

# The Art and Science of a Successful Presentation

## An Annotated Bibliography

THIS STUDY WAS COMMISSIONED BY THE AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION AS PART OF THE POTENT PRESENTATIONS INITIATIVE, A MOVEMENT TO IMPROVE EVALUATOR PRESENTATION SKILLS. THROUGH THE REVIEW OF WHAT LITERATURE WE COULD FIND ON PUBLIC SPEAKING, WE EXTRAPOLATE LESSONS FOR EVALUATOR PRESENTATIONS.

You can probably locate a dozen popular culture books on the art and science of a successful presentation at your neighborhood bookstore. Why would we bother to investigate the topic any further? Our purpose was to seek out what the peer-reviewed literature could tell us about effective speaking. We didn't want the latest well-intentioned guru, as helpful as those authors may be. We wanted to know what research has shown.

However, as you'll see in this report, it wasn't able to show us much. We detail our methodology in the appendix but despite our best investigations, this study showed us that the research on effective public speaking tends to be limited and what is available consists largely of isolated studies. As it turns out, there may be more art in public speaking best practices than science.

But there is strength in that we were able to pull patterns from the research, which spanned many disciplines and forms of presenting, from 60-second networking speeches to lectures. While we can't generalize the knowledge in each article to all forms of presenting, we can consider them as the best advice available to us as evaluators.

So while it is still difficult to draw strong conclusions about the research on public speaking, we hope that these varied reports would guide and build on your individual strengths. We hope they inspire you to hone your presentation delivery skills.

We used 5 key themes to organize this bibliography—

1. **C**rafting a Strong Message,
2. Establishing **C**redibility,
3. Planned **I**nformality,
4. Designed **I**nteractivity, and
5. Purposeful **D**elivery.

Just think of it as the 2 **C**s and the 2 **I**s that work closely with *Purposeful Delivery*, or use the acronym **CCIID** to help you remember these 5 themes.

## 1. Crafting a Strong Message

The articles in this section show the need for a clear, concise message that can be quickly grasped and remembered by audiences. In this section, words such as “learning” and “retention” (of information) all equal a memorable message. Strong messages are memorable and persuasive.

The following 6 tools will help you craft a strong message:

1. **Identify the Message.** Think of the message as the central thought of a presentation that brings together its key ideas. A presentation structure, in which the message and its key ideas are identified, introduced, elaborated, and then summarized, is vital.
2. **Split it Up.** Learners can better grasp a message if longer presentations are divided into mini-segments. Good presentations also plan for clear transitions or breaks between segments. Punctuate these segments with breaks such as a question or two from the audience.
3. **Ruthlessly Edit.** Edit out distracting information so that your message stands out.
4. **Paint the Background.** Share details about the project context, and use them to strengthen your message.
5. **Make it Memorable.** Shorter presentations and tapping into emotions increase impact on human memory.
6. **Tell a Story.** Telling a story has been shown to make the message more persuasive.

### Identify the Message

Mayer, R.E. & Moreno, R. (2003). Nine ways to reduce cognitive overload in multimedia learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(1), 43–52. For learning to occur, a person needs to pick out important information, organize it, and connect it to existing knowledge. When the demands placed on learners exceed their capacity to organize info, they experience cognitive overload. Cognitive overload leads to poor learning outcomes. This article presents these research-based tips to decrease cognitive overload:

1. Split up the presentation into smaller units, with breaks to give learners time to mentally review the information.
2. Provide a preview of key elements needed to understand the central message.
3. Remove all unnecessary information.
4. Point out key ideas during the presentation.

REDUCE INFORMATION  
OVERLOAD. BREAK UP YOUR  
PRESENTATION INTO SEGMENTS  
WITH BREAKS OF A FEW  
SECONDS IN BETWEEN.

STRUCTURE THE PRESENTATION AND SHARE THIS MENTAL MAP WITH THE AUDIENCE.

FOR E.G., TODAY I WILL TALK ABOUT 3 APPROACHES WE USED TO INCREASE USE OF EVALUATION FINDINGS. THE FIRST STRATEGY IS...THE 2ND IS... KEEP REFERRING BACK TO THIS MAP THROUGHOUT YOUR PRESENTATION.

Movshovitz-Hadar, N. & Hazzan, O. (2004). How to present it? On the rhetoric of an outstanding lecturer. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 35(6), 813-827. This text analysis of a professional lecture identified the following best practices for a strong presentation:

1. Start with a structural overview of the talk, that is, a mental map, then fill in details, and finally, summarize.
2. Give concrete examples before introducing new terms.
3. Include all information needed to understand the concept within the presentation itself.
4. Connect details back to the speaker's original mental map to orient listeners.
5. Try to set listeners at ease.
6. Call attention to most important ideas.

### Paint the Background

Rowley-Jolivet, E. & Carter-Thomas, S. (2005). The rhetoric of conference presentation introductions: context, argument and interaction. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(1), 45-70. After studying introductions to 44 international conference presentations, these strategies were used to paint the background, with the eventual goal of persuading the audience:

1. Build rapport with listeners. Short clauses and personal pronouns were also used to convey information efficiently. In other words, presenters spoke informally—a theme that the Planned Informality section of this document further develops. The personal pronouns also helped engage the audience in the decision-making process being presented.
2. Restate the presentation topic using different words (which also shed new light on the topic) and signal key transitions.
3. Share the project's context and goal, and justify the project by laying out the rationale.

USE INFORMAL PRONOUNS TO CONVEY YOUR MESSAGE EFFICIENTLY. FOR EXAMPLE, NOW LET US LOOK AT WHETHER THIS EVALUATION MODEL FITS OUR NEEDS.

Morton, J. (2009). Genre and disciplinary competence: A case study of contextualization in an academic speech genre. *English for Specific Purposes*, 28(4), 217-229. It is important to: 1) share details that describe project contexts and 2) connect these concepts together so that they support the central message. Presenters achieved these two steps through: storytelling, imagery, metaphors, and dynamic diction (that is, lively phrases, action verbs, and first and second person). This study of academic presentations details this approach and found it also conveyed professionalism.

ILLUSTRATE CONTEXT. ADD SENSORY DETAIL, SHARE EMOTIONS, AND USE METAPHORS & ENERGETIC WORDS.

KEEP LECTURES OR INDIVIDUAL SEGMENTS CONCISE. RUTHLESSLY EDIT TO AVOID INFO OVERLOAD.

POSITION KEY IDEAS UPFRONT. LONGER LECTURES = WORSE ATTENTION AND/OR INFO RETENTION.

MAKE IT MEMORABLE: EVOKE EMOTIONS.

TO PERSUADE, TELL A STORY. THINK OF A PERSONAL INTERACTION THAT MAKES A POINT. PRESENT THE CONFLICT, SLOWLY BUILD SUSPENSE AND SHARE THE RESOLUTION ONLY AT THE END.

TELL A SUCCESS STORY. ACT OUT REACTIONS. BUT SHARING OLD MISTAKES WILL HELP OTHERS RELATE TO YOU AND LEARN MORE.

## Ruthlessly Edit

Young, M. S., Robinson, S. & Alberts, P. (2009). Students pay attention! *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 10(1), 41-55. The longer a presentation, the more likely it will be for listeners' minds to wander, according to this exploratory study. Novel presentation methods such as case-studies, which provided natural breaks within the presentation, were found to be valuable.

Risko, E. F., Anderson, N., Sarwal, A., Engelhardt, M. & Kingstone, A. (2012). Everyday attention: Variation in mind wandering and memory in a lecture. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 26, 234-242. Longer presentations were associated with mind wandering and poor retention of information. Long presentations significantly affected mind wandering, with more students (52%) reporting mind wandering in the second half of lecture. Students also scored significantly higher on material from the first half of the lecture.

## Make it Memorable

Dolcos, F., LaBar, K.S., & Cabeza, R. (2004). Interaction between the Amygdala and the Medial Temporal Lobe memory system predicts better memory for emotional events. *Neuron*, 42, 855-863. Emotionally charged events can be recalled more easily than emotionally neutral events. This study provided further support for a biological mechanism within the brain that plays a role in processing emotional events. Recall was significantly higher for pictures that evoked both pleasant and unpleasant emotions than for pictures that did not bring up emotions.

## Tell a Story

de Graaf, A. & Hustinx, L. (2011). The effect of story structure on emotion, transportation, and persuasion. *Information Design Journal*, 19(2), 142-154. A group asked to read a suspenseful story scored significantly higher on attention, emotional response, and beliefs that matched the story versus a group that read a non-suspenseful story. In other words, those who read a suspenseful story seemed to be more persuaded. Suspense was created by: 1) presenting the conflict, 2) filling in suspense-building content, and 3) revealing the outcome only at the end.

Blazkova, H. (2011). Telling tales of professional competence. *Journal of Business Communication*, 48(4), 446-463. Presenters used success stories to persuade others of their professional competence. These 60 second networking speeches most often used the following structures: 1) situation, problem, solution, evaluation; and 2) overview, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, coda. Other themes included the presenters acting out reactions and exaggerating to convey emotions.

## 2. Establishing credibility

The articles in this section point to the importance of building credibility with the audience. One way that evaluators can achieve this is by using a message that is backed by evidence. They can also build credibility by carefully thinking through opposing viewpoints and addressing them thoroughly and proactively.

PLAY "DEVIL'S ADVOCATE."  
ADDRESS CRITICS' ARGUMENTS.

Leff, M. & Goodwin, J. (2000). Dialogic figures and dialectical argument in Lincoln's rhetoric. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 3(1), 59-69. Lincoln often put himself in his critics' shoes and included their viewpoints in his speeches. He did this by acting out both sides of an issue. This allowed his audiences to discover the truth for themselves. Lincoln brought opposing views to life, rather than merely addressing them. In the end, this strategy helped Lincoln skillfully convey his own message.

BUILD CREDIBILITY:  
1. SHARE A BRIEF BIO,  
2. BACK UP STATEMENTS WITH  
FACTS AND  
3. LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

Amelia, M., Michela, C. & Giuseppe, M. (2006). Rhetorical argumentation in Italian academic discourse. *Argumentation*, 20(1), 101-124. Successful public speakers established credibility, that is, they won the audience's trust and confidence. They also used metaphors to convey their message. Finally, they used personal pronouns, which included the audience and made key messages more applicable to them. In other words, they spoke informally, a theme that is further developed in the next section, Planned Informality.

## 3. Planned Informality

This section illustrates the importance of speaking informally with listeners and building rapport. Rapport-building is especially relevant to professional conferences where, in the interests of science, the audience may be healthy skeptics (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005). Also, presenters may encounter a degree of social distance at conferences. This calls for them to first connect with their audience and then persuade them. The articles suggest that evaluators should seize opportunities to connect with their audience face to face.

The findings suggest that a little lightheartedness and informality can go a long way to strengthen presentations by opening up the audience to receive new ideas. This may have implications for certain members of an evaluator's audience who may have to navigate stressful work environments with diverse players who have conflicting interests. Such environments may lead to jaded stakeholders who are less likely to receive new ideas. Though it cannot be forced, informality and laughter can help build rapport within this challenging context.

SHARE SOMETHING ABOUT  
YOURSELF. THIS PLANNED  
INFORMALITY CAN HELP OTHERS  
LEARN.

Cayanus, J.L., Martin, M.M. & Myers, S.A. (2008). The relationship between perceived instructor self-disclosure and college student information seeking. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, 33(1), 20-27. Self-disclosure occurs



DON'T BE AFRAID OF LAUGHING AT YOURSELF. THIS IS DISARMING AND CAN HELP OTHERS RECEIVE NEW IDEAS.

PLAN TO BE SPONTANEOUS! A SMILE, WARM GREETINGS, SHARED FEELINGS & ANIMATED TALK HELP MAKE A HUMAN CONNECTION.

when presenters share something about themselves that an audience would not otherwise know. Such statements can help bring about learning. Self-disclosure that was relevant and present in large amounts correlated significantly with learners seeking information from the presenter and on their own.

Politi, P. (2009). One-sided laughter in academic presentations: a small-scale investigation. *Discourse Studies*, 11(5), 561-584. A presenter's own laughter, without the audience joining in, is known as "one-sided laughter." One-sided laughter can open up an audience. A veteran presenter's one-sided laughter helped the audience: 1) receive new ideas and 2) view him as likeable. It also defused threats to his competence.

Hood, S. & Forey, G. (2005). Introducing a conference paper: Getting interpersonal with your audience. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(4), 291-306. In this study, English-language conference presentations given to international audiences used the following strategies to connect with listeners:

1. Thoughtful introductions, which:
  - a. informally cared for interpersonal aspects: greeting, thanking, acknowledging, using self-deprecatory humor
  - b. laid out topic and context
  - c. previewed an outline of contents
2. Presenters shared their feelings or attitudes towards something (for example, the temperature in the room.) This helped to build rapport with the audience, especially when the attitude was mutual or when the speaker influenced the audience to adopt it as their own.
3. Purposeful gestures, including facial expressions and head movements, to emphasize specific words.

Such strategies may seem unplanned but are often the result of intentional presentation planning.

#### 4. Designing interactivity

The articles in this section show the importance of interactive presentations. Evaluators can make their presentations more interactive by surveying or questioning the audience. These studies suggest the value of using questions to inspire reflection, draw out responses, or seek agreement.

Campbell, J. & Mayer, R. E. (2009). Questioning as an instructional method: Does it affect learning from lectures? *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 23(6), 747-759. Questioning the audience boosts learning. Participants who were questioned surpassed the control group in learning outcomes. The group that was

USE THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE AUDIENCES AND MAXIMIZE LEARNING.

QUESTIONING YOUR AUDIENCE IS THE PRESENTER'S SWISS-ARMY KNIFE. USE THIS VERSATILE TOOL TO:

1. CONNECT & ENGAGE.
2. ASSESS NEEDS.
3. GET PEER FEEDBACK ON YOUR PRESENTATION AS YOU GO.
4. LEARN FROM OTHERS.
5. GATHER IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE.

HOW TO STAY OPEN TO FEEDBACK & SELF-REFLECT? KEEP A MINI JOURNAL. JOT DOWN OTHERS' QUESTIONS, RESPONSES, WHAT WENT WELL & WHAT YOU'LL CHANGE NEXT TIME. RE-READ LATER.

BRAINSTORM WAYS TO INFUSE YOUR PRESENTATIONS WITH INTERACTIVITY. CLOSELY OBSERVE HOW OTHERS INTERACT WITH THEIR AUDIENCE. HOW DOES THEIR AUDIENCE RESPOND?

ROLE-MODEL STRONG EVALUATION & PUBLIC SPEAKING PRACTICES.

questioned scored significantly higher in 1) recall of information and 2) applying information to slightly different scenarios.

Camiciottoli, B.C. (2008). Interaction in academic lectures vs. written text materials: The case of questions. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(7), 1216-1231. Questions used in academic lectures were divided into two groups. Questions that drew out responses and asked for agreement were placed in the audience-oriented category as the audience was expected to answer them. Content-oriented questions were answered immediately by the lecturer and were used to make a point and to inspire reflection. Lecturers used audience-oriented questions as often as they used content-oriented questions. This suggests that presenters found both types of questions equally valuable.

Di Leonardi, B. C. (2007). Tips for facilitating learning: The lecture deserves some respect. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 38(4), 154-161. The benefits and drawbacks of lectures and ways to make them more effective were reviewed, based on research and personal experiences. Questions empower active learning. Staying open to the audience, receiving peer feedback, and self-reflecting improve public speaking skills.

Nasmith, L. & Steinert, Y. (2001). The evaluation of a workshop to promote interactive lecturing. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 13(1), 43-48. This study suggests that interactivity skills can be taught – and to good effect. A highly interactive train-the-trainer workshop focused on techniques such as questioning, surveying the audience, and using breakout sessions. Six months after the workshop, about 60% of the professionals attending the workshop (versus 25% of the comparison group) said that they used 5 or more interactive lectures in their own work. Researchers observed the presenters 6 months later and found their audiences responding well to these interactive techniques.

Burbules, N. C. (2008). Tacit teaching. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(5), 666-677. In this essay, Burbules develops the idea of teaching by guiding versus overtly sharing information. He analyzes this “tacit teaching” style of a Cambridge professor. Tacit teaching uses techniques such as role modeling, questions, or describing what something “is not.”

## 5. Purposeful Delivery

These studies suggest that evaluators should pay attention to delivery techniques such as gestures, articulation, posture, voice, and talking speed. For example, once they get to know their audience, evaluators may consider varying their talking speed, depending on the content being covered. A presenter may get to know an audience better by asking for a quick show of hands in response

to a question, such as “How many of you have used this technique before?” When addressing an audience who is unfamiliar with a technique, the presenter should speak slower and use gestures to emphasize key words. When going over simpler concepts, evaluators should pick up their pace to add variety and keep everyone engaged.

Though such skills may seem to be innate, evaluators can acquire them with practice. Evaluators can practice their presentations ahead of time in front of a mirror or with friendly critics— in person or remotely.

Young, P. & Diekleman, N. (2002). Learning to lecture: Exploring the skills, strategies, and practices of new teachers in nursing education. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 41(9), 405-12. Unstructured interviews with subjects newer to professional public speaking led to the following recommendations:

1. Connect with the audience: read faces, converse, and listen to them.
2. Identify what the audience already knows so new information can be built on accordingly.
3. Engage in a cycle of ongoing self-reflection to refine presentation delivery.

Kowal, S., Sabin, E. J., Lamia, J. F., Dannevik, M. & others. (2010). Start-up rhetoric in eight speeches of Barack Obama. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 39(5), 393-409. Presentation style and delivery include planning ahead to carefully choose:

1. words- for example, an informal style was used to connect better with the audiences,
2. simple introductory phrases (like “thank you”),
3. length of phrases, and
4. how fast to speak.

A study of eight speeches given by Barack Obama found significant differences in all the above features. Obama skillfully custom-tailored his delivery. He also built bridges to his audiences in the first minute of every speech.

Jorgensen, C., Kock, C. & Rorbech, L. (1998). Rhetoric that shifts votes: an exploratory study of persuasion in issue-oriented public debates. *Political Communication*, 15(3), 283-299. Presenters using these techniques were more likely to win debates: purposeful gestures to stress words, intense gaze, varying tone of voice, energetic articulation of words, an open posture, and a focused argument that is full of substance. The study authors profiled the persuasive speaker as someone displaying these qualities.

WATCH YOUR AUDIENCE AND LISTEN TO THEM. USE THEIR REACTIONS TO FINE-TUNE YOUR DELIVERY AS YOU GO.

CUSTOM-TAILOR YOUR DELIVERY TO YOUR AUDIENCE'S NEEDS. CONSIDER HOW LONG PHRASES SHOULD BE. ALSO KEEP IN MIND HOW FAST YOU ARE SPEAKING.

DELIVER WITH PURPOSE. BE DELIBERATE IN HOW YOU USE GESTURES, GAZE, AND CHANGES IN TONE OF VOICE. INFUSE YOUR PRONUNCIATION WITH ENERGY!



## About this Study

Starting with the purpose to discover what the peer-reviewed literature had to teach us about public speaking, this study employed traditional annotated bibliography methods. We used controlled vocabulary searches, in database thesauri as well as non-controlled vocabulary searches in comprehensive academic databases, including *Academic Search Complete*, ERIC, *Communication and Mass Media Complete*. Google Scholar was also used. We spanned disciplines including Education, Communication, Mathematical Education, Psychology, Linguistics, Business, Debate, and Speech. We collected the input of AEA staff and advisors.

These search terms were either used, alone or in combination.

Search Terms		“Find Words in...”
“professional presentations”	“effectiveness”	Title only
“presentations”	“rhetoric”	Subject
“speeches”	“rhetorical analysis”	Full text
“academic lectures”	“devices”	
“lectures”	“techniques”	
“public speaking”	“evaluation”	
“narrative”	“retention”	
“storytelling”	“analysis”	
“debate”	“study”	
“instructional practices”	“factors”	

## About Us

The American Evaluation Association is an international professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of program evaluation, personnel evaluation, technology, and many other forms of evaluation. Evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness. AEA has approximately 7300 members representing all 50 states in the US as well as over 60 foreign countries.

The American Evaluation Association commissioned this study as part of the Potent Presentation initiative (p2i). p2i is designed to help AEA members improve their presentation skills on at the AEA annual conference and beyond through professional development around presentation message, design, and delivery.

This report was prepared by Priya Small under contract with the American Evaluation Association.