

Deciding the Presentation Method

There is much to consider in deciding on an appropriate presentation method.

This page assumes that you have already prepared your presentation, or at least decided on the key messages that you wish to get across to your audience, and given at least some thought to how to organise your material.

What Helps you to Decide your Presentation Method?

In making a decision about your presentation method, you have to take into account several key aspects.

These include:

- **The facilities available to you by way of visual aids, sound systems, and lights.**

Obviously you cannot use facilities that are not available. If you are told that you will need to present without a projector, you're going to need to decide on a method that works without slides.

- **The occasion.**

A formal conference of 200 people will require a very different approach from a presentation to your six-person team. And a speech at a wedding is totally different again. Consider the norms of the occasion. For example, at a wedding, you are not expected to use slides or other visual aids.

- **The audience, in terms of both size and familiarity with you, and the topic.**

If it's a small, informal event, you will be able to use a less formal method. You might, for example, choose to give your audience a one-page handout, perhaps an infographic that summarises your key points, and talk them through it. A more formal event is likely to need slides.

- **Your experience in giving presentations.**

More experienced presenters will be more familiar with their own weak points, and able to tailor their preparation and style to suit. However, few people are able to give a presentation without notes. Even the most experienced speakers will usually have at least some form of notes to jog their memory and aid their presentation.

- **Your familiarity with the topic.**

As a general rule, the more you know about it, the less you will need to prepare in detail, and the more you can simply have an outline of what you want to say, with some brief reminders.

- **Your personal preferences.**

Some people prefer to 'busk it' (or 'wing it') and make up their presentation on the day, while others prefer detailed notes and outlines. You will need to know your own abilities and decide how best to make the presentation. When you first start giving presentations you may feel more confident with more detailed notes. As you become more experienced you may find that you can deliver effectively with less.

Audience Participation

While much of your presentation method will be dictated by the event, there is one area where you have pretty much free rein: audience interaction with you and with each other.

It is perfectly feasible, even in a large conference, to get your audience talking to each other, and then feeding back to you.

In fact, this can work very well, especially in a low-energy session such as the one immediately after lunch, because it gets everyone chatting and wakes them up. It works particularly well in a room set out 'café-style', with round tables, but it can also work in a conference hall.

The key is to decide on one or two key questions on which you'd welcome audience views, or on which audience views could improve your session. These questions will depend on your session, but it's always more helpful to invite views on:

- Something that you haven't yet decided; or
- Something that the audience is going to do themselves.

For example, you might ask people to talk to their neighbour and identify one thing that they could do to put your speech into action when they return to work and/or home. You can then ask four or five people to tell you about their action points.

The Importance of Iteration

You will probably find that deciding on the presentation method means that you need to change or amend your presentation.

For example, if you want to include some audience participation, you will need to include that in your slides, otherwise, you might well forget in the heat of the moment.

Fortunately, revisiting your presentation in light of decisions about how you will present is probably a good idea anyway. It will enable you to be confident that it will work in practice.

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