

Delivering an effective presentation

Preparing and delivering a lecture can be an overwhelming experience, especially for first-time lecturers. During their years as students, practitioners may have observed talented speakers who made presenting and teaching look easy, but when asked to deliver a presentation themselves, they may quickly realize that the task is not as easy as those presenters made it seem.

The responsibility to create an effective presentation is important because audience members, especially students, are ultimately responsible for learning and retaining the material even if it is delivered poorly. The presenter must strive to ensure that students understand what they are expected to know and how they need to know it, as well as how to connect it to their existing knowledge so that the information is well embedded and easily retrieved for future use. This article reviews some of the most important issues and challenges to consider when preparing and delivering a presentation.

The introduction. The introduction of the presentation should emphasize what the audience is about to learn. It should include a hook, objectives, and an overview of the presentation. One of the most common missteps when delivering a presentation is forgetting to introduce the topic. Oftentimes presenters begin their talk by only stating the title prior to covering the content. This approach is problematic for two reasons.

First, motivation theory suggests that an audience is more engaged in the presentation when the relevance of the content is specifically explained.¹ While a

presenter with content expertise may understand the relevance, a novice audience may not. Therefore, the presenter should prepare the introduction in advance of the talk and ensure that there is a review of why the content is relevant to the audience at hand.



Second, presenters who omit the introduction miss the opportunity to introduce themselves and their related expertise. Research related to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the Keirsey Temperament Sorter revealed that a majority of pharmacy students have a “guardian” preference that typically manifests in a belief that credentials are important.² Thus, presenters should establish credibility by discussing their training and experience in order to support their expertise in the subject matter. When pre-

senters state their experience related to a topic at the beginning of a talk, it helps establish their expertise in a nonarrogant way, which accommodates the guardian preference.

In addition to clearly stating why the talk is relevant and highlighting their expertise, presenters should provide a “hook” such as a story, anecdote, case, fact, or question to generate interest in the topic and grab the audience’s attention. Incorporating these two elements (relevance and expertise) into the introduction should take approximately one to two minutes.

Objectives and overview. After the talk’s relevance and the presenter’s expertise are discussed, the introduction should transition to stating the presentation’s objectives, which makes the audience aware of the intended learning outcomes. Shar-

ing the objectives with the audience is important because most presentations include a great deal of content that taxes working memory; classic research by Ebbinghaus showed that an audience rapidly forgets most of a presentation’s content within hours to days.³ Therefore, it is helpful for a presenter to emphasize what information must be remembered and how to remember it. Presenters need to adhere to three essential guidelines when writing their presentation objectives.⁴

The New Practitioners Forum column features articles that address the special professional needs of pharmacists early in their careers as they transition from students to practitioners. Authors include new practitioners or others with expertise in a topic of interest to new practitioners. AJHP readers are invited to submit topics or articles for this column to the New Practitioners Forum, c/o Jill Haug, 7272 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814 (301-664-8821 or newpractitioners@ashp.org).

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1. Each item on the list of objectives must start with a verb that is specific and measurable. Presenters can look to Bloom's taxonomy⁴ as a guide for selecting lower-level verbs that focus on facts, knowledge building, and formula-driven problem solving (e.g., state, define, list, select, identify). Objectives for presentations designed to emphasize higher-level learning such as evaluating, analyzing, and solving problems with multiple solutions should be conveyed with action-oriented verbs (e.g., contrast, develop, evaluate, generate, recommend, prioritize). The most common mistake when selecting verbs for lists of objectives is using verbs that denote concepts that cannot be measured (e.g., know, understand) instead of verbs that specify observable performance.
2. Presenters should quantify their objectives whenever possible. If, for example, a presenter wants students to identify adverse effects of a given medication, the actual number of such effects should be stated in the objective. This quantification helps students rehearse and embed the information and helps them know when they are done studying.
3. The objectives should guide and match how lecture content is delivered and assessed. If presenters use the verb "discuss," the audience should discuss the content during the presentation or on an assessment form. On occasion, "discuss" is used in error because it applies solely to the presenter; objectives should always be written in terms of the audience's role rather than the presenter's.

In addition to following these three guidelines, it is important to remember that a 60-minute presentation should target four to six objectives (three to five for a 50-minute talk) so that there is sufficient time to emphasize the vital content. This rule is based on anecdotal evidence that the typical adult attention span is approximately 10–15 minutes.⁵ Presenters can address approximately one objective per 10- to 15-minute time block. Furthermore, during the lecture the objectives should not be read verbatim but rather summarized.

To complete the introduction, presenters should provide an overview slide describing each topic that will be discussed and making the structure and

order of the talk evident to the audience. Individuals' ability to process information depends on how well they can take a large amount of information and chunk it into smaller sections, which helps increase retention and retrieval. Therefore, an overview slide that lists the presentation's topics, in order, using numbers (versus bullets) can help an audience effectively chunk the content and know what to expect. To conclude the introduction section, presenters should spend approximately 30 seconds to one minute reviewing the objectives and overview before transitioning to the content of the talk.

Presentation of content. The majority of the presentation consists of the subject matter the audience is to learn. It is important that this section focuses on what the audience needs to know and what is most vital rather than delivering an exhaustive review of the content, which may overwhelm the audience. Narrowing a topic is a difficult task because, to experts, all of the material may seem important. However, to make sure the most relevant content is covered within the allotted time, presenters should consult the objectives and reflect on what the audience likely already knows, so that new knowledge can be linked and expanded. Patient cases, primary literature, facts, statistics, and anecdotes should be incorporated into the presentation to maintain attention spans and illustrate content. Commonly encountered cases and examples can be used to help the audience understand the relevance of the content and build their knowledge base.

Transitions are important throughout the lecture and necessary to create a logical and smooth presentation. While organizing the presentation, place the overview topics onto title slides to highlight the grouping of content and signal the transition to new topic areas. For example, a presenter could use the transition statement, "Now that we have discussed the importance of adherence, let's discuss how pharmacists can get involved in promoting adherence." Without proper planning, many presenters may simply read slide titles as a transition strategy, which is a weak alternative because it interferes with storytelling. In addition, presenters

should plan how they will transition to each slide within a section, which is particularly important if slides are created at different times or assembled from different presentations. Presenters could transition to the next slide by stating, "The next important factor is . . ." Transitions are key for a smooth presentation. However, incorporation of active learning is also important throughout the lecture.

Promoting active learning. Using active-learning strategies is a great way to enhance retention. There is a growing body of research supporting the use of active learning in a presentation to promote the audience's long-term retention and future retrieval of content.⁶

One active-learning strategy includes a "think-pair-share" technique, which entails having individuals think about and answer a challenging open-ended or multiple-choice question, share their answer with a neighboring audience member, and then discuss answers with the entire audience.⁷ This activity gives the audience practice discussing their understanding and gaining feedback about their answers. Other active-learning strategies include administering formative (i.e., nongraded) in-class multiple-choice quizzes, posing questions via an audience response system (clicker),⁸ and assigning "minute papers" (i.e., requiring students to write down, in one minute, the key take-home points of the lecture and key questions about the content that remains).⁹ These active-learning strategies can be used at least one time at the beginning, the middle, or the end of the presentation to help the audience assess their grasp of the content and elicit feedback on the presentation.

For the audience to achieve the maximum active-learning benefit, it is important that the presenter design the activity to involve a majority of the audience. One way to achieve this is to allow at least 10 seconds for the audience to answer a question. Although 10 seconds may seem like a long time, waiting only 1–5 seconds for a response (as many presenters do) may not give enough time for the majority of the audience members to process the question, think of and rehearse the answer, and raise their hand to indicate their desire to respond. Waiting for learners to articulate their thoughts can in-

crease learning drastically. Another way to involve the majority of the audience is to use multiple-choice questions.¹⁰ Presenters who use open-ended questions may create a situation wherein the same one or two individuals answer all of the questions, which limits the presenter's ability to gather feedback about audience comprehension.

Question placement is another presentation-design issue that should be considered. Questions asked before the subject matter is presented (motivational questions) can pique the audience's interest and motivate them to pay attention; questions asked after information is presented (assessment questions) give the audience the opportunity to evaluate their comprehension. Both types of questions can increase retention, and inserting multiple-choice questions (or other types of questions) throughout the lecture can be an effective retention-boosting strategy.

It is also important to use appropriate nonverbal communication to encourage participation in the learning activity. Presenters should use conversational tones (as opposed to criticizing tones) to pose questions and answer student questions. Calling students by name and maintaining eye contact are other effective ways to encourage participation.

The summary. Presenters should not abruptly end a presentation without providing a summary or a conclusion. The summary should review the major points discussed in order to remind the audience what they should have learned. Providing take-home messages, reviewing objectives and clinical pearls, asking multiple-choice questions, and having the audience write a brief summary of the main points of a presentation are all useful strategies for increasing retention. After a summary is offered, presenters should leave time to answer questions. While pausing for questions should occur throughout the lecture at the end of blocks of content and objectives, it is essential that presenters at least offer to answer questions at the end of the talk, especially if they present a verbal summary and/or a summary slide that may elicit questions. If no questions are asked, the presenter can sometimes break the ice by pointing out that some members

of previous audiences were confused about a particular part of the presentation and then explaining why; this may prompt questions.

Creating effective slide presentations. Well-designed slides can supplement and augment what the presenter says and help the presenter stay organized during the presentation. To help ensure an effective slide show, presenters should adhere to the following design principles pertaining to the slide background, font usage, slide layout, and incorporation of visual aids.

Background. The slide background should avoid distracting pictures, textures, and designs. One suggestion is to use a blue background with a yellow title and white text.

Font and type size. The font should be sans serif (i.e., without "feet"), such as Arial (Monotype Imaging Holdings, Inc., Woburn, MA) or Tahoma (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA), and 24 points or larger. Presenters should use boldfaced, colored type (e.g., yellow) and underline selected text to emphasize important points.

Slide layout. Proper formatting can increase the audience's comprehension of the slide content. The slide margins should be sufficiently wide to avoid cluttered edges and maintain visual appeal. Presenters should limit the use of bullets to five to nine per slide and separate the bullets from the adjacent text (and the bulleted blocks of text from one another) with ample space; this improves the visual appearance and readability of the slide. Bulleted statements should be worded as phrases that summarize rather than duplicate the presenter's spoken words (this also helps presenters avoid reading from their slides directly). Each slide should have a unique title. For example, if more than one slide is needed in order to complete a point, instead of titling the first and second slides "Methods" and "Methods continued," respectively, consider breaking up the content so that the second and subsequent related slides have unique titles (e.g., "Participants," "Procedures").

Visual aids. Relevant pictures, graphs, and tables can greatly enhance a presentation. However, some visual devices should be avoided, such as text anima-

tions (e.g., text that suddenly appears or fades out) to avoid distracting the audience. If pictures are used, they should be large enough and of excellent quality to allow easy viewing by audience members at the back of the room. When using tables and graphs to convey a message, the presenter should remember to orient the audience to the relevant features of the data orally and use shapes such as boxes, arrows, and circles on the slides to highlight essential data elements. (On a related note, the use of audio embellishments should generally be avoided as distracting and unprofessional.)

Closing notes. Adherence to these recommendations can help both novice and seasoned presenters effectively engage an audience and convey content in a way that promotes learning. Additional presentation tips are included in the appendix.

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Appendix—Presentation do's and don'ts¹¹⁻¹³

Do . . .

- Know the audience. It is of utmost importance to understand the audience's knowledge base to deliver a presentation at the appropriate level.
- Talk to the audience and not the monitor. Avoid reading from the slides. Instead, have conversations with the audience. Eye contact not only engages the audience but also shows confidence. If you need to refer to slides, do it quickly.
- Practice the presentation out loud, preferably in front of someone who can offer feedback and ask questions. Know what you want to say before the presentation to minimize jumbling of words and thoughts and maximize clarity. Knowing the topic well and thoroughly preparing minimize anxiety. Know as much as you can about the topic to boost your confidence as the expert. Time yourself to ensure you remain in your specified time limit.
- Assert yourself as the expert. Establish credibility at the beginning of the lecture by sharing information on education, training, and experiences. Furthermore, incorporate your experiences throughout the lecture.
- Dress to impress.
- Speak slowly, concisely, and clearly, projecting to the back of the room. Pause between sentences. Remember to breathe. Take a sip of water to gain a few seconds to regather your thoughts.
- Stand up straight. Do not slouch over the podium or microphone.
- Bring a printed copy of slides to be prepared for last-minute disasters.
- Remember to smile to relax the audience.
- Start with a slide that contains the title of the talk, your name with credentials, your job title, your institutional affiliation, and the date.
- Use professional language.

Don't . . .

- Apologize to the audience if a limitation in knowledge or preparation is discovered. You should strive to portray a high level of expertise.
- Speak in a monotonous tone.
- Use unprofessional-sounding interjections (e.g., um, okay, like, y'know).
- Stare or look repeatedly at the same audience members.
- Distract the audience with body movements such as swaying side to side, rocking backward and forward, rubbing your hands, and tapping on the podium.

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