

Psychological Aspects of Designing Effective Presentations

Background to this article

Dr. Pocklington teaches presentation training at the Technische Fachhochschule Berlin (a university of applied sciences soon to be renamed "Beuth Hochschule fuer Technik Berlin"). Students there study one of numerous possible academic programs in engineering or business. They generally have had 4-9 years of secondary-school English; however, most English courses are interspersed with foreign students who have had even less formal instruction. His observations below on this topic stem from a decade of teaching English presentation courses.

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Like so many activities in professional life, giving a presentation basically can be perceived as a means of providing a service to customers. As a presenter has certain messages that he wishes to convey to the audience, he should therefore design his presentation with the following aim in mind: All efforts made in preparation and delivery of a presentation should serve the purpose of helping the audience to recognize and comprehend these messages as easily as possible.

To understand what it takes to help the audience to easily recognize and comprehend his presentation messages, the presenter has to understand his own anxieties and expectations, and the expectations of his audience as listeners/observers, as well as the interplay of these two mindsets during the preparation of the presentation and throughout the delivery of the presentation.

I. The Presenter

One major cause of anxiety in a beginning presenter is his lack of experience in standing in front of an audience: so-called stage fright. In most cases he can basically learn to overcome any incapacitations from this anxiety by actually doing presentations regularly before live audiences. The more experience he gains, the better he should become at dealing with this usual anxiety.

In particular for a beginning presenter the anxiety factor seems to increase dramatically beyond usual proportions when the presentation is to be given in a foreign language like English. This increase in anxiety is likely to stem from a beginning presenter's lack of confidence in his own English skills, in particular when speaking somewhat freely before an audience. It is evident that he feels the constriction of having to operate somewhat spontaneously under pressure in the foreign language. It is frustrating when he cannot express his ideas freely with sophistication as he is used to doing in his native language. Consequently, many beginning presenters attribute their anxieties regarding the presentation solely to having to give the presentation in English. They believe that if they could only give

the presentation in their mother tongue, they would be no problems. It seems that unconsciously they make English a scapegoat to mask other underlying anxieties.

Perhaps the most debilitating anxiety in a beginning presenter results from his exaggerated expectation of his own performance. It seems at least in Germany that students have become victims of their schooling or culture because they share a mindset bent on *perfectionism* as the aim of all academic pursuits. As it is impossible to meet this exaggerated expectation, the presenter is condemned to failure regardless how effective the presentation may in fact be. It is wholly naïve to assume that it is possible for an activity as complex as giving a presentation to be accomplished flawlessly, and then they expect to accomplish this on their very first try in a foreign language!

There is no question that we should work hard at polishing our formulations and delivery in order to be as effective as possible; however, a perfectionist mindset places enormous pressure on the presenter who believes he cannot afford to make absolutely any mistakes, as if his life depended on this. The underlying inane, yet detrimental assumption is “If the presentation ain’t perfect, it ain’t worth it!” Accordingly, as soon as something goes wrong in the presentation (and it most certainly will!), then the presenter erroneously assumes that this flaw in the presentation – no matter how innocuous – is fatal, that the presentation is now a complete failure. Such an overdrawn conclusion is likely to produce the greatest anxiety of all, even in the most skilled of presenters.

It is not just a question of how debilitating anxieties arising from a mindset of perfectionism can be for the presenter; they more adversely distract the presenter from the work at hand: Getting his messages across to the audience. What can we do as trainers to help our students overcome this debilitating mindset? Aside from teaching our students some stress-relief techniques¹, students have to learn to approach a presentation with more realistic expectations. This requires a paradigm change from a mind set of *perfectionism* to one which can be called *professionalism*. A professional also works hard at preparing and practicing his presentation to achieve the best possible result under the given circumstances. However, he recognizes that regardless how well he has prepared his presentation some things will go awry. As the professional realistically expects this to happen, he prepares to deal with these likely events. He also recognizes from his own experience as an audience member that a few flaws in delivery of a presentation when handled with adept composure do not lead *automatically* to catastrophe, on the contrary they earn the respect of the audience.

This change in mindset ultimately means a change in the focus of the presenter’s attention away from his own anxieties, in particular his anxiety regarding the audience’s judgment of his performance. With a professional mindset his focus is directed towards carrying out the task at hand of keeping the presentation on track and communicating his messages to the audience regardless of what they think. He sees himself as the ultimate service provider in serving his audience well.

Clearly, the beginning presenter requires a lot of advisory and emotional support in meeting the demands of designing an effective presentation in a foreign language. On the one hand, he requires effective coaching from someone who is sympathetic to the problems he faces, who supports him with constructive feedback and advice and

who encourages him to believe in his abilities to manage the daunting situation well. On the other hand, it is optimal to have students work together in supportive teams even when giving individual presentations. Students are to be encouraged to trust their own observations as audience members and then to advise and coach each other during the practice stage of giving presentations whether in or outside the classroom. As a presenter is inclined to have tunnel vision when in the throes of delivering his presentation, it helps to have a team of observing coaches to point out where problems are evident and require his attention. Moreover, this additional perspective of being a supportive audience member significantly helps the beginning presenter in preparing and delivering his own presentation.

II. The Audience

The audience attends presentations with certain expectations of the presenter, one of which is that the presenter genuinely attempts to establish a relationship of communication with them. Another expectation is that he establishes an aura of professionalism through the manner in which he conducts himself during the presentation.

When a presentation begins, the audience affords the presenter a brief window of opportunity to establish a relationship of communication with them. If the audience senses that the presenter is not really talking *to* them, rather *at* them, by reading off a written script from notes or from laptop transparencies or by reciting a memorized script, then the audience instinctively recognizes that the presentation is not a live act of communication, rather a canned performance. The audience recognizes that the presenter is not communicating with them in the true sense of the word. This unnatural form of communication is difficult to follow because the presenter typically fails to make extensive eye contact with the audience; moreover, he fails to employ in his voice supportive acoustical and emotive expression.

There are numerous tell-tale signs when the presenter is not formulating his ideas freely when communicating with his audience: He generally avoids looking at the audience while searching for terms and formulations in his head, and his voice sounds monotonous or unnatural because the presenter hardly ever completes sentences with a falling intonation pattern. This peculiar intonation pattern is a fairly clear indication that the presenter is more concerned about not forgetting what to say next (panic-stricken by the thought that a blockage may befall him) than about focusing on communicating the message of what he is presently formulating for the audience. Any indication that the presenter is not really communicating to the audience is a real turnoff for them; they prefer to go into hibernation than strenuously try to work out what the presenter's messages could be that he is not communicating effectively.

The solution to this dilemma lies in weaning presenters off a script-based presentation and adopting in its place a string of key-word phrases that form the text of the transparencies. Based on this information the presenter can concentrate on delivering the messages signaled in the key-word phrases on the present transparency. In this manner of communicating to the audience there is no need to recall a memorized script. Rather, the presenter can focus completely on each key-word phrase as it appears in the course of the presentation without worrying about possibly forgetting what still lies before him. When the present message prompted by

the present key-work phrase is completed, then the presenter can simply move on to the next key-word phrase waiting for him on the present/next transparency on the laptop. In this manner with some practice most presenters can speak freely with effective vocal expression in communicating their messages to the audience. Giving a presentation based on knowing one's messages instead of reading/memorizing a script not only positively induces natural falling intonation patterns but also encourages the employment of gestures and expression of natural interest and emotion. The clue is to focus on communicating with the audience and not on providing a prepared text as perfectly as possible.

Another common indicator that the presenter is not opening up the channels of communication is the hectic pace at which he speaks. It seems for fear of forgetting the next sentence of a memorized script the presenter feels driven to spit out sentences as fast as they can be produced. Such a breakneck pace of speaking not only makes it tough on the listening audience to grasp the meaning of what is being expressed, but it places undue pressure on the presenter himself. This form of behavior is bound to provoke slips of the tongue, mispronunciations, awkward formulations, loss of one's train of thought or even a complete blockage. The presenter is primarily concerned with achieving 100% recall (his underlying measure of success) before any of the memorized script slips his mind. He does not grasp that total recall is not the main criteria by which to measure the success of his presentation. Rather his focus has to be placed on really communicating to his audience.

The presenter needs to pace his formulations, in particular at moments when important messages are being conveyed (e.g. one's name, the title of the presentation, key messages of the presentation, transitions, the highlights of the summary) by speaking more slowly and enunciated to indicate to the audience that something significant is presently being communicated. Slight pauses between sections of information allow the audience to digest the messages contained in the section just presented. The audience cannot possibly handle any more new information if it is not allowed to grasp what has just been presented. Without strategic pauses, the presentation becomes an incomprehensible blur. Moreover, long pauses can build up dramatic expectation regarding the information to follow. This can be particularly effective in preparing the audience for the messages of the summary: the climax of the presentation when the most important messages of each section are formulated.

The presenter must bear in mind that the window of opportunity for establishing a relationship of communication is brief. If by the end of the introduction the presenter has not succeeded in convincing the audience that this presentation is a live act of real communication, the audience gives up on the presenter. Their thoughts wander off and they check their watches wondering when the presentation will end.

Beyond expecting the presenter to establish a relationship of communication with them, the audience wishes the presenter to radiate an aura of professionalism and credibility. How can the presenter hope to earn the respect of the audience to gain the possibility to influence their opinions and behavior when he himself exercises little control over his own eyes, voice and pace of communication? Only when the presenter demonstrates expertise in these regards can he earn the respect of his audience. Only then are they willing to grant credibility to the messages the presenter

is attempting to deliver to them. The audience measures professionalism in great part by the composure and sovereignty with which the presentation is delivered and problems that arise in the delivery are overcome.

Moreover, the audience wishes to be served well by a presenter who anticipates and meets their needs throughout the presentation. With a professional mindset the presenter's focus is turned to employing the channels of communication effectively to make the presentation as listener friendly as possible: Making it easy for the audience to grasp the messages of the presentation becomes the overriding aim of all of the presenter's efforts.

III. The Delivery

The following section provides personal advice directed at the beginning presenter regarding the designing/delivering of effective presentations as they relate to the various stages of a presentation. The bulleted style of expression employed below highlights the key points to be made regarding the interplay of the psychology of the audience and the presenter.

0. Pre-presentation Advice

Know your audience: Try to determine who exactly you will be addressing with your presentation. What are the demographics of your audience: their professional/cultural background, age and gender? This should help you understand better what you can assume they know already about your topic and, beyond this, what they would like to know from you about your topic. This information should help you be able to prepare the development and delivery of your messages. It will also help you anticipate likely questions. Knowing your audience will provide you better understanding in determining the focus of your presentation, help you adjust your expectations and dispel exaggerated anxieties.

Attitude: Think positively.

- Know that your presentation can never be perfect...and fortunately it does not have to be in order for it to be very good. Rather you should simply focus on communicating your messages effectively: When things go wrong (and they will), keep cool knowing you can manage your way through any problems.
- Do not judge yourself or your performance (that is the business of the audience); rather stay focused on conveying your messages to the audience.

Control your nerves: Look at your audience with a hearty smile and wait till they give you their attention before starting. This behavior raises suspense and demonstrates your control.

- Pace yourself while speaking – (slow down!) There is no hectic. This demonstrates control over your nerves. Not only will the audience be able to follow you better, you will gain their respect by serving their listening needs well.
- Take brief breaks between each of the stages of a presentation (i.e. the numbered sub sections below). This helps the audience comprehend your messages better and gives you the opportunity to collect your thoughts for the next sub section.
- Use every reasonable opportunity to stretch out your introduction in order to have enough time to develop a relationship with the audience.

Eye and voice control: Stay focused on communicating to your audience.

- Look at the audience! Do not look out of the window, at the floor/ceiling, the computer monitor or the projection wall except when clicking to the next transparency.
- Get your voice to come down at the end of sentences (otherwise the audience will recognize that you are delivering a memorized text to them). This effective behavior will convey the message to them that you are confident and in control.
- Get your emotions involved – your voice has to reflect your interest in the topic (and not your nervousness in this situation) as well as your appreciation of being able to speak to this audience. Even if your English were perfect, nobody will buy into your messages if you sound disinterested in what you are saying.

I. Introduction

The introduction is crucial because it is your window of opportunity to establish a relationship with the audience. To be successful you must practice it very well to achieve nearly 100% eye contact together with effective usage of your voice and pacing.

The start

1. Welcome the audience – Smile, and with your voice express genuine appreciation to the audience for attending. Use at least two sentences, e.g. “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming to my presentation today.” Pause briefly before going on.
2. Introduce yourself – give your name slowly with enunciation in order to convey the message that you as the presenter are important and that you believe in yourself – your name is not simply just another piece of information. Add where you are from, where/what you are studying, your field of specialization and any work experience relevant to your topic.
Pause.

Main subject

3. Introduce the topic of the presentation – express the title slowly with enunciation and be sure that you bring your voice down (otherwise you yourself seem to be treating the topic as unimportant).
 - The topic should be explained briefly if it is likely that there are at least a few in the audience who do not know exactly what you are talking about (e.g. a new product or unfamiliar company). Some members of the audience will otherwise be frustrated if they have to wait until the body of the presentation to determine precisely what the topic is. They may simply drift off in thought.
 - If possible, give the audience the reason(s) why you wish to talk to them about this topic (your connection to the topic or special interest in it) and how the audience can benefit by listening to your presentation. As the term “purpose” sounds too technical in a presentation; express your intentions for the presentation in more familiar terms: “I wish to speak to you about this topic because...” instead of “The purpose of my presentation is...”
 - Introduce the outline of the presentation before showing it by saying how many parts it breaks down into (do not stand there with outstretched arm prepared to click immediately when your announcement is over) – now take your time to click for the next transparency – finally wait (always give the audience a few seconds to look at the next transparency before you begin to speak). Note: Before moving on to any transparency, bear in mind the following guiding mantra: Announce, click and wait!

4. Outline the structure of the presentation – the items listed here should be very brief in length (no more than a line) and numbered (generally three/four listed items at most for ten minutes of presentation). No transparency page should take the audience more than say five to ten seconds to read. Otherwise you will have to wait unbearably long for the audience to finish reading the page; or you will start talking when they have not finished reading, frustrating them considerably.
 - Do not show sub sections in the outline (they should be mentioned however) and do not show or discuss the fact that there will be an introduction or a summary section (technically they do not belong to the body of the presentation and they are taken for granted as the framework of presentations).
 - Each item should be numbered and capitalized as it should correspond with what appears as the heading of the later sections of the presentation below.² Since numbering provides the audience important orientation in the body of the presentation, most transparencies in the body should have numbered headings.
 - Do not simply read the items off from the transparency – this should never happen anyway with any transparency. Each item should be explained briefly with at least one sentence, i.e. the information you provide must go beyond what the audience can already figure out for themselves based on what you show them on the transparency. You must contribute new information beyond what the audience can see or surmise from what they see in your outline because they expect to hear more from you.
 - Pause.

Services for the audience

Although the following information is not absolutely necessary for the success of a presentation, providing it affords you more opportunity to build your relationship with the audience, and the audience will feel well served by you.

5. Duration – Announce how long your presentation will take without employing the term “duration” as it sounds too technical in a presentation.
6. Questions – Do not tell the audience what to do (*Please do not ask questions...*, *Please ask them at the end...*), rather inform them when they have the opportunity to ask their questions. *“I will be happy to address your questions during/after the presentation.”* The audience prefers not to be commanded, even if the command is accompanied with “please”. Moreover, the larger the audience and the more formal the occasion, the more likely you will wish to deal with questions after instead of during your presentation.
7. Handouts – Only announce handouts if there are some, otherwise simply do not mention them. The announcement of there being no handouts throws a wet blanket on an otherwise perfectly good start to your presentation. If there are handouts, be aware that there are two basic types:
 - 1) The first type provided to the audience at the beginning of the presentation looks much like the transparencies of the presentation, i.e. the handout is merely a list of bulleted key-word ideas on one page. The purpose of the handout is to pre-structure the presentation and provide lots of space between the listed items for the audience to take notes. In this format the handout avoids the danger of the audience remaining focused on the handout because it only takes up to half a minute to browse through it.
 - 2) The second type of handout provided to the audience at the end of the presentation is written in detail with full sentences because it has to explain

itself. A mere skeleton outline would be useless without someone to explain it. By contrast, if the detailed type of handout were provided during the presentation, it would distract the audience from paying attention to you. Also when many people in the audience turn the pages of the handout, a lot of noise is generated making it difficult for the rest of the audience to follow your presentation.

II. Body

Supportive content

1. Starting the body – First make a transition, usually employing the term “now”: *Now let us begin with the first topic concerning...* This is a form of signposting signaling the start of the body for the audience’s orientation.
2. Introduce a supportive topic, etc. – In a presentation beyond 15 minutes it is important to treat each supporting topic as a mini-presentation in itself: There is an introduction with outline – body – conclusion. You need to explicitly announce the structure of each section to the audience like you do for the presentation itself. The audience needs such structural support particularly when more than five minutes are devoted to a section. However, providing such structural information in brief presentations (say around 10 minutes) would take up too much time compared to the time spent on the actual content of each section.
 - Providing good visuals is important to a presentation because this is the strength that presentations have over mere speeches or lectures.
 - Moreover, it is important to provide good examples making it easier for the audience to realize what you mean in abstraction. Examples strengthen your arguments with substance.
 - Employ numbering at the top of each transparency as presented in the outline. Also employ capitalization to distinguish different levels of importance: 1) basically all important words are capitalized for headings/subheadings at the top, 2) only the first word of a bulleted line is capitalized to indicate the important points, 3) no capitalization employed at the lowest level of importance indicates minor points (introduced with indented bulleting). Examples are provided in the footnote below.²

Rhetorical aids

3. Asking rhetorical questions – These questions prepare the audience to receive the information you are about to provide them with. As such questions encourage the audience to think along with you, wait a few seconds after asking them: Let anticipation build before providing your answer.
4. Referring to what you will say / have already said – These references to other sections of the presentation provide the audience assistance in understanding how the presentation sections work together.
5. Making transitions – This is the mortar that holds the sections together. As the audience needs assistance in recognizing the organization of the presentation, transitions play a critical role in making the structure clear.
 - If the audience misses a transition, they can become disoriented. Consequently, it is advisable to employ two-part transitions: Not only should you announce that you are moving on to a new section, but beforehand indicate that you are completing the present one. Slow down your tempo providing transitions with deliberation and 100% eye contact. Otherwise the

transition goes by so quickly that some in the audience may well miss this signposting of topic change.

- Do not be vague about the topic covered / to be covered: "That brings us to the end of *this topic*; now let's move on to our *next topic*." Be specific which topic it is that you have just covered / will cover: "That brings us to the end of this topic *concerning the history of IBM*; now we will move on to our next topic which *deals with IBM's broad range of mainframe computers*." Specific information provides the audience much better orientation because they need continual reminding of structural organization.

Emergency phrases

6. Reformulating a botched sentence / Bringing in forgotten points –Realize that it is perfectly normal that due to nervousness your brain will sometimes start sentences that it cannot sensibly complete, or it forgets points that you wished to make. What's new? When this happens – and it will – be prepared to deal with such situations! Do not panic or admit that something has gone wrong, rather put everything back on track by demonstrating that you are a person who is completely in control of such matters with emergency phrases like "Let me reformulate that for you" or "Let me add an important point here".

III. Conclusion

Basic Messages

1. Signaling the conclusion – This is a special transition which requires three parts: 1) Rounding off the last supportive section, 2) announcing the *conclusion* of the presentation (announcing the *end* at this point can be misleading as many will think the presentation is actually over and move on with their thoughts and wish to pack and leave), then 3) announcing the summary (i.e. the initial section of the conclusion) before leisurely clicking to move on to the summary transparency and waiting a few seconds before speaking. There is good reason for such an extensive transition: You are preparing the audience for your most important activity: Reviewing the main messages of your presentation comprehensively and enunciating their significance. By making the audience wait, you build up suspense to indicate distinctively to the audience that the most important section of your presentation is about to start.
2. Summarizing/Reviewing all supportive sections – The summary section is a critical one because it is your opportunity to convey all of your main messages to the audience in a *tour de force*.
 - Therefore, you should practice this section very well with 100% eye contact and with a voice that expresses interest and whose intonation comes down at the end of sentences.
 - The "Summary" transparency can take on three possible forms: 1) it is a blank page except for the "Summary" heading, 2) it is a copy of the Outline transparency except the old heading is replaced by "Summary", or 3) the text of this page under the "Summary" heading appears as bulleted key-words, basically covering the main messages of all of the main sections of the presentation.
 - Take for example a presentation on a particular company which is divided into three parts: its history, its products and its services. In this case typically students may say "First of all, I talked about the history of *Heidelberger Druckmaschinen*, then its products and services." Note: A summary is not an outline (i.e. a listing of topics); rather it is a review of the main messages of each section.
 - Instead of starting off with the phrase "I talked about..." which merely introduces an outline and dilutes the power of your messages (losing all of the suspense that

you built up with the three-part transition), go straight to your messages, e.g. [message regarding the history of the company =] “*Heidelberger Druckmaschinen*, which began as a family-run operation, has become one of the largest and most successful printing-machine manufacturers in the world.”

- Generally there should be a minimum of one sentence of message(s) per main section of the presentation. Otherwise it could be asked why this information constitutes a main section at all if in the end its message(s) is (/are) not worthy of mentioning in the summary.

- Some section of the body, usually the last one, is often the most important one, i.e. it usually provides the most messages to be reviewed in the summary.

3. Post-summary: Drawing conclusions, looking to the future, making a closing remark,... – You cannot simply end a presentation with the summary: It feels too cold and sober thereby sending the wrong signal to the audience like “Boy, am I happy to get out of here now.” The presentation requires a natural rounding off. This can be accomplished in a number of ways: drawing conclusions, making recommendations, requesting the audience to take action, looking to the future, making a final remark/observation, providing a relevant quotation. The post-summary provides a feeling of conclusion to the presentation.
4. Signaling the presentation is over – If you do not explicitly announce that you are now at the end of the presentation, your ensuing invitation for questions seems to come out of the clear blue sky, taking the audience by surprise.

Dealing with questions

5. Inviting questions – No commands (e.g. *Please ask your questions now.*) or informal usage (e.g. *(Got) Any questions?*). You are well advised to anticipate in advance the kinds of questions that may be posed and consider your replies.

Repeating/Acknowledging questions – The repeating of questions provides a service to the audience, a part of which may not have heard/understood them. Thanking someone for their question is courteous and enhances his self-esteem. These tactics also provide you some time to reflect on the question.

Clarifying questions / Avoiding giving answers – If questions are ambiguous, vague or not to the point, it saves time and avoids frustration if you first clarify what exactly what is meant. If you have no answer, you can ask the audience or the person who posed the question if they have an answer. Sometimes you may not wish to divulge information and have to acknowledge that you are not authorized to answer the question.

Checking if answers are satisfactory / Inviting more questions – These activities are courteous and make a good impression.

Final formalities

6. Providing contact information – If contact information is provided on your last transparency, you do not need to read this off to the audience. Keep the contact information simple (at best perhaps only one telephone number or email address – if you should wish to provide more information it can be provided in a handout). As it is obvious that for example an email address is a form of contact information, “Contact information” or “For further information” need not be written on the transparency.
7. Mentioning handouts – If there are handouts, do not forget to mention them at this point. Obviously if there are no handouts, do not announce this fact.
8. Thanking the audience - “Have a nice day!” should be said with a genuine smile and spirit and not merely factually or apathetically. If you employ the last

transparency to express your appreciation to the audience for attending, be sure to thank them yourself before showing the transparency (wait a few seconds before clicking). Remember that you, not the transparencies, should be the source of new information.

Summary

For presentations to be effectively designed and delivered requires that the presenter has a good understanding of what he needs to be doing to meet two fundamental expectations of the audience: They want a relationship with the presenter who really communicates with them in a live act, and they want the presenter to conduct himself in a professional manner. He has to deal with his own anxieties and not become a slave to them. In particular the beginning presenter must overcome exaggerated expectations of his own performance due to a mindset that demands perfectionism as its benchmark for success. Rather through preparation and practice the presenter can reduce the number of problems that naturally crop up and effectively deal with those remaining problems that nevertheless are bound to occur.

Once the presenter gains control of his anxieties, he is able to turn his attention to the primary aim of his presentation: conveying his messages to the audience. He can focus on serving his audience in such a way that it becomes easy for them to recognize and comprehend these messages. To even have a chance at success in this endeavor the presenter has to ensure that he establishes a relationship of communication with the audience within the first minute of the presentation. This means that beyond the mere words that are expressed, the presenter has to effectively employ all channels of communication, in particular eye contact, expression in his voice, a falling intonation pattern at the end of sentences and effective pacing.

If the presenter effectively exercises control over these skills while remaining composed at all times even when dealing with the problems that arise, then the presenter will meet the audience's expectations regarding communication and professionalism, thereby making them receptive to his presentation messages. Despite any presenter shortcomings concerning language or performance, the audience will grasp these messages and grant them credibility.

A note to beginning presenters

The task of learning to give presentations effectively as described above may seem quite daunting. It is advisable to concentrate on three aspects of the presentation to ensure the greatest likelihood for success: The introduction, the transitions and the conclusion (more specifically the three-part transition leading to the conclusion, the summary and the post-summary). Although these sections usually amount to only two to three minutes altogether regardless of the overall length of a presentation, they are crucial for establishing a relationship to the audience, establishing and maintaining a perception of professionalism in the audience, and enhancing your success of conveying your messages to the audience.

Introduction: Starting your relationship with the audience as well as establishing credibility as a professional.

Transitions: Reestablishing your credibility by carrying out effective transitions between main sections of the presentation in a professional manner.

Conclusion: Generating suspense for the review of your messages, delivering them succinctly without dilution, and bringing the presentation to a successful close.

What had seemed daunting will appear to be much more achievable because the presentation boils down to these three tasks. Please do not misunderstand: The content of the presentation is important; however, if your messages are not attractively packaged, they will remain on the shelf.

A note to trainers of presentation courses

The following points make sense for the design of a presentation-training course.

- First, map out the journey for your students by explaining the course outline to them. Many students may naturally react in disbelief that so much will be demanded of them. Let them know that you will be there to support them.
- Therefore, provide continual encouragement and place faith in them that they will indeed become effective presenters by the end of the course.
- Moreover, encourage students to coach each other by preparing in groups that provide feedback, tips and encouragement.
- Practice introductions and mini presentations to focus on the skills of eye contact, voice control and pacing. Also conduct practice and final presentations. The practice presentation is for providing feedback. Without such feedback opportunities students cannot reach their potential in one go. This allows the students to rework the presentation and overcome initial flaws and thereby achieve much better results in the final presentation. The clear improvement in their performance does wonders for their confidence. Otherwise the majority of students would walk away from the course with broken spirits and a lack of self-confidence in their abilities – just the opposite effect of what we strive to achieve.
- Enjoy the progress the students make. Show your enthusiasm for their success in overcoming their challenges. If the students feel that you really care about their career development, they will go that extra mile with you responding positively to your belief in them.

¹ Stress in itself is not a bad thing. It is a normal body reaction to “dangerous” situations. Naturally giving a presentation does not present a physical danger to the presenter, but psychologically one feels threatened when standing alone in the limelight. To a certain degree anxiety is an actual ally: Anxiety motivates the presenter to prepare well in advance of the presentation in an attempt to give his best possible performance. During the presentation anxiety mobilizes all of his faculties for him to focus on the tasks at hand. However, like a deer dazzled by the headlights of an oncoming Mack truck, the presenter can be debilitated by excessive anxiety: He is so fixated on an overpowering feeling of inadequacy and helplessness that he experiences a blockage and perhaps even a breakdown. When the presenter becomes completely focused on his feelings of anxiety, he becomes incapable of turning his attention to the tasks at hand.

Moreover, the presenter has to stop dwelling on judging his own performance. First, he has to deal with his exaggerated expectations of perfectionism: If the audience does not expect perfection of the presenter, why should he. On the one hand, he should simply prepare as well as possible to reduce the potential for mistakes: Mistakes will naturally occur. When they occur in practice, not only can one fix them, one can practice fixing them in the context of an ongoing presentation. One thereby feels prepared and can be comfortable dealing with mistakes when they crop up in the real presentation. Finally, when mistakes occur, the presenter needs to focus his attention on getting the presentation back on track rather than on passing judgment on his performance: Judgment of how well one is performing is the business of the audience.

Stress-reduction techniques can also be effectively employed to help bring anxiety levels down to manageable levels. To help oneself to burn off adrenalin, relieve tension and relax, one can stretch one’s limbs and back muscles as well as massage one’s face, scalp, hands and back of the neck. One can also take deep breaths that are then slowly exhaled...releasing one’s nervousness. Finally, one should think of positive images in order to support one’s self-confidence that all will go well: the warmth of the sun, the taste of hot chocolate, inspiring songs. One should tell oneself “I can do this well”. One should perceive the presentation not as a form of suffering and punishment, rather as an opportunity to prove one’s abilities as an aspiring professional.

² Hierarchy of capitalization usage – At least three levels of importance can be made evident to the audience through the usage of capitalization as suggested below. Note there is not only a difference in the use of capitalization but also in the font size of the different levels of importance. [If you should only require two levels of information, i.e. headings/subheadings and main points, the latter can be treated with the usage of capitalization as described in points II or III below. Whatever you decide, just be consistent in usage.]

- I. Headings (the most important information, including subheadings) – the following types of words are capitalized: 1) The first and last words, 2) all nouns/pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and subordinate conjunctions like *as*, *because*, *although*.
All other types of words remain lowercase letters: articles like *a*, *an*, *the*; prepositions like *on*, *over*, *without*, coordinating conjunctions like *and*, *but*, *or*; and the *to* of infinitives.

II. Main points – only the first word is capitalized unless a proper noun appears like *English*, the *United States*, and *Thomas Jefferson*.

III. minor points – nothing is capitalized unless a proper noun appears.

For details see Writer's Block – Writing Tips:

<http://www.writersblock.ca/tips/monthtip/tipmar98.htm>

First Example

II. Solutions from the Internet

Tools beyond Standard Solutions

- Blowfish or other Explorer-like tools
- EFS for advanced users
- Available freeware
 - Microsoft downloads
 - book inserts
 - product add-ons

- Note the three levels of information hierarchy. First, there is the heading (and subheading level also with capitalization like the heading), then the main-point level marked with dots as bullets, and finally the minor-point level marked with hyphen as bullets.

- Note the proper names make exceptions to the capitalization rules at the two lower levels: *Explorer* and *Microsoft*.

- Also note the difference in the size of letters to distinguish from each other the heading, the subheading, the main points and the minor points. Font size should never be less than 20 for the minor-point level of information (24 is usually better).

Second Example

II. Application Documents

Cover Letters

- Purpose
- Highlighting key qualifications

- bulleting
- positioning

- Note that "Cover Letters" as a subheading is capitalized like the main heading.