

ENGLISH CAFÉ NO 8

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLIC SPEAKING IN ENGLISH

Organise your presentation in a logical structure. Most presentations are organised in three parts, followed by questions:

1 Introduction

- welcome your audience
- introduce your subject
- explain the structure of your presentation
- explain rules for questions

2 Body of presentation

- present the subject itself

3 Conclusion

- summarise your presentation
- thank your audience
- invite questions

+ Questions

Notes

Try to appear as spontaneous as possible. Do not read your presentation. Reading a text is boring and will send your audience to sleep! Use notes to remember everything you need to say. Some people make notes on small, A6 cards. Some people write down just the title of each section of their talk. Some people write down keywords to remind them.

DELIVERY

'Delivery' is the way in which you actually deliver or give your presentation. Delivery is at least as important as content.

Nerves

Most speakers are a little nervous at the beginning of a presentation. So it is normal if you are nervous. Pay special attention to the beginning of your presentation. This is when you establish a rapport with your audience. During this time, try to speak slowly and calmly. After a few moments, you will relax and gain confidence.

Audience Rapport

You need to build a warm and friendly relationship with your audience. Be careful to establish eye contact with each member of your audience. Each person should feel that you are speaking directly to him or her.

Body Language

What you do not say is at least as important as what you do say. Your body is speaking to your audience even before you open your mouth. Your clothes, your walk, your glasses, your haircut, your expression - it is from these that your audience forms its first impression as you enter the room. Generally speaking, it is better to stand rather than sit when making a presentation. Avoid repetitive and irritating gestures.

Cultural Considerations

If we imagine a German working for an Israeli company making a presentation in English to a Japanese audience in Korea, we can see that there are even many possibilities for cultural misunderstanding. Try to learn about any particular cultural matters that may affect your audience. Cultural differences can often be seen in body language. To a Latin from Southern France or Italy, a presenter who uses his hands and arms when speaking may seem dynamic and friendly. To an Englishman, the same presenter may seem unsure of his words and lacking in self-confidence.

Voice quality

Your audience must be able to hear you clearly. In general, you should try to vary your voice. Your voice will then be more interesting for your audience. You can vary your voice in at least three ways:

- speed: you can speak at normal speed, you can speak faster, you can speak more slowly, and you can stop completely! Silence is a very good technique for gaining your audience's attention.
- intonation: you can change the pitch of your voice. You can speak in a high tone. You can speak in a low tone.
- volume: you can speak at normal volume, you can speak loudly and you can speak quietly. Lowering your voice and speaking quietly can again attract your audience's interest.

Visual aids

80% of what we learn is learned visually (what we see) and only 20% is learned aurally (what we hear). This means that:

- visual aids are an extremely effective means of communication
- non-native English speakers do not need to worry so much about spoken English since they can rely more heavily on visual aids

It is important not to overload your audience's brains. Keep the information on each visual aid to a minimum - and give your audience time to look at and absorb this information. Remember, your audience have never seen these visual aids before. They need time to study and to understand them. Without understanding there is no communication.

Apart from photographs and drawings, some of the most useful visual aids are charts and graphs.

Audience Reaction

Remain calm and polite if you receive difficult questions during your presentation. If you receive particularly awkward questions, you can suggest that the questioners ask their questions after your presentation.

LANGUAGE

Simplicity and Clarity

If you want your audience to understand your message, your language must be simple and clear:

- use short words and short sentences
- do not use jargon, unless you know that your audience understands it
- talk about concrete facts rather than abstract ideas
- use active verbs instead of passive verbs

Active verbs are much easier to understand. They are much more powerful. Consider these two sentences, which say the same thing:

Sentence 1: Toyota sold two million cars last year.

Sentence 2: Two million cars were sold by Toyota last year.

Which is easier to understand? Which is more immediate? Which is more powerful?
Sentence 1 is active and Sentence 2 is passive.

Signposting

When you drive on the roads, you know where you are. Each road has a name. Each town has a name. And each house has a number. You can look at the signposts for directions. It is easy to navigate the roads. You cannot get lost. But when you give a presentation, how can your audience know where they are? They know because you tell them. Because you put up signposts for them, at the beginning and all along the route. This technique is called 'signposting' (or 'signalling').

During your introduction, tell your audience the structure of your presentation, for example:

"I'll start by describing the current position in Europe. Then I'll move on to some of the achievements we've made in Asia. After that I'll consider the opportunities we see for further expansion in Africa. Lastly, I'll quickly recap before concluding with some recommendations."

A member of the audience can now visualise your presentation like this:

Introduction

- welcome!
- explanation of structure (now)

Body

- Europe
- Asia
- Africa

Conclusion

- summing up
- recommendations

Throughout your presentation, put up signposts telling him which point you have reached and where you are going now. When you finish Europe and want to start Asia, you might say:

"That's all I have to say about Europe. Let's turn now to Asia."

When you have finished Africa and want to sum up, you might say:

"Well, we've looked at the three continents Europe, Asia and Africa. I'd like to sum up now."

And when you finish summing up and want to give your recommendations, you might say:

"What does all this mean for us? Well, firstly I recommend..."

Here are some useful expressions to signpost the various parts of your presentation.

Introducing the subject:

"I'd like to start by..."

"Let's begin by..."

"First of all, I'll..."

Finishing a subject:

"Well, I've told you about..."

"That's all I have to say about..."

"We've looked at..."

Starting another subject:

"Now we'll move on to..."

"Let me turn now to..."

"Next..."

Analysing a point and giving recommendations:

"Where does that lead us?"

"Let's consider this in more detail..."

"What does this mean for ABC?"

Giving examples:

"For example,..."

"A good example of this is..."

"As an illustration,..."

Dealing with questions:

"We'll be examining this point in more detail later on..."

"I'd like to deal with this question later, if I may..."

"I'll come back to this question later in my talk..."

Summarising and concluding:

"In conclusion,..."

"Right, let's sum up, shall we?"

"I'd like now to recap..."

Ordering:

"Firstly...secondly...thirdly...lastly..."

"First of all...then...next...after that...finally..."

"To start with...later...to finish up..."

THE PRESENTATION ITSELF

Most presentations are divided into 3 main parts (+ questions):

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

As a general rule in communication, repetition is valuable. In presentations, there is a golden rule about repetition:

"SAY WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO SAY, SAY IT, THEN SAY WHAT YOU HAVE JUST SAID."

In other words, use the three parts of your presentation to reinforce your message:

In the introduction, say what your message is going to be.

In the body, say your real message.

In the conclusion, say what your message was.

Introduction

Use the introduction to:

Welcome your audience:

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen"

"Good afternoon, everybody"

Introduce your subject:

"My purpose today is to introduce our new range of..."

"I am going to talk about..."

Outline your structure:

"To start with I'll describe the progress made this year. Then I'll mention some of the problems we've encountered and how we overcame them. After that I'll consider the possibilities for further growth next year. Finally, I'll summarise my presentation (before concluding with some recommendations)."

Give instructions about questions:

"Please feel free to interrupt me if you have any questions."

"I'll try to answer any of your questions after the presentation."

Body

The body is the 'real' presentation. If the introduction was well prepared and delivered, you will now be 'in control'. You will be relaxed and confident.

The body should be well structured, divided up logically, with plenty of carefully spaced visuals.

Remember these key points while delivering the body of your presentation:

- do not hurry
- be enthusiastic
- give time on visuals
- maintain eye contact
- modulate your voice
- look friendly
- keep to your structure
- use your notes
- signpost throughout
- remain polite when dealing with difficult questions

Conclusion

Use the conclusion to:

Sum up:

"In conclusion,..."

"I'd like to sum up now..."

Give recommendations:

"In conclusion, my recommendations are..."

"I would suggest / propose / recommend the following strategy."

Thank your audience:

"Thank you for your attention."

"May I thank you all for being such an attentive audience."

Invite questions:

"Are there any questions?"

"Can I answer any questions?"

Questions

You may wish to accept questions at any time during your presentation, or to keep a time for questions after your presentation. It's your decision, and you should make it clear during the introduction. Be polite with all questioners, even if they ask difficult questions. Sometimes you can reformulate a question. Or answer the question with another question. Or even ask for comment from the rest of the audience.

