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How To Deliver Persuasive Presentations

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When it comes to persuasive communication, if you wander, you are lost. Too often, presentations fail to deliver results because they don't follow a clear path to a concrete call to action.

1. Know what you want

Before thinking about content, it is vital to know what outcome you want from your presentation. It is a good idea to start the planning process by writing, "When I have finished speaking, my audience will..." and finish that sentence with some specific action.

Vagueness is the enemy, so fuzzy statements like "my audience will understand more about my project" are out. Make the action tangible and compelling, and then build the content around what the audience needs to know, feel and believe about you in order to take action.

2. How to win over an audience

Remember that your goal is not to beat your audience into submission but to persuade them to take action.

- Always assume that your audience consists of good, thoughtful people who may not be as familiar with the material as you are.
- Show your understanding of both sides of the argument. If necessary, explain the risks or obstacles of your message and how they can be mitigated or overcome.
- Use logical, ethical and emotional appeals, as well as a variety of evidence to support your argument. This could include expert testimony, statistics, real-life examples or personal experiences.

3. Benefits and Obstacles

What are audience's strategic, personal and business benefits of taking action? What obstacles or barriers might prevent them from doing so?

Brainstorming the answers to these questions in advance will help to clarify how you need to bring the audience on board.

Once you have done this, choose the three most important themes — either benefits or obstacles — for this audience. Then set about finding suitable expert testimony and statistics that support each theme.

4. Build your argument

Successful rhetoric is built on a well-defined and trusted structure:

- *The Grabber*. Grab your audience's attention with an anecdote, a question, a startling statistic or a thought-provoking quotation.
- *The Message*. Follow the grabber with a one-line statement that succinctly tells the audience what your presentation is about.
- *Signposting*. Signposting lays out the skeleton of the argument for the audience and is as simple as saying, "There are three reasons why you must vote for me: knowledge, ability and passion."
- *Benefits 1-3*. Focus on benefits rather than features. At least 75% of your presentation should be dedicated to developing your three main points. Each benefit or theme should be supported with a careful selection of statistics, demonstrations, examples or personal experiences.
- *Closure*. Sum up your main points in one sentence and give your call to action. This could be a direct close such as "visit our website" or an indirect close that reminds people of the hardship they will endure if they don't take action. Really powerful speeches also reconnect with the beginning of the speech in some way. This also avoids the embarrassment of having to tell the audience that you have finished. The challenge is to have a grabber that allows an easy referral back.

5. Delivering Like a Pro

Usain Bolt is not only the fastest man in the world; he is also the fastest man in the world when 80,000 people are watching in the stadium and a billion more are watching live on TV. Public speaking is a performance. Like Bolt, you need to be able deliver well under pressure and not just under practice conditions. Having a clear structure and lots of practice are the best ways of helping to lighten the mental load.

Top tips for delivery:

- Rather than memorize the whole speech, re-create it from five elements: The first 10 words, the message, the three benefits, the closing and the last 10 words.
- Use a webcam to practice gestures as well as phrasing.
- Gesture only to emphasize points.
- Make eye contact with the audience.
- Use facial expressions to convey your feelings.

- Enunciate and vary your rate of speech.
- Don't speak too fast: it's not a race.
- Dress the part.

Finally, on the day of the presentation, if you see you are running out of time, move smoothly to your conclusion and wrap up quickly, but not before delivering that all-important call to action.

By Conor Neill, Lecturer at [IESE Business School](#). Read more of his work [here](#).