

Designing Effective Presentations – Everything You Need to Know!

Designing Presentations:

Presentations are like icebergs, what you see is only a small part of the whole thing. The design process (particularly the preparation of the content and material) is crucial to a successful presentation. Below are some simple and easy steps to follow to ensure that even if you've never designed a presentation before, it can be a success!

6 Steps to Effective Presentation Design:

Ensuring that you think about these six steps will help you design an effective presentation:

1. Planning and Preparation.

- The most important part of making a really good presentation is preparation; and 'failing to prepare is preparing to fail'.
- Spend some time thinking about the material you want to cover; be sure what it is that you want to communicate.
- Idea storm things it might be possible to include.
- Rank ideas into: topics you must include, topics it would be nice to cover, and information it is worth knowing in case of questions.
- Prioritise the essential.
- Remember to think about the audience. Who will be there? What will their expectations be? What level of knowledge do they possess at the moment?

2. Context

- As well as considering the audience, the venue, the time of day and the level you can also consider the type of presentation. There tend to be two main categories for giving presentations: to persuade and to explain or inform. These will affect the overall style.
 - Persuade: Need to use enthusiasm, excitement and emotion
 - Inform/Explain: Need to be logical and use analogies/examples

3. Structure

- Once you know what you want to include in your presentation you will need to put it into a structure so that you can speak coherently and develop themes without losing your audience along the way. Most presentations can often be broken up into these recognisable parts:
 - Introductions – who you are, what the purpose of the presentation is, and an outline of the structure.
 - Main Body – the main points, presented in a logical and coherent fashion.
 - Conclusion – summary of the main points, and an emphasis on the key things to remember.
 - Questions – opportunities for audience to clarify their understanding or find out more specific details.

4. Content

In order to ensure you don't bore the audience to death or not give enough information think about the following statements when writing your content:

- Keep it clear – what exactly are you trying to say?
- Keep it focused/relevant – what are the salient facts to get across?
- Keep it as simple as possible – now is not the time to dazzle the audience you're your extensive research and complex diagrams!

5. Timing

- Rehearsing your presentation is essential. You need to think about how you are going to fit to the time limit. Finishing early is better than running over time, but don't assume that 5 minutes is long enough for a 15 minute presentation!

6. Visual Aids and Supporting Materials

Follow these tips to ensure that your visual aids and supporting materials help the audience understand your presentation, rather than impede them!

Good practice:

- Concise.
- User-friendly.
- Well-organised.
- Legible.
- Relevant.
- Blank space.

Bad practise:

- Too many words.
- Untidy layout.
- Too much detail.
- Poor format.
- Bad grammar and spelling.

As an additional note, bear in mind the need to convert statistics into charts and graphs wherever possible and put lengthy detail into a handout. Visual aids will bring your presentation to life, but don't rely on the technology to make up for a lack of content or preparation!

Further reading

If you want to look at this topic in more depth we recommend the following:

- Mandel, Steve (1993) *Effective Presentation Skills*, Kogan Page.
- Lidstone, John (1985) *Making Effective Presentations*, Gower.
- Adair, John (1989) *The Effective Communicator*, Industrial Society.
- Stanton, Nicki (1982) *The Business of Communicating*, Pan Books.
- Edwards, PN (2004) *How to Give a Talk: Changing the Culture of Academic Public Speaking*. [Online] <http://www.si.umich.edu/~pne/acadtalk.htm>
- Shephard, Kerry (2005) *Presenting at Conferences, Seminars and Meetings Chapter 1 – What Makes Presentations Good?* [Online] http://www.sagepub.co.uk/dicken/study_skills/Shephard-01.pdf