

# Speaking of Science

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## ❖ Pieces of a Presentation

1. You
2. The Audience
3. Audiovisuals (sometimes known as the “presentation”)
4. The Room
5. Time

## ❖ The Phases of a Presentation

### ➤ Planning (MONTHS to weeks in advance)

- ❑ Note the date in your calendar and back-calculate deadlines
- ❑ Invited or self-inflicted?
- ❑ Research the organization – find out the theme
- ❑ Get feedback from the organizers on your topic, especially if you are an invited speaker
- ❑ If you don't have the time to prepare – JUST SAY NO!
- ❑ What is the point of your talk, your Message Objective?
- ❑ Narrow your topic to a MAXIMUM of 3 important and relevant points
- ❑ Who will be in the audience?
  - Experts, peers, lay audience, mix
  - Politicians, decision makers, scientists, interested public
  - Cultural/ethnic diversity
  - Language barriers?
- ❑ What will be the size of the audience? (<10; 10 to 30; 30 to 50; 50 to 200; 200+)
- ❑ Plan your talk BEFORE you open PowerPoint
- ❑ Length of talk
  - The hardest -- 5 to 15
  - The most common -- 15 to 25
  - The easiest -- 25 to 45
  - The scariest -- >45

❑ **READ ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE ORGANIZERS!**

➤ Designing (months to **WEEKS** in advance)

- ❑ Write an outline
  - Title – short and memorable
  - Message Objective
  - Three supporting points (at most)
  - Final Sentence
- ❑ Write a script if you are nervous – *turn it into an outline*
- ❑ Prepare your audiovisuals
  - SIMPLIFY
  - Video clips
  - No unusual fonts (not supported) – be “font consistent”, avoid red
  - No photos behind text
  - Avoid equations unless you are teaching a technical course
  - Site lines – use upper  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the screen
  - Get rid of redundant title blocks
  - Get rid of bullet points
  - Make two versions – with and without text
  - Embed prompts and avoid pointers
  - Peer review for content and flow
- ❑ Request all AV and supporting equipment – make no assumptions
- ❑ Ask organizers:
  - Room layout and size (photo if possible)
  - Seating arrangements
  - Lighting and sound
  - Lectern and podium
  - Microphones (none, stationary, or lavalier)
  - Recordings
  - AV tech help
  - Computer system location
  - Pointers
  - Moderators and timers
  - Evaluation forms
- ❑ Request a prime spot in the program – avoid “killer spots” – Primacy and Recency
  - Before or after lunch
  - End of the day or end of the conference
  - Meal time
  - Avoid being the “middle man”
- ❑ Request abstracts from adjacent speakers
- ❑ Develop your own evaluation form if not provided by the organizer (for short courses)

➤ Practicing (weeks to **DAYS** in advance)

- ❑ Peer review for typos and clarity
- ❑ Send your concise bio –the moderator will likely read it verbatim
- ❑ Send the organizers a copy of your materials, even if they don't ask...
- ❑ Brainstorm potential questions and generate some answers
- ❑ **Memorize** the order of your visuals
- ❑ **Memorize** your THREE MAIN POINTS!
- ❑ **Memorize** your final sentence
- ❑ **Practice** out loud – to an audience if possible – PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

➤ Preparing (days to **HOURS** in advance)

- ❑ Before you arrive at the venue:
  - ❑ **STOP** working on your PowerPoint – print out a hard copy for reference
  - ❑ Make copies of your presentation on a USB, CD, carrier pigeon...
  - ❑ Sleep and hydrate
  - ❑ Wear something that is “quiet” and comfortable
  - ❑ Review the order of your slides
  - ❑ Give yourself plenty of travel time
- ❑ At the venue:
  - ❑ Find your moderator – make sure they have your bio and can pronounce your name
  - ❑ Find out timing prompts – cards, lights?
  - ❑ Get your presentation loaded and **check it on the screen**
  - ❑ Check all videos
  - ❑ Tour the room and set-up – lights, sound, computer system, timer
  - ❑ Check the remote – use your own if one is not provided...try to use your own
  - ❑ Make sure there is enough light for the audience to see your face (avoid backlighting)
  - ❑ Check the height of the lectern and microphone
  - ❑ Attend earlier sessions if possible, especially the keynote – make notes
  - ❑ Arrive early to your session
- ❑ **REVIEW THIS CHECKLIST!**

➤ Delivering

- ❑ At the lectern – glass of water, half full, no ice; cough drops; notes; watch/clock
- ❑ Audio – no name tag, no keys in your pocket, no clicking pens
- ❑ Visual – no name tag, check buttons and zippers
- ❑ Take a deep breath and pause before starting
- ❑ Start with “the hook”
- ❑ Reintroduce yourself if necessary, after the hook
- ❑ Voice
  - Words – keep them short and simple
  - Tone and volume – the verbal strobe light
  - Inflection – avoid monotone
  - Pace – slow down
  - Pauses – the dramatic effect
  - No artificial fillers – the words that steal your time to use “the pause”
  - The Black Screen – or the “visual pause”
  - If you must rely on a script – “See – Stop – Say”
  - NEVER speak while looking down
- ❑ Style – it makes you human
  - Make a connection and generate empathy – tell a story
    - ◆ Personal experience
    - ◆ Current events or local reference
  - Humor – put the audience at ease
    - ◆ Avoid sarcasm
    - ◆ Be extraordinarily PC – no religion, politics, alcohol, foul language
  - Respect your audience
- ❑ Body language – scale to the audience
  - Grotesque, truth, passion, and ecstatic planes
  - Watch your audience for immediate and unfiltered feedback
- ❑ Eye contact – if you lose eye contact, you lose a relationship
- ❑ Props – books, cups, glasses, example materials, phone calls
- ❑ Say “thank you” so the audience knows that you are done
- ❑ Questions
  - Respect the audience, give them a chance to ask questions 75:25
  - Eliminate the lectern barrier
  - **Listen**
  - Restate the question – repeat if positive, paraphrase if negative
  - Respond simply and directly
  - Say “I don’t know” – don’t bluff

➤ Evaluating

- ❑ Ask someone in the audience how you did – ask them beforehand to evaluate
- ❑ Send a follow-up e-mail with a self-evaluation
- ❑ Read the evaluations
- ❑ Ask for advice
- ❑ Make notes to yourself about how to improve
- ❑ Critically evaluate other speakers – note what you like and dislike
- ❑ Watch a video of your presentation
  - Listen first
  - Watch second
  - Listen and watch
  - Video from afar, moderate distance, and then up close

❖ **Top Ten Speaker Follies from RRNW**

10. "Microfont Master" -- use 28 point font or larger.
9. "Little Red Texter" -- check readability prior to your presentation on a big screen, not your computer screen. Many people (10% of the male population) are color blind.
8. "The SWAG" -- limit the acronyms.
7. "Speed Racer" – the speaker who has 70 slides to get through in 15 minutes. Slow down and speak clearly into the microphone.
6. "Screen Seeker" -- AVOID reading your slides – the disembodied voice.
5. "I'm Just" -- the self-deprecating individual who diminishes the value of their discipline.
4. "The X-Box Aficionado" – curb your animation urges to a distraction-free level.
3. "The Pointer" – red pointers are like Where's Waldo for the conference crowd.
2. "The Sorry Speaker" who repeatedly says "I'm really sorry about this slide"... If you must apologize, then delete the slide -- if it's in the presentation, do not apologize.
1. "The Time Bender" -- the speaker who DOES NOT FINISH ON TIME. It's just plain rude.