most interesting to look at?
  - Were the easiest to listen to?

## GROUPASSESSMENT

### Presentation Rating Scale

**Directions.** Use the following presentation guidelines to assess how well a group member, group spokesperson, or team makes an oral presentation to the group or a public audience. Identify the speaker's strengths and also make suggestions for improvement.

Presentation Guidelines	Superior	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<b>Purpose:</b> Sets clear and reasonable goal			
<b>Audience:</b> Adapts to listeners			
<b>Logistics:</b> Adapts to occasion and setting			
<b>Content:</b> Uses a variety of effective supporting materials to support main points			
<b>Organization:</b> Uses clear organization and an effective introduction and conclusion			
<b>Credibility:</b> Demonstrates competence and character			
<b>Performance:</b> Uses voice, body, and presentation aids effectively			
<b>Comments</b> Strengths of Oral Presentation:           Suggestions for Improvement:			

## NOTES

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4. Engleberg and Daly, p. 130.
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6. David Zarefsky, *Public Speaking: Strategies for Success*, 4th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), p. 302.
7. Engleberg and Daly, p. 321.
8. Authors of voice and articulation textbooks generally agree that a useful, all-purpose speaking rate is around 145 to 180 words per minute. See Lyle V. Mayer, *Fundamentals of Voice and Articulation*, 13th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004); Jeffrey C. Hahner, Martin A. Sokoloff, and Sandra L. Salisch, *Speaking Clearly: Improving Voice and Diction*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002); Ethel C. Glenn, Phillip J. Glenn, and Sandra Forman, *Your Voice and Articulation*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998).
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12. Marjorie Brody, *Speaking Your Way to the Top: Making Powerful Business Presentations* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), p. 81.
13. Leech, p. 288.
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16. William J. Ringle, *TechEdge: Using Computers to Present and Persuade* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), p. 125.
17. Ringle, pp. 125 and 135.
18. S. Hinkin, "Designing Standardized Templates: First You Choose It, But How Do You Get Them to Use It?" *Presentations*, 8 (August 1994), p. 34.
19. Ringle, p. 132.
20. "Microsoft PowerPoint®," *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PowerPoint>.
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22. Jeffrey R. Young, "When Good Technology Means Bad Teaching," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 12, 2004, pp. A31–32.
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24. Tufte, p. 24.