Best Practices: Presentations

The Basics

### **Big Presentation Fast**

Increasingly, as the pace of business and modern life quickens, you will be asked to find ways to get a lot of information across in a small amount of time. The challenge is to do this in such a way that you can still maintain your passion and leave a strong impression with your audience. Certain best practices are vital:

* Boil it down: maximum of three main ideas
* Body: be grounded, take space, use gesture
* Relax and breathe!
* Use props and visuals
* Metaphors and stories
* Voice: vocal variety and passionate purpose
* Be creative: take risks!
* Involve your partner and the audience

### Let a Thousand Images Bloom

Metaphor (to coin a metaphor) is rain in a desert—turning an otherwise dry, technical presentation into a fertile, compelling story flowering with evocative imagery. Great leaders throughout the ages have used metaphor to inspire their audiences and move them to take action—think of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

### Time Out

Often, especially when we are tight for time, we tend to rush and get ahead of ourselves. Vertical and horizontal moments are a way to ensure that you will stay present and not rush:

* **Practicing your vertical moment** can be as simple as taking a deep belly breath and letting it out on a small sigh, relaxing your muscles (allowing your knees to bend slightly, relaxing your jaw) and reminding yourself of your Passionate Purpose.
* **Practicing your horizontal moment** is a chance to connect with your audience, make eye contact, while still maintaining a connection to your own center, your own breath.
* **Real-life vertical and horizontal moments** can include breathing and pausing, sipping water, looking at notes or slides, asking questions, and taking a break.
* **You can remind yourself** to take small vertical and horizontal moments throughout a presentation, especially if you find yourself getting stressed out or speeding up.

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Plan Your Presentation to Fit the Goal

How can your presentation be structured and delivered to best serve your goal and convince your audience of these benefits?

##### Structure of a Good Presentation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Beginning |  | Tell them what you’re going to tell them: |
|  | * Start with a **creative element** (see ideas below). * Create a relationship with the audience. * Introduce theme, overall message, issue, or problem. |
| Middle |  | Tell them: |
|  | * Give them your key messages (three maximum). * Acknowledge their concerns; illustrate benefits. * Add in a **creative element.** |
|  |  | Tell them what you’ve told them: |
|  | End | * Summarize. * Issue a “call to action.” * End with a **creative element**—what do you want them to remember? |
|  |  |
|  |  | Create a dialogue: |
| Invite Questions |  | * Repeat or paraphrase questions so everyone in the audience can hear. * If there are no questions, you can ask them some questions. |

# Best Practices: Presentations

### Creative Elements

Make your presentation memorable using the following:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Personal stories * Humor * Analogies, metaphors | * Surveys, polls, quizzes * Interesting statistics * Demonstrations | * Props * Quotations * Visual aids |

Rehearse!

* Practice out loud several times until you feel comfortable.
* Work with a coach and ask for feedback on both content and delivery.
* Pay attention to use of vocal variety, congruent body language, and performance energy.
* To deal with stress, use relaxation techniques and focus on your goal and the audience (rather than on yourself).

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Handling Q&A

After a presentation, there is often a period dedicated for questions from the audience. This is an important opportunity to engage them, confirm that the information was understood, learn about their concerns, and generate ideas. These sessions can be stressful as they require thinking on our feet while communicating clearly. The following 5-step model can support you to use all the components of the PRES model while facilitating Q&A sessions.

Five-Step Model for Success with Q&As

Breathe and ground yourself as you listen to the question.

Clarify the question.

Empathize.

Open up the question to others.

State the response.

## Tips on How To…

### Clarify the Question

* Ask for more detail.
* Reframe/restate the question in your own words and confirm with questioner.
* Break question into parts if there are multiple issues raised in the question.

### Empathize

* Acknowledge underlying concerns or commitments (what do they need?).
* Appreciate their emotions or feelings.
* Thank them for question and, if appropriate, courage to ask it.

### Open Up the Question to Others

* Invite others to add insights or ideas or answers.
* Refer question to appropriate person or department.
* Inquire if others have same or similar question.

### State the Response

* Use concise clear responses.

# Best Practices: Presentations

* Use expressive body and voice.
* Make commitment to follow-up if you don’t have answer in the moment.
* Use stories, analogies, and examples if appropriate.
* Use language, industry terms, and acronyms that your audience will understand.