Strategies for Group Presentations

Managerial Psychology 15.301- Fall 2006

Dr. Karen Boiko
Writing Across the Curriculum

With assistance from Leigh Hafrey, Sloan School,
Mary Caulfield, WAC, and others

Strategies

- Preparing
- Presenting
- Pitfalls
  - In particular, using slides effectively

Preparing

- Preview your agenda and announce your main points. A successful talk is more explicit and emphatic than a written report:
  "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you've told them."

- A successful talk has a clearly marked Introduction and Conclusion, and clear transitions between sections.

- Provide cues as you move from point to point:
  "Now that I've explained our rationale, Jenna will outline our experimental design."

Preparing

- In a short talk, limit yourself to 5 or fewer major sections or key points.
- Listeners can't absorb as much as readers, so don't deluge them with details.
- Plan the content and sequence of visuals while organizing the talk, not as a separate process.
- Leave time to revise text and graphics from your notes or paper into a form better suited for an oral presentation.

Preparing

Consider your audience:

- Audiences for talks often have less specialized knowledge than readers of journal articles, so remember to define specialized terms.
- Note the relevance of your talk for your audience.
- If you sound like *you* are interested in your topic, you have a better chance of interesting your audience.

Presenting

Before your talk:

- Rehearse by yourself and with your group.
- Check out the equipment and room.
- Check, and double check, timing.

Presenting

Right before your talk:

- Immerse yourself in your talking points.
- Check equipment again.
- Don’t drink a carbonated beverage.
- Breathe!

Presenting

During your talk:

- Straighten up
- Face the audience
- Smile. Show that you are happy to be here.
- Dare to speak (relatively) slowly and loudly.
- Accept that in the end, by giving a talk, you express who you are.
  (BRICS, U. of Aarhus, Denmark)

Common pitfalls

- Forgetting that a talk, like a paper, needs a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end
- Forgetting that your audience doesn't know what *you* know about your work
- Concluding weakly
- Not timing overall talk and sections carefully
- Failing to check spelling
- Failing to anticipate questions
- Not using slides effectively
- Being mesmerized by your slides or the screen

Addressing one pitfall

A successful conclusion:

- Recaps main points;
- Reformulates key ideas rather than mechanically repeating them (“Save the best for last”);
- Concludes confidently: emphasize what worked!
- Looks to the future: Questions that remain, research that needs to be done, next steps that might be taken, implementation . . .

Principles for effective graphics (1)

- Consider media other than electronic slides—Overheads, handouts, blackboard . . .
- Limit text and simplify graphics on slides.
- Match your visual “tone” to the tone and purpose of your talk.
- Keep template and border consistent.
- Keep format horizontal (even though most screens are square).

Principles for effective graphics (2)

Inform your audience; persuade them; but don't overwhelm them:

- Figure on 45 seconds to 2 minutes per slide, i.e., about 8 slides for a 12 minute talk.
  "Most engineering students try to deal overheads like they're dealing cards at a casino. Don't. Your audience needs time to absorb a slide." (U. of Toronto)

- Try to avoid talking right when you put up a new slide—this creates information overflow for your audience.

Principles for effective graphics (3)

Simplify graphics – 1

- Avoid tables: aim for bar graphs, pie charts, simple diagrams, pictures, or lists.
- If you must use tables, limit the number of columns and rows, and clearly separate headings from results.

Principles for effective graphics (4)

<u>Simplify graphics – 2</u>

- Make letters ≥ 20 points—even in diagrams.
  "Theorem: the fonts are always too small."
  (BRICS, U. of Aarhus, Denmark)

- Use clean, simple fonts on slides; for graphics, use sans serif fonts like Lucida or Ariel.

- DON'T USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.

Principles for effective graphics (5)

Simplify graphics – 3

- Use color strategically; link it to meaning.
- Be careful with red and green (color blindness) and cultural meanings of colors.
- Avoid pale colors (esp. yellow) and “knock-out” (reverse) colors—white on blue, green on black…
- Beware distracting backgrounds, fussy templates, and distracting animation.