

Public Speaking

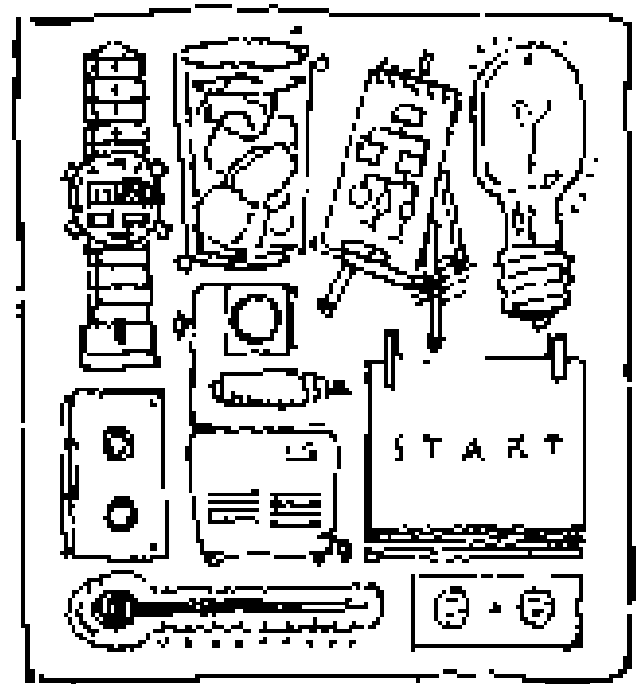
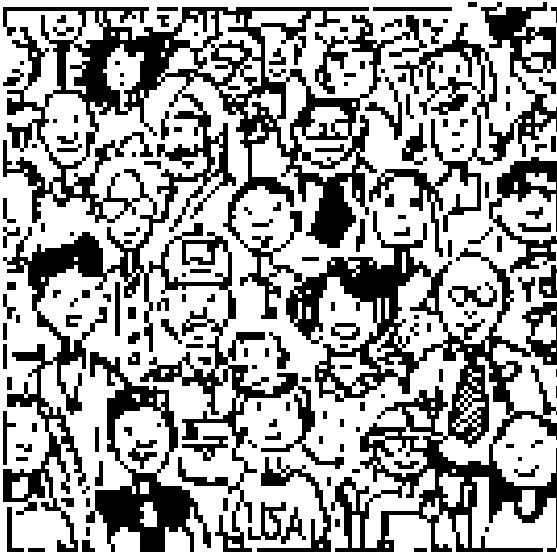
Effective speaking

Upon completing this chapter, the reader will be able to describe audience characteristics, clearly state the purpose of the speech, develop a speech that is relevant to the targeted audience, and deliver the speech.

Imagine that you have been asked to make a formal presentation to the board of directors next week. The presentation is to be a report about last year's activities as well as a request for funding. You observed last year's presentation but have never presented such a report before. What can you do to make a positive impact on the board? The following tips should prove useful to you as you prepare and deliver this or other types of speeches.

This chapter will review the following:

- analyzing the audience
- determining the purpose
- developing the speech
- delivering the speech
- evaluating the speech



Analyze the audience

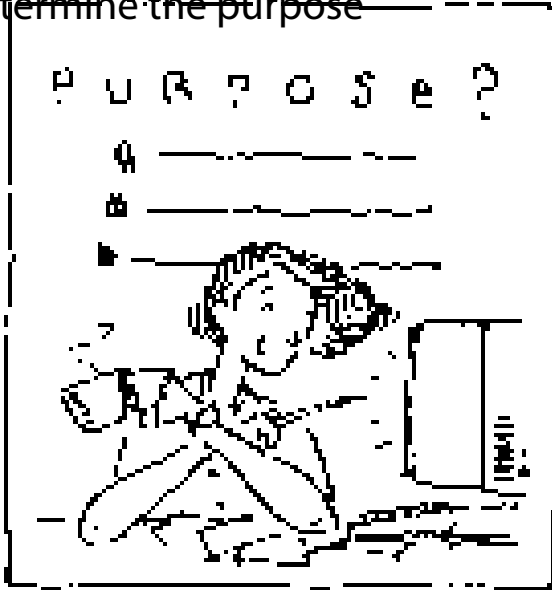
The first step in preparing and delivering an effective presentation is to ask questions about the audience you will be addressing. This, in effect, gives you necessary background for meeting the expectations of the target group. Whom do you ask? Start with the person who has issued the invitation. Then, if you know any of the potential audience members, talk to one or more of them.

Questions to ask (directly or indirectly):

- Why have I been invited to speak?
- What is the topic, and why does this group want to know about it?
- How long have most of the members been with this group?
- What groups do they represent (school teachers, bank officers, doctors, lawyers, neighborhoods)?
- Who are they (gender, age, ethnic group, education)?

- Where will I be speaking?
- What does the room look like (auditorium, conference room, cafeteria)?
- What control do I have over the room (lights, temperature, noise)?
- Will everyone be able to see projected or displayed materials (videotape, slides, flipchart)?
- When will I be speaking (time of day, position on the agenda)?
- How long am I expected to speak?

Determine the purpose



Your next step is to define the purpose of your presentation and determine how you can address audience expectations based on this goal. Presentations can be classified under one of four general types. Each type has a primary purpose.

Inform (explain or teach)

This type of presentation helps the listener know or understand more about a topic. You may be sharing goals, strategies, key events, good or bad news. Or you may be showing or demonstrating how to do something. People of any age will learn more readily when they are involved with information or ideas, rather than just listening. If you hope the group will learn something, get them involved in discussion or an activity.

Persuade (convince)

The listener is encouraged to accept



a challenge, change an attitude, or take action as a result of this presentation. Your presentation flows logically: (1) problem, (2) criteria, (3) possible solutions, (4) best solution, (5) action.

Inspire

This presentation should have emotional impact on listeners. The topic, examples, and delivery contribute to an inspirational presentation.



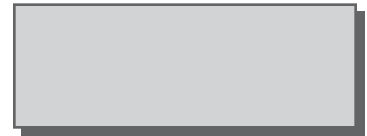
Entertain

This presentation helps the audience enjoy a specific occasion. It may involve additional speaker-audience interaction.

Your presentation may incorporate more than one of these purposes. Effective presentations usually include features of each type, but the main purpose



is based on what the audience is expected to know, do, or believe at the end of the session. Complete the following to help you determine your primary goal:



"After my session, the audience will _____."

Now that you know who is in your audience and what you want them to do following the presentation, you can begin to outline the components of the speech.

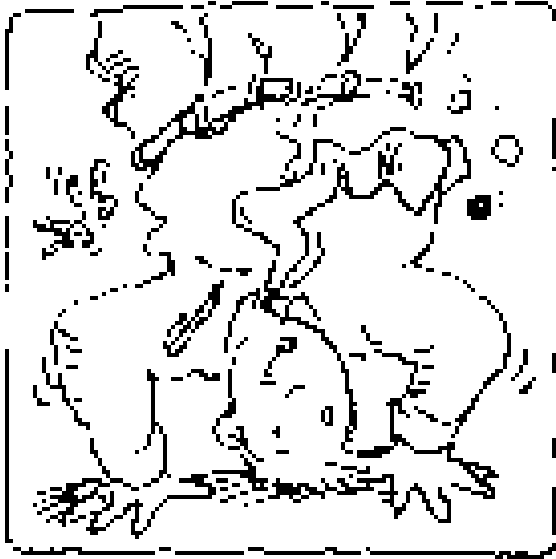
What are the three most important points you wish to make? Yes, you know a lot more than just three points, but remember your time limit, the audience, and your final goal. Limiting yourself to three key points will help you keep the presentation focused.

Develop the speech

You've defined your audience; you've gathered all the parts and pieces; now you are ready to put it all together. When you begin to assemble it, a speech or presentation is much like a paper: it should have an opening, a body, and a closing.

The opening should grab the audience's attention. You can:

- ask questions.
- quote well-known people.
- make a provocative statement.
- set up a problem.
- tell a (short) story.

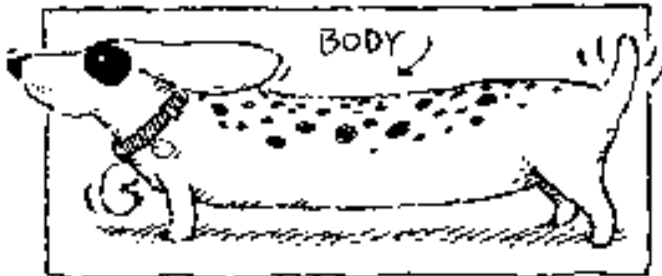


N F E N I N G

- use a visual aid.

The opening also should include a brief overview. In other words, tell them what you will tell them.

The body of your speech will be based on your key points. The points should be discussed in terms that are familiar to the audience. Include examples and stories



audience members can relate to. Refer to your audience analysis for insights about what will appeal to them. Consider using support materials to reinforce your message and to keep the audience more actively involved in the presentation.

Reflect on how you will use the support materials. Make sure displayed items are large enough to be seen by the entire group. When you create transparencies and slides, use key words or phrases, white space, and pertinent graphics. Don't include so much information that no one can make sense of them. Decide where to stand so that you don't block anyone's view of the transparency, slide, or flip chart.

As you assemble the content and materials, list potential questions. Review the narrative. Have you addressed the questions on your list? If you haven't already included answers to the questions, determine how you will address them when they arise.

Use transitions to move your audience from point to point. Transitions create a logical flow to the presentation.

Support materials:

- handouts
- transparencies
- flipcharts
- videotapes
- slides
- audio tapes
- physical objects

They can help build momentum for your final point and dynamic close.

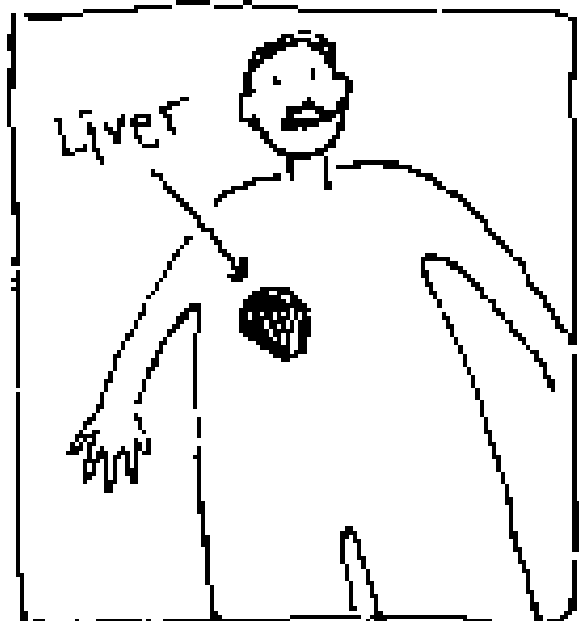
In the closing you tell them what you have told them. It should include a brief recap of the points you've covered. Remember that once you have indicated you are coming to the end of your presentation, you should end it shortly thereafter. Don't continue for another 20 minutes. The closing should include some type of charge to the audience. Refer to your presentation's goal to determine how to charge them. For example, the purpose of the presentation to the board of directors referred to at the beginning of this chapter was to persuade the board to fund your organization. The closing charge might be:

"As you can see, we have had tremendous success this year, thanks to your past support. We want to maintain the momentum, but we can do this only if we have your continuing financial support."

Deliver

The speech is together, all your support materials are prepared, and you're ready to deliver your speech. But nervousness is setting in. Where did it come from?

Stage fright has struck. We tend to get nervous about making presentations because we want people to accept what we say. Most of us are concerned about what the audience thinks of us. We want to make sure that we have covered everything and are always afraid we'll forget



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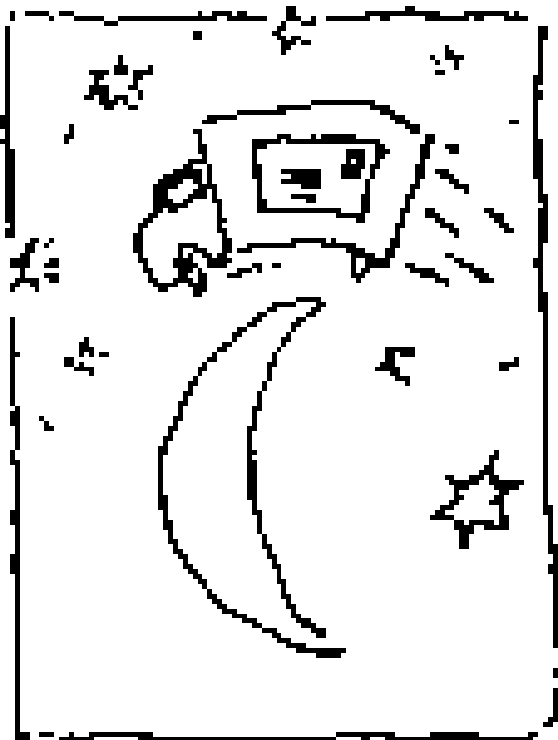
something. Finally, most of us have an internal picture of the perfect presentation that we can never match. The combination of these elements leads to sweaty palms, shortness of breath, and blank minds. There are several things you can do to lower your anxiety level.

General actions

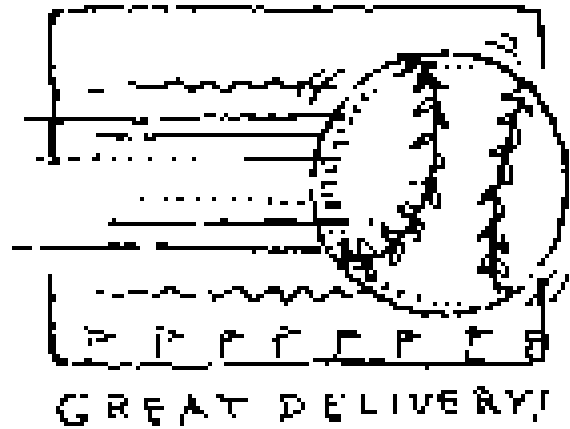
- Take a course in public speaking.
- Imagine yourself as a good speaker. It will be a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Identify your fears, categorize them as controllable or uncontrollable, and confront them.
- Accept some fears as being good.

Before the presentation

- Check the facilities and the AV equipment.
- Obtain information about the group (audience analysis).
- Know your material well. Ensure that you are the expert.
- Practice your presentation. Ask friends or relatives to critique the presentation. Talk to yourself in the mirror. Videotape yourself, and review the tape.
- Practice responses to tough questions or situations.



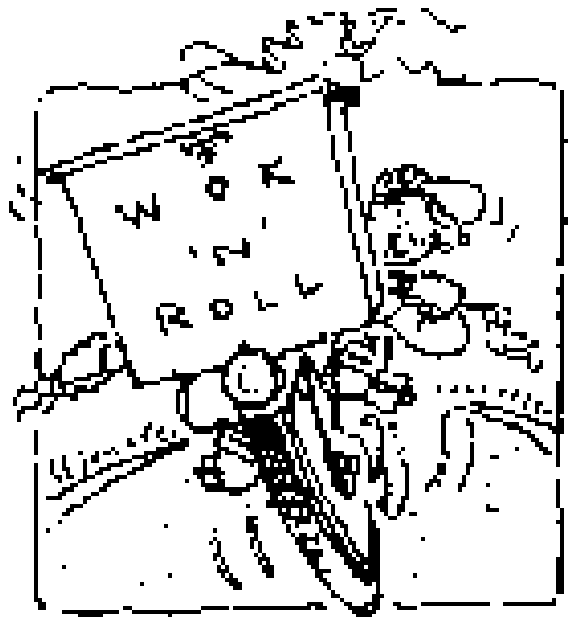
OVERNIGHT
DELIVERY



- Anticipate potential problems and prepare probable responses.
- Rest up so that you are physically and mentally alert.

Prior to and during the presentation

- Convince yourself to relax; breathe deeply; meditate; give yourself a pep talk; think affirmatively.
- Identify advocates in the audience.
- Introduce yourself to the group in advance. Meet and greet them as they arrive.
- Create an informal setting.
- Provide an overview of the presentation.
- Provide for and encourage audience participation.
- Learn audience members' names and use them.
- Establish your credibility early. Know the topic; display confidence and professionalism.

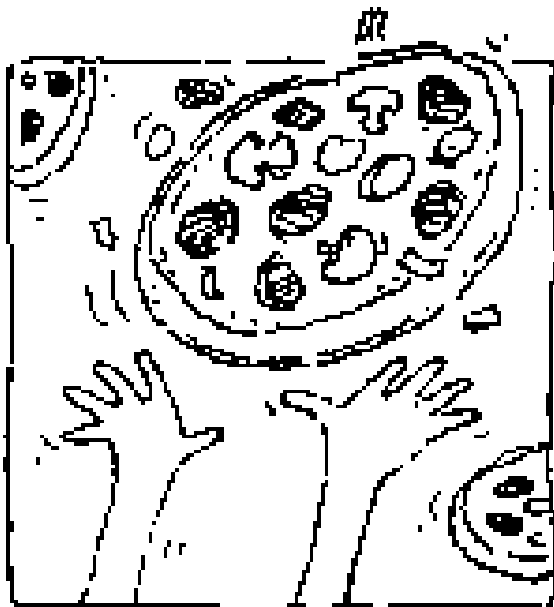


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- Use eye contact to establish rapport. However, if you are talking to a group from a different culture, make sure eye contact is appropriate.
- Prepare an outline and follow it.
- Use your own style. Don't imitate someone else.
- Use your own words. Don't read, unless you want to share a direct quotation with your audience.
- Dress comfortably and appropriately.
- Put yourself in your audience's shoes. They're asking, "What's in it for me?"
- Assume the audience is on your side. They aren't necessarily hostile.

Your stage presence, how you look and sound when you deliver your message, is very important. Your message is actually delivered through three channels: visual, verbal, and vocal. The most effective presentations are those in which all three channels reinforce the message.

Visual Channel. At least 50 percent of your message is sent visually. What does your appearance say about you and the message you intend to send? When you think about what to wear the day of the presentation, think about the audience and where you will be making that presentation. A suit is nice but not quite appropriate if you are talking to a group in the horse barn. On the other hand, jeans are not appropriate in an office or other formal setting. Check with the person who invited you about appropriate dress. What is customary attire for the meeting? A word of caution: if the customary attire is something that you would not normally wear, choose something that is close but comfortable. For example, if the customary attire is jeans, but you don't own a pair, wear slacks and a shirt



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or sweater. (A tie would probably not be appropriate.) If your clothes or accessories detract (or distract) from your intended message, they are inappropriate.

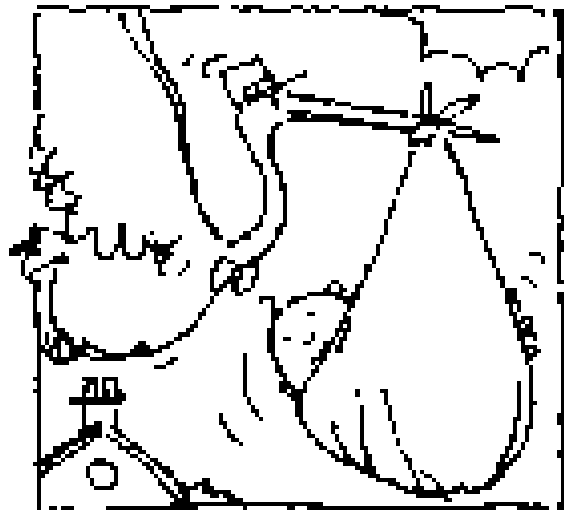
Most of us don't like to talk about it, but personal grooming plays a big role in the visual message we send, too. If the clothes are right but the hair is dirty, needs cutting, or is the first thing the audience notices about you, they will be paying more attention to that than to the intended message. Don't let your personal hygiene detract from your message.

The visual message is also conveyed by your demeanor. Body language — how we hold our arms and hands, how we stand, our facial expressions — speaks volumes about us. The next time you are in an audience, observe the speaker's body language. Where is the speaker standing — behind a podium or table or close to the audience? Is she turned toward or away from the audience? Is he making eye contact with members of the audience? What is her facial expression — solemn, happy/animated, sad, frowning, no expression? Where are his hands — in his pockets, behind his back, gripping the podium, waving around?

Standing behind a podium, table, or piece of equipment puts a barrier between the speaker and the audience. Sometimes it may be necessary to do that, but consider moving from behind that barrier and closer to the audience to create a more informal, intimate environment. If you need a microphone, request a wireless or hand-held microphone so that you can get closer to the audience.

Don't write out the entire presentation and read from those notes; just use an outline and your own words. You can refer to the outline from time to time to ensure you are still on course.

Look at the audience; make eye contact. Eye contact gives the impression of talking directly to individual members of the audience. Of course, you should not talk to the same individual for the duration; instead, look at people throughout the room. Include the entire group in



SPECIAL DELIVERY

the “conversation.” Making eye contact with just one side of the room can make the other side feel ignored and left out of the conversation.

If there are questions or comments from audience members, be sure to look directly at the person speaking. Looking at your notes or another part of the room may give the impression (correctly or not) that you are not interested in what he or she has to say.

What are your hands doing while you’re talking? Many people don’t know what to do with their hands, so they have a death grip on the podium, rattle loose change and keys in their pockets, or play with a pen or pencil. These are habits that can drive an audience crazy. Instead of stuffing your hands in your pockets, develop gestures that provide emphasis (no rude ones, please) for the points you are making.

Facial expressions also provide clues to the audience about your feelings. Raised eyebrows can indicate surprise, shock, alarm, or that you have a question. Lowered eyebrows may give the impression that you are unhappy, angry, or disapproving. A smile, frown, tightly closed lips — what do these expressions convey to the audience?

The audience is reading your body language and you should be reading theirs too. What are they thinking about? As you look around the room, note what their actions are: looking at you, reading, staring into space, fidgeting. This body language can tell you pretty quickly whether or not your audience is still with you. Are they slumped back in their chairs, avoiding your eye contact, or are they sitting straight up and toward you, perhaps even on the edge of their seats?

Ask yourself if they are leaning back and avoiding eye contact because they disagree with what you are saying. Are their arms crossed and bodies turned away from you?

- Choose attire that contributes to perception you want to create; make sure it does not distract from your message.
- Be subtle when referring to notes.
- Make eye contact with audience.
- Use appropriate gestures and movements to add meaning.
- Be conscious of your head movements. (Do they convey affirmation, denial, curiosity, uncertainty, confidence?)

This could mean that they disagree with what you are saying, or it could mean the room is too cold. Are their faces puzzled?

Perhaps you need to explain in more detail or rephrase a point. Read their body language and respond as appropriate.

Verbal Channel. A second channel your message is delivered through is one that most of us think about first. That is the verbal channel. What words will we use to deliver the message? It is crucial to refer to the audience analysis when you think about what you will say. The most

effective presentations are those that use clear, straightforward language the audience can relate to.

Jargon is specialized or technical talk of a specific

- Use simple, straightforward words.
- Use language that will move the audience to act.
- Choose words and phrases carefully.
- Repeat key points.

group. Unless your audience is part of that group and familiar with the jargon, avoid it. Polysyllabic words are usually unnecessary and may cause some audience members to quit listening to you. Use emotive words to build the audience’s emotions so that they will complete the charge you leave with them at the end of your presentation.

Vocal Channel. How does your voice sound? Do you speak in a monotone or do you change your tone to match the words you are speaking? A monotonous voice will put your audience to sleep. Changing the tone adds interest and variety to the spoken words. How loudly do you speak? Can everyone hear you or does your voice go no further than the first row? A softly spoken word used at just the right time can create drama and keep the audience on the edge of their chairs, but if the entire presentation is spoken very softly, you may appear to be timid.

Most of us tend to be very uncomfortable with silence, especially when we are the focus of attention. When we don’t know what to say, fillers like “um,” and “aah” get

- Vary tone of voice appropriately.
- Vary speed.
- Use pauses.
- Avoid fillers (um, aah, er).

sprinkled into the void.

Silence is not bad and can actually be used to your advantage. It can provide a brief rest and mental review for your audience as well as an opportunity for you to re-focus. Like any other new habit, you must practice deliberately using pauses before they seem comfortable to you.

Fielding questions should be an integral part of your presentation. The audience has listened to you, and now it is your turn to listen to them as they ask questions or make comments. Courteous attention from you is always appropriate. Listen to the question or comment, determine the nature of the question as well as the actual intent, and then respond. Demonstrate that you are listening by turning toward the speaker and looking at him or her.

Make sure that the rest of the audience has heard the question. If they did not, repeat it, checking with the questioner to ensure you have repeated accurately. Include the audience by looking at them once you have acknowledged the questioner.

Give yourself time to think about your response before you open your mouth. Remember that it is better to say

you don't have an answer to a question than to try to bluff your way through it. The response should be as short as possible without being abrupt so that you will have time for other questions.

What is the intent of the question asked? Sometimes you will need to address the emotion behind a question rather than the surface question you hear. Perhaps it's reassurance the questioner needs rather than a direct answer to the spoken question.

What if an audience member doesn't agree with you and wants to argue? There are a few options for dealing with these folks. Unless this is a debate, you probably don't want to argue with the person. Instead, note that you appreciate his point of view but you don't hold the same one. Or, you may want to say that it is a good point, but in the interest of time, one that should be explored on another occasion. You might offer to discuss the point after the session is over. By remaining calm and courteous, you can maintain control.

Steps to remember:

- Listen.
- Determine nature and intent of question.
- Respond (keep it short and simple).



Evaluate

For most of us, evaluation is the least appealing part of any project. Evaluating how you did as a presenter/facilitator/speaker can be very productive, however.

Questions to ask:

- Could everyone hear?
- Did I use an effective tone of voice?
- Did I avoid fillers and distracting gestures?
- Did I have an appearance of confidence?
- Did I use terms and language the audience knew and understood?
- Did I personalize the content for the audience?
- Did the materials support the content?
- Was the content appropriate for the audience?
- Were visuals legible and accurate?
- Were the visuals necessary?
- Was there too much/too little content for allotted time?