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Chapter 4 : Making presentations and conducting discussions

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CHAPTER 4: MAKING PRESENTATIONS AND CONDUCTING DISCUSSIONS

Planning Your Presentation: Attention, Time, Humour and Voice

Attention:

Attention wanders: You should plan to create new claims on audience attention throughout the talk. Few people can concentrate for more than fifteen minutes at a time. Experienced speakers use devices to re-engage their audience:

- use audiovisual displays, such as pictures, graphs, tables which the speaker explains (don't read text from overheads).
- list main points to be covered
- summarise at suitable points throughout
- use verbal illustrations– examples, stories or anecdotes which help the audience create an image of what you are talking about.

Time

Fidel Castro, President of Cuba, gave some speeches that lasted for nine hours. Most audiences would stage a revolution to escape listening for that long! Keep to your time limit. If it's a 50 minute lecture, don't run over; if it's an eight-minute presentation, take eight minutes.

Humour

Note what makes people laugh. This varies from culture to culture and from generation to generation. Humor is not always appropriate. Avoid jokes that are at the expense of any particular group, such as blondes or rugby players, Irishmen or Indians, priests or rabbis, in order not to give offence. Making jokes about their own or others' personal shortcomings–height, weight, or social skills–has been found detrimental to the speaker's image, making audiences regard them as less competent, less expert and less likeable.

The Voice as an Instrument

Good speakers have very expressive voices. Sometimes they are loud, sometimes soft, sometimes slow, sometimes fast; their tone varies a great deal. Use your voice like an instrument to capture and sustain attention. Together with body language and eye contact, your voice convinces the listeners that the message is addressed to each person individually; meeting needs, sharing feelings and allaying fears. The voice can be a tool of the emotions; through its intensity, pitch and pace you can allow the audience to feel the emotional impact of your words.

Conducting Discussions

Much tutorial and training work is conducted in discussion format so it is important to review discussion group formats at the beginning of a course.

Successful discussions occur when

- the topic is important to participants
- the leader knows a great deal about the topic
- the participants have read and thought about the topic

When planning a presentation involving discussion ask yourself

- What content will be covered?
- How much time will each segment take?
- Which questions will prompt discussion?
- How does the discussion relate to the topic of the lecture or students' interests?

Individual Task

Your task is to plan a discussion on the topic "Giving class presentations".

Points to consider:

1. Capture attention by means of a

- question
- film clip
- story or case description

Give a description of how you could capture attention

2. Ask questions

- Open ended and directed to whole group
- What will you do if no-one answers?

3. What happens if an answer is wrong?

- How can the student find the correct answer?
- What happens if it's partly right?

4. Keeping talk on the topic

- Summarise what we've done
- Summarise what we need to do

How will you do this—whiteboard, butcher's paper, OHP?

5. When an audience members' comment is off the point say:

- "Thanks for giving us that information Emma. Let's think about it in relation to"

6. Use the whiteboard or overhead transparency to summarise the discussion:

- Advantages of this _____
- Disadvantages of this _____

7. What to do if the discussion gets out of control or off the topic.

8. What to do if some people don't contribute to the discussion.

9. What to do if one person becomes the "class clown" and dominates the discussion with his/her negative contributions.

10. What to do if students don't do the reading and feel it's OK to talk "off the top of their heads".

11. Write a paragraph using the format on p. 69 beginning "Effective discussions"

12. Write a paragraph using the format on p. 69 arguing for or against the proposition that "Whoever asks the questions controls the discussion".

Smith, B.J., & Delahaye, B.L. (1987) *How to be an effective trainer: Skills for managers and new trainers* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.