

A Professional Development Opportunity

Preparing and Delivering an Oral Presentation - Part II

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In Part I of this series, we discussed the importance of effective communication when preparing and delivering an oral presentation. In this sequel, we offer specific considerations pertaining to the five W's: *Who, What, Where, Why, and When?* A sixth point, *How?*, determines the appropriate methodology for your presentation and ultimately, its content.

Questions to Ask

Meaning?

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| * Who do I want to talk to? | (Desired Audience) |
| * Who will I actually be talking to? | (Actual Audience) |
| * What am I going to say? | (Audience "Needs") |
| * What do I want to talk about? | (Intent) |
| * Where will I be speaking? | (Location) |
| * Why do I want to talk about it? | (Purpose) |
| * When am I going to speak? | (Time of Day; Length) |
| * How am I going to say it? | (Content) |
| * How will I develop my speech? | (Structure) |

Let's address these one at a time, and contrast the approach used for an after dinner talk at the local Rotary Club with a paper delivered at a professional meeting.

* **Who do I want to talk to?** The answer will determine how you present your material - whether you focus on style or substance. The Rotary Club audience will expect you to be lively and entertaining; if you're not, they may doze off! At an NWA conference, substance will be expected over style, however, the ability to deliver a well-organized presentation will enhance your probability of success.

* **Who will I actually be talking to?** It is imperative to recognize who your audience will be to maximize the effectiveness of your talk. For example - who makes up your actual audience at a Rotary Club gathering - senior citizens, retirees or young professionals? What is

the size of your audience, and overall education level? At a professional conference, the educational background of the audience can be assumed to be similar to your own, enabling you to deliver a much more technical and scientific presentation.

* ***What do I want to talk about?*** Most likely, something related to weather! For the Rotary Club, you might wish to share a personal experience (tell a story), or push a point of view (climate change). For a conference paper, you should be sharing your unique professional knowledge or research efforts in a more technical manner.

* ***What am I going to say?*** Consider the needs of your audience? What do they want to hear? Why should they listen to you? Your audience will be asking: “Why should I care what you have to say? What’s in it for me?” The answers to these questions will determine not only the content but the delivery of your presentation.

* ***How am I going to say it?*** Will you be delivering a talk in a language easily understood by an audience with a broad background or one with technical expertise?

* ***Why do I want to talk?*** Any talk consists of a ***general purpose*** and a ***specific purpose***. In both scenarios the general purpose is likely ***to inform***, although at a Rotary Club meeting, entertainment is also possible. Your purpose may include some form of persuasion as well. A conference paper serves the specific purpose of exchanging technical information with your peers. At a Rotary Club gathering, the specific purpose might be to share similar information, but in laymen terms so that your point can be easily understood.

* ***How will I develop my speech?*** A successful talk contains a clear opening, body and conclusion. A favored technique is to present your main points and support material in groups of three to enhance audience attention and recall. You may also want to use appropriate visual aids; ones that add to the presentation rather than detract (that will be the subject of Part III in this series on effective communication). Overall, the K.I.S.S. principle should always apply - Keep It Simple and Sweet! You want people to remember what you said, so leave them with something meaningful and with impact.

* ***Where will I be speaking?*** Will you be in a classroom, auditorium, or banquet room? The location will help determine your style. It’s always a good idea to get a look at the venue ahead of time to familiarize yourself with the setting before your presentation. Take special note of the layout, particularly the presence of a stage or lectern, and the use of microphones.

* ***When will I be speaking?*** Take note of the time of day and whether a meal will be served. Be particularly cognizant of the format: will your talk follow a formal meal or are you to speak beforehand? Keep track of your time allotment and NEVER go overtime. Be sure to reserve time for questions and discussion.

Here are a number of additional points to consider to guarantee success of that presentation you worked so hard to develop:

* Try to limit how much you read directly from a speech. Keep your notes concise, utilizing bullet points if necessary.

- * Always give credit where credit is due. Don't pass off the work of others as your own.
- * Deliver a positive message, especially before the public.
- * Tell your own story. You are sharing your knowledge with others.
- * Be authoritative. That's why people are coming to hear you in the first place!

Becoming an expert speaker takes a lot of practice. The best way to develop and hone your oral communications skills as well as leadership capabilities is to join a local Toastmasters club. There you will learn fundamental speaking skills in a friendly, supportive environment.