

Museums of Cheshire

Volunteer Training Toolkit

Confidence & Public Speaking



Co-ORDINATED BY:



TRAINING BY:



FUNDED BY:



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Presentation

Giving presentations and speaking publicly is nerve inducing but by using the right tools and techniques nervous energy can be transformed into something productive.

The goal is to make your presentations, talks or public speaking sessions extraordinary rather than ordinary, memorable instead of forgettable and enjoyable instead of tolerable. Most of all they should be effective at getting your message across.

There are 6 main steps to consider:

1. Purpose – what you want to achieve with your presentation
2. Audience – who will be receiving the presentation and what they may respond to
3. Context – the physical and intellectual space of you and your audience
4. Structure – The physical order of the presentation
5. Style – the way you present the presentation
6. Success – what you should feel after achieving all of the above

Purpose

Before beginning the presentation, or talk, it is important to think about the purpose of it. The purpose of a presentation should go beyond *informing* and evoke the wider purpose of your museum. This may include things like reaching new audiences, bringing in more visitors, enhancing permanent exhibitions or encouraging income.

As part of your presentation planning process, write down the purpose of your presentation or talk. It might be helpful to discuss this with your line manager, especially to understand how your presentation fits into your museums wider objectives and goals. After you have formalised the purpose of your presentation, underline the key words to ensure that your purpose is active and not passive.

Passing on information or informing an audience in itself is a passive aim. Instead, try to think of the active purposes attached to the purpose of providing information. For example, you might give a tour of your museum and focus on a particular artist. The act of imparting knowledge about this artist is passive but your overarching aim might be to encourage the audience to buy an annual ticket or to become a friend of the museum and attend similar talks in the future. Your talk could form part of a wider aim to, for example, raise money for the conservation of a painting for that artist. It might be useful to talk to your line manager about how your talk or presentation fits into your museums wider objectives and aims.

Audience

It is important to understand your audience so that you can tailor your presentation to their knowledge, experience, and expectations. Your line manager may be able to tell you about the audience you can expect, especially if they are a particular group such as school children or a specialist interest groups. In other instances, it might be more difficult, such as general visitors. As part of your preparation it might be helpful to write down as much information about your audience as you can. If your audience is not a pre-booked group then you can discuss your typical visitor profile with a line manager or perhaps the front of house staff.

The most important information that you need to know is: “what do they need to know in order for me to fulfil the active purpose of my presentation *and* how much do they know already”

The other information you have gathered about your audience will help you determine *how* you give your presentation.

Audience research can also form part of your presentation. You can ask some open questions at the start to increase participation and to allow you to understand how much existing knowledge your audience already has.

Some audience research questions you might find helpful to ask include:

- Age
- Socio-Economic background
- Gender
- Your relationship to them (are they museum members, general visitors, interest groups etc)
- What do they know about your museum already (are they regular or first-time visitors)
- What are they interested in? (most visitors come to museums because of a general interest, so does this interest need to be fostered to encourage repeat visits or to make them ambassadors for your museum)
- How the time of day may affect them
- Their existing knowledge

Context

It is important to consider potential barriers that may prevent you from achieving your purpose. Barriers can be both physical (such as the space allowing everyone to see and hear you) or intellectual (such as using words that are too technical, or assuming too much knowledge from your audience).

Your audience research should have flagged up any potential intellectual barriers. As you will usually conduct presentations and talks in your own museums, you should be able to either do your own venue audit or draw upon an existing one. A venue audit will allow you to be aware of any issues and address them, either by removing problems or making your audience aware of them. IT barriers can be an issue if you are using technology so ensure that you do a test run before your presentation.

In order to tackle all your potential barriers, it might be helpful to draft a table as part of your presentation preparation. This should include a problem and solution column. In some cases, you cannot change aspects of your venue, but you can ensure that you make your audience aware of any issues so they can make allowances.

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
Audience or presenter drunk	Stay sober. Make your presentation as simple and as short as possible. Negotiate an earlier slot before the audience has consumed too much warm complimentary Liebfraumilch.
Screens not visible because of ambient light	Change position of screens, pull curtains or blinds, arrange for lights to be dipped. Use a more powerful projector (the higher the number of lumens the brighter the image).
People can't hear properly	Change the layout to bring the audience closer. Use a public address system. Speak more loudly, enunciate your words more carefully and slow down.
People can't see properly	Change the layout. Block off seats where the view is obscured by fixtures and fittings. If it's a really big venue think about installing big screens and using video cameras to literally zoom in on the action.
Audience inattentive	Is it because they're distracted by physiological needs? Change the room temperature. Give them an excuse as a part of your presentation to get up and move around. They'll thank you for preventing deep vein thrombosis.
Audience too rowdy	Give them a chance to relax. Have an additional, un-scheduled break. Give people a chance to chill. Find out what the cause of the rowdiness is.
Hecklers	See my ten point plan for dealing with them in this blog post - one of many on presentation skills and a good reason to subscribe to the ACM Training blog!
Equipment failure	"What can go wrong will go wrong" was the mantra of the original crash test dummy John Stapp . It kept him alive in dozens of death-defying stunts. Equipment failure during a presentation is unlikely to be fatal but the embarrassment can feel pretty wretched so have a Plan B. In practice that means things like bringing a rolled up flipchart pad with the hand-drawn version of your slides.

Reading the audience

Preparation and research will put you in a really good position to tailor your presentation to your audience. However, it is not always possible to know who your audience will be until they arrive. It is also possible that you may misjudge your audience. Reading your audience as you are presenting is essential to ensuring that they continue to engage and be interested in your content.

Reading your audience is a way for you to gather non-verbal (and perhaps verbal) feedback in real time and tailor your presentation to ensure maximum engagement and understanding.

Before you start your presentation have a quick look at what your audience are wearing. Are they casual and comfortable or formally dressed? The answer to this question may be an indication for how formal your presentation should be. You can also gauge how comfortable your group is with one another. If they seem familiar to each other and are chatting to one another before you begin then this is a good indicator that they would react well to audience participation and a Q&A session.

As you go through your presentation, try to note the aspects which are met with approval such as nods, laughs or smiles. Signs of interest or agreement include raised eyebrows, touching the chin or mouth and slow nodding. This will let you know what your audience responds positively to and you can replicate or build on this in case energy or interest dips later in your presentation. Similarly look for part of your presentation that are received negatively or with disinterest. Typical indicators that your audience is looking disinterested include foot tapping, leaning forward, and lack of eye contact. Confused audiences often have asymmetrical body language such as tilting the head to one side or a frown. If your audience look confused you can easily simplify what you are saying by breaking down ideas and using simple language.

When reading your audience try not to focus on individuals but the group as a whole. It may be that one person is disinterested in your presentation but the rest are fully engaged and interested. You just try to look for patterns of non-verbal communication across the group as whole and don't let any single person put you off giving your presentation.

Content

Content is the most important aspect of your presentation. However, content should be prepared with your purpose, audience, and context in mind. In order to do this, go through your context and examine it closely to see if each part contains information your audience really needs in order for you to achieve your purpose.

Structure

Structure is about how presentations are ordered. Often presentations fall into a linear or chronological approach. However, more creative structures may help keep your audience interested in what you are saying and therefore make it easier for you to achieve your purpose. It is important to find 'hooks' within your content and punctuate your presentation with them. Hooks are moments that make your audience sit up and listen to you. Hooks can be created through something like a question, a shocking fact or a common interest. This will help audience stay engaged and interested.

Style

There are three main areas to consider when thinking about style:

1. Verbal – spoken word
2. Para-Verbal – the way in which words are spoken
3. Non-Verbal – everything else other than words

Verbal

The words you choose are important. It is important to look back at your audience members and think about how you may adapt your language. If they have knowledge of your topic you may be able to use more technical language. If your audience are beginners or new, then you may have to avoid using specialist language. If you are unsure, it might be helpful to start your presentation with open questions, or punctuate your talk with additional questions to ensure your audience is keeping up with you. When writing or drafting your presentation, speak the words out loud to yourself to ensure that they flow and feel natural.

Para-verbal

Tone is important when delivering presentations. A flat tone can make audiences quickly lose concentration. In order to avoid a 'boring' tone you need to have a variety. This includes variety of speed, rhythm and tempo. Pausing, for example, can be useful to demonstrate a point, or, to allow your audience to absorb information.

Non-Verbal

Non-verbal communication includes how you move your body throughout your presentation or talk. This includes the choice you make to either pace or to stay still behind a lectern. Too much pacing can be dizzying for your audience but equally staying still can be too sterile. Finding the

right balance should keep everyone engaged (including those at the back). Your physical movement should not distract from your verbal content though.

Techniques

Some techniques you might find helpful in your presentation include:

- Repetition (using sparingly)
- Tagging (highlight the key messages to your audience)
- Story telling
- Catchphrases
- Primacy and latency (position your key words at the beginning and end of sentences for maximum impact)
- Hooks
- Rule of 3s (listing things or ideas in a group of 3)

Nerves

Some ideas for conquering your nerves include:

- Recognise that you are nervous and remind yourself that it is perfectly natural
- Make a plan to help put you in control of your presentation – this will reduce your nerves
- Practise your presentation so that nothing is unknown to you
- Breathe deeply
- Speak slowly as nervousness tend to make people to speak too quickly
- Focus on success – Try not to think about ‘getting through it’ but enjoy your presentation and focus on the wider purpose of it.
- Feed off your audience. Most museum visitors come because they have an interest and are keen to learn more. They are likely to want you to succeed and will be interested in what you have to say.