

PRESENTATIONS

DESCRIPTION

A presentation is an organized oral communication to an audience. Presentations can be enhanced with visual aids and question-answer sessions. Use this tool to make a formal announcement or to keep the community up-to-date about site activities or milestones. Presentations also can be used to prepare the community prior to significant events or decisions.

REQUIRED ACTIVITY?

No.

MAKING IT WORK

WHEN TO USE

The timing of your presentation is critical. For example, holding a briefing for the *Media* and community leaders prior to a controversial decision is far more effective than having one after the fact. Presentations are most effective when they are planned around major events or decision points and are supported with visual aids.



[See Media, Tab 25](#)

HOW TO USE

Schedule presentations at a convenient time and place. Present only two or three key messages, and anticipate problems. The following sections walk you through preparing and delivering presentations and following up afterwards.

CHOOSING A FORMAT

Presentations can take a variety of formats. For example:

- Stand-up speech at a podium;
- Presentation at a technical meeting;
- Informal session; or
- Panel discussion.

PREPARING

Once you've researched material for the presentation:

- Choose the best speaker(s). Some people are uncomfortable with speaking in front of large groups of people. Put your best public speaker behind the podium and rely on others to answer questions or provide support;
- Think about using visual aids (*e.g.*, charts, graphs, *Exhibits*, enlarged photographs);
- Anticipate and plan for questions that may be asked;
- Rehearse! Once you have thought through the purpose of the presentation and identified the key messages and audience, the best thing to do is rehearse. Some people even simulate the setting by having their peers pretend to be the audience;
- Promote your event with flyers, ads, and articles;
- Personalize the event (*e.g.*, greet people at the door; hand out an agenda listing speakers, format, time, and topics; hand out name tags; provide business cards; set up a question box; put out a sign-in sheet); and



[See Exhibits, Tab 13](#)

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- Before the presentation, ask if there are any topics that the audience wants covered, write them on a board, and address them.

DELIVERING THE PRESENTATION

No matter which presentation technique you choose, several rules of thumb apply:

- Keep the presentation brief, as in 20 minutes for delivery and five minutes for questions;
- Consider the golden rule for presentations: Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them;
- Establish a positive, knowledgeable tone. Avoid sounding defensive or condescending;
- Emphasize only the key messages (limit: three messages per presentation);
- Use hand-outs, slides, overhead transparencies, posters, maps, and photographs;
- Anticipate *Frequently Asked Questions* or other likely questions; limit time per question and ask someone from the audience to be the timekeeper; and
- Be honest if you don't know the answer to a question; take notes and follow up later.

FOLLOWING UP

- Ask the audience if this method is a good way to communicate with them. Ask for suggestions. Ask people to fill out an evaluation card. Evaluate the type of information, delivery, speakers, and venue. Include a question about how they heard about the event.
- Use the sign-in sheet. This information could be used to create or add to a *Mailing List*. You could also send out the responses to questions you were not able to answer. Also, remember that since the meeting is public, the Office of General Council has determined that sign-in sheets are not proprietary and must be released if they are requested.
- Stay until people have left. To do this, bring people to help you pack up to leave so that you can spend time after the meeting mingling with people and answering questions.
- Respond to unanswered questions as soon as possible.
- Record your own notes about your impressions of the presentation.
- Hold a de-briefing with the entire presentation team as soon as possible to review the session and make improvements. Prepare a "lessons learned" summary.

EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1: BOOKSTORE TALKS

One CIC scheduled regular talks at a bookstore, similar to those given by visiting authors. The presenter spoke about very specific site-related topics and kept the speech to about half an hour. The first ten minutes, as always, were devoted to giving a quick summary of events that had occurred at the site, the next 15 minutes covered the topic, and the last five minutes summarized the main points. After the presentation, the presenter fielded questions.

[See Frequently Asked Questions/Referrals, Tab 18](#)



[See Mailing List, Tab 23](#)



EXAMPLE 2: School Play

One region that needed to distribute bottled water to residents around a site recognized the critical importance of explaining why bottled water should be used and how to avoid using tap water. The CIC coordinated with a sixth grade teacher, and gave a presentation to school children. The students put on a play that was a hit in the community.

Tips

- Consider joining your local chapter of Toastmasters to refine your speaking style.
- Diffuse hostile questions by expressing genuine empathy before providing an answer.
- Always follow up with people whose questions you could not answer.
- Provide copies of presentation materials to the media, including speeches.
- Repeat questions to ensure that the entire audience hears them.
- Keep answers short and direct.

RELATED TOOLS/RESOURCES IN THE TOOLKIT

- [Exhibits, Tab 13](#)
- [Fact Sheets, Tab 15](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions/Referrals, Tab 18](#)
- [Mailing List, Tab 23](#)
- [Media, Tab 25](#)
- [Public Meetings, Tab 32](#)
- [Risk Communication, Tab 37](#)
- [Videos, Tabs 45](#)

ATTACHED ITEMS WITHIN THIS TOOL

- Attachment 1: Audience/Facility Checklist—Reminders for selecting and preparing a facility and scoping your audience
- Attachment 2: Public Speaking Hints—Tips for improving your voice, speech, and non-verbal behavior
- Attachment 3: Handling Audience Questions—How to respond to difficult questions
- Attachment 4: Presentation Techniques — Pros and cons for using techniques such as speeches, roundtable discussion, overheads, and panels
- Attachment 5: Visual Aids—How to best use visual aids in presentations
- Attachment 6: Sign-In Sheet

ATTACHMENT 1: AUDIENCE/FACILITY CHECKLIST

THE AUDIENCE


- Know the size of your audience. Choose a presentation format appropriate for the size of the group and type of meeting (*e.g.*, seminar, roundtable, panel discussion, or speaker).
- Pick a facility that suits your presentation style and accommodates audience size.
- Decide on content appropriate for your audience. Are the attendees going to expect technical, financial, or more general information?
- Analyze your audience to determine what type of information suits their interests. Are they teachers, salespeople, community groups, CEOs?
- Determine what level of understanding your audience already has for the subject.
- Ensure your presentation is useful by identifying the value you are adding. What reason do they have for coming to your presentation? What will the audience get from you?
- Identify and address the problems members of your audience may be facing. Is anyone angry, dissatisfied, relocated, or otherwise more effected by the release than others?
- Learn the thinking styles of your audience. Will you need to support your main points with lots of anecdotes and statistics?

FACILITY/LOGISTICS

- Visit the facility, if possible. Is it appropriate for your needs?
- Identify the individual to contact if the lights, audio, or temperature need adjustment.
- Know the names and phone numbers of emergency contacts in the area.
- Check restrooms for accessibility.
- Check parking space to accommodate the attendees.
- Send participants directions to the facility, if necessary.
- Schedule the presentation for a time when most people can attend.
- Ask if anyone needs to take a break.

LAST MINUTE REMINDERS

- Pack the presentation materials the night before you are to deliver it.
- Bring two sets of notes and overheads in case one set is lost or unusable.
- Bring extra light bulbs if you are using equipment that requires them.
- Bring enough business cards to hand out at the end of the session.
- Bring general informational handouts.
- Bring extra copies of the agenda.
- Bring colored markers.

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- Bring a converter plug.
 - Bring a pointer.
 - Bring a note pad to write down questions or remind yourself to clarify an issue during the question and answer period.
 - Bring blank transparencies in case you need to add anything at the last minute.
 - Think of everything that could go wrong, and prepare.

ATTACHMENT 2: Public Speaking Hints

Practice makes perfect. Improve your speaking by focusing on the following aspects of voice, speech, and non-verbal behavior:

VOICE

The way your voice sounds depends on factors ranging from how loud and fast you speak to the way you pronounce words.

- **Turn Up the Volume:** Speaking too softly causes your audience to strain to hear you; speaking too loudly can be distracting. Speak loud enough so that all of the people in the room can hear you. Ask someone to assist you before your audience arrives to test how loud you need to speak to reach the back of the room. Ask your audience if they can hear you.
- **Control Your Speed:** For most situations your rate of speech should fall between 120 and 150 wpm. Many people often speak faster or slower than they should because they feel nervous. If you speak too slowly, the speech may seem boring; too quickly and the speech may be difficult to follow. To check your rate of speech, count the number of words in a section of your speech. Then, keeping an eye on a second hand, deliver that section. Practice your speech with someone who has not heard it and ask them to check your rate.
- **Use Vocal Variety:** Vary your voice to make your speech more interesting. Use inflection where appropriate, such as on your key points.
- **Check Your Dialect:** Generally, people feel most comfortable listening to someone who speaks with a similar accent to their own or has a neutral accent. If you have a strong accent, the audience may not understand you. Therefore, talk slowly and periodically check with the audience. You might want to start with, “I know my Georgia accent is thick, so stop me if you can’t understand my twang.”
- **Pause:** Using pauses at the right times in your speech helps the audience. Combined with vocal variety, they are the commas, periods, and exclamation marks of the speaking world.
- **Watch How You Say It:** *Where* you place emphasis in a sentence changes the meaning of the message. For example, repeat the following statement several times varying the emphasis each time, and listen to the connotations:

“Your property values are not decreasing.”

SPEECH

Speak in a manner that is comfortable, and be confident and knowledgeable of the topic.

- **Get the Message Across:** The information may be new and overwhelming to the audience. So, convey your message concisely. Simplify complex subjects by using familiar terms and concrete language. Avoid extra words and overused words, such as “very,” “just,” or “like.”

Before: Due to the contaminated rainwater run off, and the subsequent influx of phosphates and nitrates into local aquifers, we are in the process of installing a water purification facility. Therefore, community members should purchase purified water or establish a method of water purification within their residence.

After: You should drink filtered or bottled water until the treatment pumps are installed.

Repeat Key Points: Repetition helps the audience remember your message. Review your key points at the start. Reiterate them throughout. Summarize them at the conclusion.

Speak Naturally: Relax and be yourself. Jot down key words and phrases you want to convey instead of reading an entire speech verbatim. Only read directly from notes to ensure that you repeat quotes and statistics accurately. Speaking extemporaneously from note cards allows you to move around more and frees your hands so that you can gesture effectively. This conveys that you are comfortable with the audience and the topic.

Use Your Imagination: People perceive and learn differently. If you are talking about a concept that is difficult to understand, provide examples to illustrate and clarify your topic. Perhaps use a metaphor, or other type of imagery, in place of technical jargon. For example, you could compare the structure of a landfill cap to the layers of an onion. Reframing an idea helps you reach as many people as possible.

NON-VERBAL

Actions can speak louder than words. Effective non-verbal behavior makes your audience feel comfortable, helps emphasize main points, and reinforces ideas.

Talk With Your Hands: Do not stand with your hands in your pockets. Do not hold the podium in a “death grip.” Do not keep your arms crossed. These behaviors can give bad impressions. Making occasional hand gestures gives you a more relaxed appearance, emphasizes main points, personalizes your presentation, and conveys confidence.

Stay on Your Toes: Occasionally move away from the podium. Constantly standing behind a podium can create boundaries and encourage confrontation.

Maintain Eye Contact: Good eye contact with the audience keeps them engaged. One technique suggests picking three people around the room and shifting your gaze to each throughout your presentation. This gives the appearance that you are addressing everyone in the room, while helping you keep your concentration. Look at the people in the back of the room as well.

Make a Lasting First Impression: A well-groomed appearance portrays a professional demeanor. Try to dress appropriately for the occasion. When in doubt, it is better to overdress than underdress. Also, check your appearance in a mirror right before you speak.

ATTACHMENT 3: HANDLING AUDIENCE QUESTIONS

Your audience will evaluate you most critically during question and answer periods. Your credibility may depend on how you interact with the audience. You will be evaluated on how well you think on your feet, accommodate complex questions, and know the subject.

QUESTION AND ANSWER BASICS

When it comes time to answer questions from the audience, follow these four important steps: Listen, Explore, Answer, Check. **Listen** to what the questioner is asking you. **Explore** for more information or clarification if the question is long or has many parts. **Answer** the question by being straightforward and to the point. **Check** to see if the questioner is satisfied with your answer.

Other ways to ensure that you are on course when answering questions include:

- Repeat the question. Is there a hidden meaning in what is being asked? What type of question has been posed? Is it open ended, to the point, or closed?
- If a question is vague or wandering, restate what you believe the question to be.
- Maintain eye contact with the questioner. Take a few breaths before speaking to give yourself enough time to form a concise answer.
- Avoid lengthy discussions with one individual. If necessary, offer to meet with them at the end of the question period, or have them give you a call at a convenient time.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Then provide a contact who may know the answer, offer to look into it and get back to them (and follow up), or ask the audience for their suggestions. If you redirect the person with the question to someone else, follow up to see if they were helped.

QUESTIONS DURING THE PRESENTATION

Hopefully you have asked the audience to reserve questions until the end of your presentation. Some speakers request that the audience only interrupt to seek clarification on something that was not understandable. If there is a question posed during the presentation, however, you can do a few things. First, if answering it will quickly clarify a point, answer it immediately. Or you could give a quick answer and explain that you will elaborate during the question and answer period. You also could tell them you are planning to cover that information later, and refer to the agenda and show them where you will be covering it. Finally, you could build places into your speech where you pause and ask if there are any questions about the information just presented.

When the presentation is finished, review what happened. Were there a lot of questions asked during the presentation? If so, maybe there was a section that was not fully explained or a topic that needs more detail.

CALMING STRATEGIES

- Acknowledge the questioner's intelligence ("That's a perceptive question").
- Rephrase the question in neutral terms to diffuse any hostility. You do not want to make the questioner look bad and you do not want to become defensive.
- If there is a rambling or very long question, try to pick a point you can expand on, and then get back to your original agenda.
- Turn the projector back on to bring attention back to your agenda.
- Change a slide to indicate you are moving on.
- Refer to the next page of a handout.

- Remind the audience of the agenda and where you are heading.

Tough Question Strategies

When handling a difficult question, you should try to identify the questioner's underlying objective or theme. The following examples are types of difficult questions and possible techniques to answer them effectively.

1. The **“set up.”** A long preamble precedes a question and is sometimes loaded with misinformation.

Example: “Considering the low regard that residents have for the EPA, how do you, as part of the EPA, expect people to believe that you are not selling out to the PRP?”

Solution: Do not nod your head when the question is being asked because it may be viewed as agreeing with what is being said. Wait until the question is finished, then go back and break down the preface: “Yes, it may be true that some people are suspicious of EPA’s negotiations with private companies, but in fact EPA is requiring the PRP to clean up the site.” You also may want to concede that there may be cause for people to question, but that they should look carefully at what you are doing now.

2. The **“either/or situation.”** The questioner poses two unacceptable alternatives.

Example: “Either you are misinformed, or you are protecting someone,” or “Were those irresponsible statements due to incorrect information or were they part of a deliberate attempt to mislead the public?”

Solution: You can answer the question directly: “Neither. The real issue here is . . .” and move on the points you want to make. Or you can just ignore the trap and respond the way you want.

3. **Irrelevancy.** In this situation you are called upon to answer a question in an area unrelated to your area of expertise. As a result, you may be quoted out of context.

Example: “Ms. Jones, as the RPM for the XYZ Landfill, do you think EPA should reconsider its position on dioxin?”

Solution: Reply that it is not your area of expertise, then launch into information regarding EPA’s actions at the XYZ Landfill. Direct them to the expert.

4. **The empty chair solution.** In this situation, the interviewer quotes an opponent or person with a different point of view who has criticized your view but is not present.

Example: “Dr. Ralph Smith has said that this facility is a serious health hazard,” or, “Congressman X says EPA’s handling of the cleanup has been inadequate.”

Solution: You can say, “I have not heard those remarks,” or “I believe the facts will show ...” Do NOT attack an opponent who is not present. Be willing to review the information and then comment on it.

5. **The broadside attack.** The questioner attacks you directly.

Example: “You are deliberately withholding information, aren’t you?”

Solution: Deny it immediately, if it is not true, or be candid if there is some truth in it. “We only withhold information that we consider confidential and which may adversely affect the drafting of a permit for a facility.” Point out the ways you are disseminating information, such as through meetings, fact sheets, and public availabilities.

6. **The hypothetical situation.** This technique involves the “what if” question.

Example: “What if contamination is discovered in the groundwater below the facility? Will the community be provided with alternative supplies of drinking water?”

Solution: Point out that “we cannot speculate on what we might do until all the facts are in.” However, you also should note what you are doing to ensure that you are gathering all necessary information.

7. **Inconsistency.** You may be asked about opinions or policies that have changed over time.

Example: “When the investigation of the site first began, EPA said the problem would be taken care of in less than one year. It has been three years and nothing has been done.”

Solution: Explain the reasons for the change, whether it was due to a change in policy or circumstance. For example, “When we first made that statement we were not aware of the extent of the contamination. As a result, it took us longer to study the site than expected. Our intentions have always been to keep the community well informed. We plan to complete our studies by this summer at which time we will release the information to the public.”

8. **“No comment.”** This is not the same as “I don’t know.” It can be stated a number of ways. If you do not know the answer to a question, state that you do not know the answer.

Example: “We have heard that ABC Industries, a large employer in the area, may have its site placed on the National Priorities List.”

Solution: If the answer is “no comment,” it can be done smoothly: “EPA has not yet made a decision about the extent and severity of the contamination that exists. We will be sure to inform you as soon as we have reached a decision.”

ATTACHMENT 4: PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES

Type of Presentation	Pros	Cons	Example
<p>Individual Speech Information is presented live by one person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaker can respond to questions. • If flexible and expert, speaker can tailor presentation to audience's attitude or informational needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ineffective or poorly prepared speaker can damage credibility. 	<p>Speech and Q&A session for the public regarding modifications to a proposed remedy.</p>
<p>RoundTable Discussion People representing different viewpoints discuss topic(s), aided by a facilitator.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could take the form of a "brainstorming" session. • Speakers offer different perspectives on the issues. • Participants may be able to resolve conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate may not be appropriate for all situations. • A powerful speaker can sway the outcome. • If not controlled, the insider participants may lapse into jargon, leaving audience out. • Opportunities for audience input are limited. 	<p>To present different proposals for future use of a Superfund site.</p>
<p>Panel Discussion People with special expertise (<i>i.e.</i>, toxicology, public health, regulatory) speak about a topic and then field questions from audience; also called a "Town Meeting."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information presented from experts in various fields. • Encourages audience interaction. • Can be used as a diagnostic tool to determine and address your audience's greatest concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed messages may be sent from panel participants. • Technical speakers often use arcane jargon or "talk over audience's heads." • Discussion can easily stray from the topic at hand. 	<p>To air ramifications of different cleanup options or discuss on-site risks.</p>

Type of Presentation	Pros	Cons	Example
<p>Video Presentation A pre-recorded segment is shown explaining a particular topic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience can see things at distant locations. • Videos can be widely distributed. • Videos are excellent for showing site progress. • Visual approach is very appealing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May seem impersonal. • Requires audio/visual equipment. • Equipment may not be able to serve a large audience. • Video production can be expensive. 	<p>Good for “topical” discussions such as the Superfund pipeline, presumptive remedies at particular site types, how to get a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG), etc.</p>
<p>Informal Session An individual addresses a group in a relaxed environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and flexible. • If audience is comfortable, members can provide immediate feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can accommodate only a small group. • Falls flat if facilitator is not well prepared. 	<p>This approach is perfect for discussing information with a Community Advisory Group.</p>

ATTACHMENT 5: Visual Aids

Visual aids help to state facts clearly, emphasize a point, and capture the audience's attention. The most important aspect of using visual aids is to **KEEP IT SIMPLE**. While it is tempting to dazzle your listeners, the *content* of your presentation is the key. Visual aids should supplement your speech, not distract attention. Types of visuals include flip charts, wipe boards, videos, computer shows, 35mm slides, overheads, and handouts. While each of these have unique qualities that make them appropriate for specific situations, they all must follow similar rules to remain effective.

CONVEY ONE MESSAGE PER VISUAL.

Visuals should emphasize the points you are making while you are speaking. One main idea per visual will focus your audience, keep the presentation on the track you choose, and reinforce the idea that you think is important. Short phrases that are simple and direct are more effective than long, complicated sentences. Use action headings and phrases to grab attention. For example, if you are preparing a slide on the number of Superfund sites that have begun cleanup construction in fiscal year 1997, your header could read, "Superfund Cleanup Construction rose dramatically in FY 97" rather than "Superfund Cleanup Construction begun in FY 97." There is more excitement and punch to the first header, and it conveys more information.

MAKE ALL VISUALS READABLE.

Nothing is more distracting in a presentation than the speaker putting up a slide and saying "I know you all probably cannot read this, but . . ." If your audience cannot read your slides, then there is no sense in showing them. One way to be sure your audience will be able to read your visuals is to follow the 8H rule. This states that if you can read an image from eight times its height in distance, most likely your audience also will be able to read it. For example, if you are using a flip chart with two inch lettering, and you can read it while standing 16 feet away, it should be fine. If you can read a one inch slide from eight inches away, it should be readable for your audience. If there is any doubt, before your presentation have someone stand at various distances from the visuals and tell you what they can and cannot read.

Follow the guidelines below when considering what type point size to use for three different types of visuals:

	Title	Subtitle	Text
Transparency	30-36 point	24 point	18 point
Slide	24 point	18 point	14 point
Flipchart	3 inches	2-2 ½ inches	1 ½ inches

USE A MAXIMUM OF TWO FONTS PER VISUAL.

A single font is ideal for clarity and continuity. Some speakers use one font for text and another for headers. For additional flexibility or emphasis, you can use italics, bold, and underlining. Words typed in all capital letters are difficult to read because the letters are the same shape and the eye cannot easily distinguish them.

LIMIT LINE LENGTH.

Ideally there should be no more than six words per line and six lines per visual. You should also limit each line to 40 characters.



Use four colors maximum per visual.

Colors grab the attention of the audience, and enhance retention and recall. However, do not go overboard; fewer than four colors is best. Use a single background color for continuity, or at least keep the colors in the same color family. You can change colors to emphasize points or words. Try to select the appropriate color to match the idea you are conveying. Warm colors like red, yellow, and orange convey excitement and conviction, whereas cool colors such as blue, green, and purple convey calmness and objectivity. However, red is usually synonymous with caution, problems, or retreat. Slides should have dark backgrounds with light text, while overheads should have light backgrounds with dark text.

ATTACHMENT 6: SIGN-IN SHEET

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