10 Tips for Better Presentations and Facilitation
By Peter Garber

There is no doubt that visual aids can improve the quality of the training experience for participants. However, there is a very important training principle that you need to always keep in mind: You are still the most important visual in your training presentation. You are what the audience will spend the majority of its focus on during the training.

You can either enhance or detract from your other visual training aids. How you deliver materials will ultimately make the difference between your audience benefiting from the materials you present or not paying very much attention to what you present. The following are 10 tips for better presentations that can help you become a better presenter in the future:

1. **Look the part.** You don’t have to look like a model or movie star to play the role of a trainer, but you do need to look the part. You should dress appropriately for the audience and environment. For instance, if the training is at a resort, your attire should reflect what is appropriate for the situation. However, if you are at the corporate offices where business attire is expected, you should dress accordingly. You need to make sure that your grooming is not distracting to the audience. Obviously, you need to make sure your hair is combed or brushed, your clothing is properly worn, and so forth. By nature of the profession, trainers often come in contact with felt-tipped markers. If you find yourself handling these writing instruments, make sure you don’t put colored marks on your face that may distract the audience from your presentation.

2. **Pay attention to your nonverbal behaviors.** This is often called your body language, and it means the way you communicate to your audience in ways other than with your words. You need to ensure that your body language is consistent with your verbal message. If not, you will instantly lose credibility with your audience. For instance, if you make a statement about how important a particular point is but your body language is too casual or relaxed, the real message you may be presenting is that the point is not very important at all. Similarly, your vocal inflections also provide subtle messages that may be inconsistent with your verbal message. If you say you feel strongly about something but say it in such a way that it sounds like you don’t really care about the point, the audience will get a mixed message.

3. **Get your voice heard.** The participants need to be able to comfortably hear what you say. If you need to use a microphone in order to be clearly heard, don’t be reluctant to use one, preferably a wireless microphone that can be clipped on. If you have to use a hand-held microphone, make sure you keep it close to your mouth so that the amplification of your voice doesn’t vary. Also, before you begin the presentation, test the sound to make sure that you are coming across clearly and not too loud or soft for those near or far from the speakers.

4. **Practice “stage presence.”** The best entertainers in show business typically have the best stage presence. Stage presence is how you are seen by the audience watching you. When presenting, you should think about yourself as if you were an entertainer on stage. How you walk, where you position yourself, and how you move on this stage will all have an impact on your audience. Watch your favorite entertainers and emulate some of their stage presence techniques. Some move around, some interact more with the audience, some use certain gestures, some use props to help them keep the audience’s attention.

One thing you need to be careful of is creating distractions, such as fiddling with something in your hands, picking at yourself, constantly adjusting your clothing, and so forth, as these all create *noise in the channel* that can be very distracting.

5. **Take a lesson from the weatherman.** Watch weather forecasters on television and you will see them touch, turn, and talk as they deliver the weather forecast. They touch (or point) to the weather map, focusing their attention, and yours, on what is being displayed, they turn to the camera, and then they talk to the viewing audience. Avoid talking to your visual aids and not to your audience.
6. **Relate to the audience.** Remember what it is like to be sitting in the audience. What makes the difference between a training experience that is totally enjoyable or one that is a boring or even punishing experience? Often this difference is determined by the design and delivery of the training. The best training is a program in which the presenter really thought about what the participants would be experiencing. The presenter should have considered the main points she wants to convey to the audience, what knowledge the participants would take from the training experience, and how the audience may feel at various times during the training schedule (ready to participate early in the day or feeling sluggish after lunch, for example) and designed the program accordingly.

7. **Pay attention to the environment.** You need to make sure the room isn’t too hot or cold, too stuffy or breezy (fans, air conditioning blowing), too noisy, or too messy. Let light in from the outside if possible. Ask participants if they are comfortable with the room’s climate, noise, and so on. If an issue arises, take the time to correct any problems that you can.

8. **Be a variety show.** Again, think about your audience and what their learning experience is like. No matter how effective it is, using one presentation style or method can get tedious, particularly if the program lasts all day. Utilize as many different learning approaches as possible, such as multiple presenters, audiovisual materials, group discussions, breakout sessions, questions and answers, and more.

9. **Entertain the audience.** Don’t be afraid to be entertaining. This will make you an even better visual aid to the audience. An occasional joke or funny story helps break up the presentation and provides some comic relief. People like to hear personal stories or experiences that generally relate to the topic being presented. This makes the material seem more practical and is easier to relate to and understand.

10. **Make them wish you had talked longer.** The point is not to push the time of your presentation beyond what the subject requires or what the audience will comfortably tolerate. Many potentially excellent presentations are ruined by going on too long. If they had only been shorter, the audience would have gotten a great deal more out of the presentation. Don’t irritate your audience by over-presenting the information you have to share.

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