

Five Steps To Delivering An Effective Presentation

Presenting at a medical conference or to a group of your peers can be challenging and, for some, even frightening. Too often, one struggles to prepare and deliver a presentation, while the audience struggles to maintain interest. Most presenters, even those who fail, begin with good intentions. But effective public speaking is a learned skill that can be honed by applying specific techniques. The fastest way to improve your presentation skills is to learn the five basic principles of communication:

1. Understand your audience;
2. Define your purpose;
3. Have a clear message;
4. Organize your content for optimal impact; and
5. Maintain a natural, relaxed state.

Your presentation is an opportunity to deliver a message that can motivate and inspire the audience.



The ability to connect with the audience improves if your presentation is aligned with their needs. Begin by asking yourself some simple questions: Who is my audience? What are their medical backgrounds? How much knowledge do they have about this subject? Will they be receptive or hostile to the subject matter? Answering these questions will help you tailor your presentation and heighten its relevance.

Once you have completed the audience analysis, you need to determine the purpose of the presentation. Are you seeking support for your research? Are you trying to establish your credentials, further the quest for a cure or promote a promising new drug? Presenting copious amounts of information with an ambiguous purpose may frustrate and confuse the audience. By defining the objectives, you will make it less difficult to create the presentation and easier for your audience to understand its content.

Next, state your message in a clear

and concise manner. Your presentation is an opportunity to deliver a message that can motivate and inspire the audience. Remember that you are the expert on the subject and your audience may not have the same depth of understanding. Keeping the message brief, specific and repeatable will guide audience members in their interpretation of what you are saying. Ask yourself, "If they only remember one key concept about my talk, what is it I want them to remember?" Then state that concept clearly throughout the presentation. Every major point of your talk should end with, "...and that's why it is so important that we fund this research"; or "... drug X accomplishes this goal"; or "... and this will help us provide cost-effective care."

After clarifying your message, develop a strategy for effectively delivering the content. Your format will affect the overall impression with which you leave the audience. There are five formats from which to choose when presenting medical or clinical information; make sure you choose the one that best conveys your message. They are:

1. Timing—arrange information in sequential order;
2. Climax—deliver the main points in order of escalating importance;
3. Problem/Solution—present a problem followed by a solution and its benefits;
4. Classification—focus the presentation on important items that are not delivered in any particular order; and
5. Simple/Complex—arrange information from the simplest concepts to the most complex.

Always remember that body language communicates a variety of information to the audience. The audience is not only listening to your presentation, but also is interpreting any nonverbal messages you may be sending. It is critical that you project confidence while at the same time appearing relaxed. Maintaining good eye contact, using purposeful gestures and speaking in an expressive manner will enhance your credibility and keep the audience engaged.

The most important of these skills is eye contact. Rather than scanning the audience, focus on one person at a time while relaying a full thought. Remaining focused on one person for a complete sentence creates the impression

that you are simply having a conversation with the audience rather than delivering a formal presentation.

As you prepare your next presentation for a medical conference or peer group discussion, remember that presenting is not an innate talent. Delivering a powerful and effective presentation requires learning and practicing and, finally, using these techniques successfully.

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