SOME VERY GOOD IDEAS TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR PRESENTATIONS

- Steve Klomp Murdoch University

**PREPARATION AND PRACTICE** is EVERYTHING! Generally speaking, for a speech you have not performed in the past, your research, preparation and practice should take up eighty times the time of the presentation itself (an 80:1 ratio). So, a ten minute speech will require 800 minutes (really!) of practice. I know it seems like a lot, but you will be surprised what a difference this will make to your professionality – and your career!

**MEMORISING** your speech VASTLY improves your credibility. This is particularly true, in fact it is essential, when talking about yourself.

Your audience **WANTS** you to succeed. Really!

Part of your preparation is researching the **AUDIENCE**. Who are they, what do they want to hear, what level should I pitch things, what will they be wearing, etc

Part of your preparation should be anticipating the **QUESTIONS** you will be asked. Decide if you will allow questions, when you will allow them and what your answers might be. What will you do about the question you can’t answer? (Hint: Honesty is everything)

Part of your preparation is **TIMING**. The more you practice the more accurate you will be with the time your speech will take. For this class, for example, a ten minute speech should run for TEN minutes – exactly (you should prepare for real life presentations with the same strict adherence to timeframes).

This author has invented a brilliant system of audience interaction called **FITA** (Friends in the Audience). For payment of a thousand bucks I will tell you all about it. Alternatively, you can come to class and ask about it – for free!

Presentation **AIDS** are just that – AIDS. Don’t fall for the mistake of using them as a crutch. For example, NEVER read the powerpoint slides you have prepared – especially if you turn your back on the audience to do so.

Speaking of powerpoint slides – aim for **FOUR** words per slide. Really! They are just pointers to things you are going to say, not a repeat of what you are saying.

Speaking of **HANDOUTS** – in most business situations they should be given out at the end. If you give them out earlier than that your audience will read them. You certainly don’t want that – you want them to be concentrating on you!
• **ATTIRE** is really important. Dress in a way in which you feel comfortable and that is appropriate for the audience. That said, it is always better to be more formal rather than less. The golden question is: ‘Do I want them to concentrate on how I look or on what I say?’

• **BODY LANGUAGE** (of which dress is a part) is very important. At this stage don’t try to practice different body language techniques. Just practice and prepare your speech to a 80:1 ratio and then believe passionately in what you are saying. The ‘right’ body language will come by itself.

• **PARALANGUAGE** (the way you speak) is obviously very important. Taller, well dressed men who speak in a lower timbre are more believable than others, for example. Aim to speak fairly slowly and evenly and don’t get too excited (your voice rises in pitch when you get excited). Don’t end statements with a rising tone – it will sound like you are asking a question and it is a manifestation of nervousness.

• **HANDOVER** is crucial. If you are one member of a group of speakers, make sure the handover between one speaker and the next is fluid and automatic. Avoid saying things like: “Now I’ll hand you over to Joe Blow who will talk about...”

• Have you investigated the **VENUE**? It should be part of your preparation. Consider size of audience that can be accommodated, acoustics, parking, lighting, etc.

• **TEN MINUTES EARLY IS ALREADY LATE!** Don’t leave it too late to arrive. You will be all flustered and unprepared. Also, leave nothing to chance. Don’t assume the powerpoint will work, the internet will be available, the audience will be ready.... Check everything, absolutely everything – early enough so that you have time to fix things if need be.

• In what **ORDER** should you speak? If you are one of say five speakers to talk, try to be second or third. First is too much in the spotlight and by the fourth presentation the audience is fidgeting.

• How much movement (**KINESICS**) is enough? Well, let your personality shine through. It doesn’t matter as much as you think. On the other hand, don’t pace up and down, but don’t stand still like a statue either!

• Don’t use a **MICROPHONE** if you can possibly avoid it. Microphones cause problems in recording, in remitting sounds like ‘p’s and ‘s’s and they are often unreliable.

If you must use a microphone, stand directly behind it and keep your mouth four finger widths from the windsock at all times.
• Is EVERY interaction in business a presentation? Well, actually, yes! An interview, an address to your team, accepting a promotion, talking to a client, meeting a group at a Club after work, a progress report....

• Is there ever a time in business when I can drop my GUARD and say and act as I wish? Well, actually, no!

• What about specific situations? An APOLOGY?

If you have done something in error and you must face the accusers then three rules apply:
1. Admit your mistake
2. Apologise – but only once. Mean what you say, but don’t linger over it. You don’t want your accusers to hold you forever to ransom over your mistake.
3. Have a solution and a timeframe

• A POOR WORK EFFORT?

This will happen to everyone. You will go through times when the family are taking a lot of your time, when the weather stops you from selling your quota of refrigerators, when you just feel lethargic, you might be sick, etc

This situation is like an apology. Confront your Performance Evaluation Panel and:
1. Acknowledge what has happened.
2. Offer a plausible reason why it has happened.
3. Apologise – ONCE
4. Have a realistic solution and a timeframe. The key word here is ‘realistic’. If the weather is still going to be bad for a month then there is no way you will fix the refrigerator sales quota problem over the next four weeks.

• A COMPARISON BETWEEN YOU AND ANOTHER CANDIDATE?

Again, a common work situation. No matter what, do not concentrate on the failings (or the advantages of your opponent – and never ever sully their character or call their abilities into question. Rather, spend your time talking about the advantages you can offer the company, your passion for project X, your long term goals and how your selection would improve factor Y.

• The STICKY QUESTION?

Imagine for example, if you are going for interview and you are one of two candidates and they ask you: ‘If X gets the promotion instead of you could you work under him or her?’
Boy oh boy is this a loaded question!

Generally speaking the answer is: ‘It would be inappropriate for me to comment on another applicant but I do feel the best dynamic would occur if I led the group, and I certainly offer the advantages (described previously) and I certainly have the passion, the commitment and the long term goals appropriate for this position. (Pause) Having said that, I am a team player and I believe in this project so I will work towards completing the task in whatever capacity is open to me. I would expect that whomever is chosen as leader takes advantage of my experience and advice – and that of all members of the team’.

• I have assessed the audience and they are an easy going, salt-of-the-Earth type of group. Is it OK if I relax into the VERNACULAR?

No, never. You may simplify your language but swearing, any form of profanity or common language or using words that imply a sexual, gender, race or any other bias is always inappropriate.

• It’s a football crowd! Can’t I make DISPARAGING REMARKS about others – it’s all good fun?

NO. NEVER.

• The talk is going well but I am having real PROBLEMS with the projector and one member of the audience. What do I do?

Essentially you acknowledge the problem(s) – once – and then ignore them. You should have a back up to allow for technological failure anyway (such as printed copies) and the prickly member of the audience is going to feed on your responses. IGNORE!

• My mind has gone completely BLANK. What do I do?

This is guaranteed to happen to you at some time or another. Another related problem is that you simply didn’t expect a question or response and you don’t know what to do. Honesty is always a good thing, but the best solution is to learn ten ‘one liners’, one of which you can say depending on the situation. ONE LINERS give you time to get your brain back into gear, but they also deflect the difficulty.

A humorous one liner is: ‘I’ve got nothing!’

A useful one liner is: ‘That is an interesting question. I would like to get back to you about that one because it requires a bit more thought and in any case it may not be of interest to all audience members. May I talk to you after the presentation?’

• The best cure for NERVOUSNESS is preparation and practice. Absolutely. Nothing is more of a cure. You can also chew gum prior to going on stage (it settles your stomach acid), you can use
the FITA technique (remember to bring along your thousand bucks), you can stand behind furniture like a rostrum or you might like to have the advantage of tactile reinforcement of nearby furniture.

If you are nervous giving presentations (aren’t we all?) it won’t ever go away completely, but the more presentations you do the less nervous you will be and the more you will learn to control your nerves.

• Be sure of your FACTS! Amazing how often as presenters we state something we are 80% sure is right – and it turns out to be wrong. If you are not 100% sure, say so.

• Reference everything

References are supposed to be used whenever information is presented using presentation aids such as powerpoint, on handouts and for facts and figures you state (distribute a reference list at the end of the presentation or on the last powerpoint slide and remember in-text referencing on individual slides or handouts as well).

• Don’t drink any ALCOHOL. It’s obvious really. It may give you Dutch courage but it also produces a lousy performance – and it will certainly help you forget parts of your presentation.

• I can’t memorise all of this stuff! May I use PALM CARDS?
The short answer is NO. It is hard to imagine anything more amateurish, particularly if it is obvious you are using them.

Why not plant ‘cues’ around the room? Make the lettering HUGE so that you can simply glance that way and recall a point. Don’t write a whole lot and then expect the audience not to notice you squinting to reading it all. You can also use the FITA technique (those of you who have a thousand bucks that is). Best of all, memorise your speech. You will be surprised how quickly this happens if you do enough preparation.

• It will be ALL RIGHT ON THE NIGHT! Well, it will be, if you have practiced and prepared enough!