

Organise the Presentation Material

Regardless of whether your presentation is going to be delivered formally, such as at work or informally, for a club or perhaps a Best Man's speech. You should always aim to give a clear, well-structured delivery. That is, you should know exactly what you want to say and the order in which you want to say it.

Having thought about and planned a good structure will also help to alleviate any nervousness you may be feeling in the build up to your talk.

1. Blue Sky Thinking (The Ideas)

Keeping your objectives in mind, write down all the points you wish to make, irrespective of order. For an introduction to Blue Sky Thinking, see our section on Brainstorming - part of our guide to problem solving.

2. Select Your Main Points

The talk/presentation should be divided into three sections:

- Introduction (beginning)
- Main Content (middle)
- Conclusion (end)
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A useful structure would be the following:

- **Tell the audience in the introduction what your subject is and how you have organised the presentation** (by stating the key elements).
- **Then tell them the details of the key elements and/or messages** (by expanding and qualifying the key points in more detail and providing supporting evidence).
- **Then tell the audience what you have just told them** (by summarising the key points, concluding with the main subject again).

Work on the main content first.

From your notes decide on the most important things that need to be said. If you have too much material, be selective.

As a guide:

- 3 key points are sufficient for a 10-15 minute presentation.
- 6 key points are sufficient for a 30 minute presentation.
- 8 key points are sufficient for a 45 minute presentation.

Arrange the key points in logical order and expand them with supporting material - discussion, argument, analysis and appeal. If you are hoping to persuade people then it is advisable to address potential objections within the presentation so that you present a reasoned, well-balanced view.

3. Decide Whether to Illustrate

Most talks benefit from personal anecdotes, real-life situations or hypothetical examples to bring them to life.

If the presentation is short and informal it is probably not necessary to use any visual aids. Use visual illustrations if anything requires expanding, clarifying or simplifying. Illustrations of any type should be relevant and fully explained. Bear in mind that a talk will last longer if visual aids are used.

PowerPoint or other presentation software is often used to support a presentation, although care needs to be taken to ensure that this technology aids the presentation and does not detract from the main essence of your talk. Do not use visual aids or PowerPoint just for the sake of it or to show off your technological prowess, there is nothing more distracting than whizzy and pointless PowerPoint animations in a presentation.

4. Introduction and Conclusion

The introduction should give a preview of what you are going to say and should gain the attention of the listeners with a statement of purpose. Make it clear whether you wish to accept questions as they arise during the presentation, thereby breaking your flow and risk being side-tracked, or will invite questions at the end.

The conclusion should repeat the main points but this time try to use different words and summarise the main point and argument. End decisively, so that no-one is in any doubt that your presentation is finished. This is also the time to ask the audience whether they have any questions.

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