



Tips on Crafting a Compelling and Useful Presentation¹

It's no secret that public speaking can be a scary business. We know we have ideas or something useful to share with our peers, but actually *doing* so – daunting. So, many of us procrastinate rather than face the fear. Then, we don't have time to polish the rudimentary talk, adding to it the little tweaks that make it really shine.

So, consider this your notice to get busy shining! Treat it as a life experiment – incorporate one or more of these ideas and then evaluate afterwards.

Prepare Your Talk

Write it out

Use the tool that works best for you (outline, narrative, mindmap) but get the ideas that you want to communicate to your audience out of your head before you go anywhere near a presentation software! Think about what your objective is for your talk – do you want to persuade someone to action? Inform them on your latest research? Knowing what you are trying to accomplish will help you know if you have achieved it. In that same vein, realize you might not have time to say everything you'd like to share. Often sufficient depth, with details and examples, tops breadth. Plan your talk for the time allocated, leaving room for audience engagement. Include the most important pieces in the start of the talk in case you don't have time to cover everything.

Craft Your Visuals

Consider this photo for a moment. Can you read the screen? When crafting visuals, it is critical that you look at them through the eyes of your audience.

Design for the Room

Choose the font and color wisely so that it has good contrast and can be seen across the room. This is a bit tricky when you don't know the room configuration ahead of time, but general rules include using at least a 24 point size, no more than three easy-to-read fonts, and consistent backgrounds and layout.



Read or Listen – Pick One

The level of textual detail on the slide in the photo is overwhelming. By putting so much text on the screen, the presenter forces audience members to choose – read or listen. Another reason to go light on the text on your slides is that **you** will be tempted to read from your slides if there is text to be read.

Practice Ahead of Time

We all know we *should* practice our talk before we give it. You will feel calmer, cooler and more collected if you've talked through it at least once. Consider pairing up with a conference buddy. Meet ahead of time via Skype or in person and give your presentations for each other. You might also ask a colleague at your institution (preferably an experienced presenter) to listen and give you honest feedback. You can learn from each other: win-win!

Make Adjustments

When you get to the venue, check out the room where you will present. Where do you want to stand? How loud do you need to speak? Do you know how to work the technology? Can your presentation be seen from all points?

¹ Modified from a document originally developed by the 2014 MAALL Continuing Education Committee.

Delivering Your Presentation

Non-Verbals Matter

Smile. This helps you relax and signals to the audience that they are in for a good presentation. Make eye-contact, trying to include your entire audience throughout the presentation. It might help to focus on some friendly faces.

Communicate Audience Expectations

How do you want to handle questions – as they come or at the end? Either works, but communicate your wishes to your audience and be true to your word. If you say you want to handle questions at the end, be sure to leave time for them. Likewise, let your audience know if you will be providing your slides or handouts electronically. (If so, please share them with the Education Committee so everyone can find the slides in one spot!) They won't feel as pressed to take copious notes if they will have access to the slides later.

Start with a Story

Human beings are hardwired to enjoy stories. Kick off your presentations with a story to capture their attention and pepper your talk with examples and anecdotes to keep it.

Slowly, Loudly, Clearly

When presenters get nervous, they tend to unintentionally speed up their words, sometimes to the point of making it difficult to understand the message. Avoid this common pitfall by making sure when you speak, you do so at a slow rate, that your voice is loud, and that you enunciate your words clearly. You may feel like you are slowing down to a crawl, but your audience will appreciate the effort and will better be able to understand your presentation.

Don't Read Your Speech

You may need to read a quote, and you can certainly consult your notes, but reading your presentation puts a barrier between you and your audience.

Use Handouts Strategically

All that good data you wanted to share on your slides but knew people couldn't read is perfect for a handout. But be smart about when you give it out. As soon as you give a handout, you lose the attention of your audience at least until they have had a chance to evaluate it. So, give it out before the presentation starts, at the end, or at a strategic moment in your talk. Your Education Committee liaison can help with handing them out for you.

Wrapping Up

Connect with Your Audience

Almost always, you will have spoken directly to the needs of at least one of your colleagues. Taking the time to connect with that person after your talk can help build incredibly useful professional bridges.

Conduct a Post-mortem

Consider your session. What worked and what could be improved? Did attendees provide useful feedback that can help you improve next time? While things are fresh in your mind, take a moment to jot some notes.

Breathe a Sigh of Relief!

It is over...until next time when you will have that much more confidence and experience under your belt.

On behalf of the Education Committee and your colleagues at the MAALL Annual Meeting, thank you for sharing your experience and wisdom with us!