
The Mathis Group's

Messenger

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Present Like a Pro

By Dr. Keith Mathis

There are many myths about public speaking. Perhaps you have heard that public speaking comes naturally to people. Public speaking requires highly educated people. Public speaking is an easy way to make a living. Public speaking doesn't require much preparation. Public speaking can be accomplished on a wing and a prayer. None of these are true!

People make many excuses for not wanting to make a presentation. Nobody will listen to me. I am not an expert. I will mess up and look silly. I have a bad memory and will lose my place. I will not be able to control my nerves. I sound stupid with my vocabulary. I have a very heavy accent and will turn people off. Have you ever heard (or used) any of these?

A powerful speaker is one who will be remembered. He/she has an understanding of the crowd as well as the topic. He is excited about what he is talking about, and he is able to pass that excitement over to his audience. He is friendly and self-assured but not cocky and egotistical. His presentation is tasteful and informational. Let's examine how he is able to be so successful.

First, let's look at what not to do. There are many mistakes made in public speaking. Speakers may dedicate little or no research to the topic and do little preparation for the presentation. They use wrong or inappropriate material. Perhaps they use untested material. They do not bother to understand their audience's demographics. They are critical during the presentation and often stray from the topic. Some speakers may even use a canned presentation from another gig!

Now let's look at what makes a great presentation. Knowing your audience is very important in preparing your presentation. Who will you be speaking to? What are their needs and attitudes? What is their educational background? What do they already know about your topic? Make the material fit your audience; adjust or customize it for impact.

Next, examine your objectives before preparing your presentation. What do you desire for the audience to learn? What do you want them to walk away with from the presentation? What is the purpose for the presentation? Remember, the objectives are your road map for the presentation. They will keep you on track.

Now you are ready to gather material. Research your topic thoroughly, and then narrow it to fit your purpose. You can do a topical search, conduct personal interviews, document observational information, and discover terms and phrases that are specific to your topic. Prepare an outline. Create supportive information for each point. Examine statistics, facts or illustrations that will fit. List all gaps, and fill them in with information, research data, and illustrations. There are many helpful resources from which you can draw: newspapers, magazines, newsletters, interviews, audio and video tapes, movies, and encyclopedias.

By preparing an outline, you will reap many benefits. You will find that it is a quick reference to where you are going. It will calm you during nervous times. It allows you to use certain phrases or quotes without memorization. Your points can be written and detailed exactly. Ideas can flow with little or no rambling.

Be conscious of the time factor; fit your presentation to what the group has designated. Close with power rather than stop abruptly or fizzle out. Go over your main points in a summary,

(continued on page 2 Present Like A Pro)

*To be a good speaker in public, you must be
a good thinker in private.*

E.C. McKenzie

Success is dependent on effort.

Sopocles (c.496-406 B.C.)

Dramatist

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(continued from page 1 *Present Like A Pro*)

ask for audience questions, or tell a story, illustration, or quote to wrap it all up.

Practice! Practice! Practice! Now that you have an outline, go over your presentation several times so that it comes naturally. You want to interact with your audience, not read to them. Stand up during your rehearsal; perhaps you can stand in front of a mirror to see what they will see. You may even want to tape your practice so that you can look for the weak spots.

Prepare yourself physically, mentally and emotionally for your presentation. Get plenty of rest the night before. Go over the presentation one last time. Dress the part. Come early to the site to set up and test all equipment. Put all failure out of your mind. Smile! You're on!



Types of Presentations

There are four basic types of presentations: informative, persuasive, entertaining, and impromptu. Informative presentations give information or tell how to do something. People want new information, and these provide new skills to be applied. Persuasive presentations persuade and call for action. They are strongest when the speaker believes what he is talking about. They focus on getting people to take action or change their thinking. They align themselves around logical reasoning and strong evidence. They identify with the audience's reactions by using emotional arguments. Entertaining presentations are social in content and normally very uplifting. Impromptu presentations take place in a moment's notice. The speaker presents without any type of preparation. Examples are introductions, award presentations, and answering questions.

Visual Aids In Presentations

There are many types of visual aids: media equipment, handouts, workbooks, charts, graphs, posters, white boards, flip charts, pictures, photographs, etc. By incorporating visual aids into your presentation, you will have more clarity. However, they must be large enough for everyone to see. They must be clear and understandable. They must not be cluttered. They must reinforce the presentation.

If using any visual aids, remember these things. Stand out of the way of the aid. Make eye contact with your audience. Ask questions. Speak when changing the visual aid. Refer to the visual aid. Turn off the projector when it isn't being used. Tie the presentation together with the aids. Don't use too many aids. The aids are to reinforce the speaker and the presentation, not be a distraction.



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