

## LECTURES & PRESENTATIONS

### DOS AND DON'TS FOR MAXIMISING LISTENER PLEASURE!

Don Jordan, May 2009

#### DO:

- Use your presentation to include material that you cannot include in your written paper or address. Pictures and diagrams can often help your audience to grasp more rapidly and completely what you want them to know. However, be careful to show only those that directly illustrate your argument or topic. Amusing stories that illustrate personal aspects of your investigation or project can help people warm to your theme. Be an interesting human being and not a speaking automaton!
- Remember that you are allotted a maximum time to speak, and be sure you finish comfortably inside it. Fifty minutes passes surprisingly quickly, and twenty minutes absolutely flashes by.
- Pick out what you consider is the minimum number of main points you wish to make, and speak to those. It is much better that you cover a few points without rushing, than trying to cram everything in.
- Practise your talk beforehand, speaking it aloud. Time it, record it, and edit as necessary. Go over it several times until you can deliver it with minimal reference to your notes. Deliver it to a friend or relative and ask them for feedback.
- Look at your listeners and choose several of them to speak parts of your talk to. Imagine you are having a conversation with them alone. Speak clearly, without rushing, and leave some spaces so that your audience can absorb what will, mostly, be new to them. You may know your subject well, but they may be hearing about it for the first time.
- **STOP** when told your time is up! End the sentence you are on, say "Thank you for listening", and leave it at that. The session leader and your audience will love you. If you were unable to finish the talk as you had planned, there may be an opportunity during question time for you to add something more. Frequently, question time can be more valuable to your listeners than your presentation, and they will appreciate your leaving adequate space for it.
- Be very careful, economical and self-critical about the use of visual material. Human brains generally process **either** auditory **or** visual material, but rarely both at once. If you show a picture or set of words to an audience and continue talking, they will not take in what you want them to, and they will feel frustrated and cheated. Limit the number of words on screen to a **maximum** of about 8 to 10! **Stop speaking** while the audience reads the words or looks at the picture. Ask yourself why you are showing these words and pictures - how do they add to your listener's understanding of your topic?
- Use PowerPoint for **non-verbal** presentations only! It is a complete medium in itself, especially when all the 'bells and whistles' are used. People can't cope with your words as well. Give people one thing at a time to concentrate upon.

- Ensure that you stand to one side of an overhead projector or computer, and that the screen is high enough, so that you don't obstruct your audience's view of the screen. Practice with these tools is necessary so that you don't interrupt the flow of your talk or your listeners' concentration.
- Remember all the good presentations you have enjoyed in the past, and the bad ones you have endured. Use your own experience to put yourself in the place of your audience and give them something you would enjoy yourself!

## **DON'T:**

- Read your paper word for word (or even roughly word for word!). You may as well be in a room by yourself as far as your audience is concerned! Your own experience as a listener must have told you how boring and alienating this is, so why would you want to subject your listeners to it? Your paper will be in print in some way or other and the audience can read it word for word themselves later on, if your presentation has stimulated them to want to.
- Put words on the screen and then read them to your audience. They can do that perfectly well on their own, if you give them time to. Your talking will just get in the way of their understanding.
- Talk to a screen with words or an illustration on it. Glance at it, if you really need to check that you have the correct illustration and that it is aligned correctly, and then face your listeners again before you begin talking. There should be no need for checking, anyway, if you have practiced your talk properly.
- Give a lengthy history of your project if your main purpose is to tell your audience about something you have discovered or learned, and why this may be valuable to them. They can read about it in your written paper if they want to. Is it even relevant to the subject of the seminar, conference or lecture series, anyway? Most people want to learn something that they can use in their own present situation and may not really care how you came to it, fascinating though this may be to you.
- Add music or a sound-track to a PowerPoint presentation. The visuals must stand alone, without distractions.