Advanced

3. How to Prepare a Presentation

The Time Needed for a Good Presentation

- It is conventional wisdom, that **95%** of the work needed for a good presentation is done *before* you face your audience.
  - A rule of thumb for *experienced* speakers, well versed in their field, is:
  - **30 minutes preparation for 1 minute presentation!**
- Included in that time are:
  - *Basic decisions*.
    Analysis of the likely structure and expectations of the target group (is your target group the Prof. and his assistants or your fellow students?), first decisions about the main goals of the presentation (what are the main messages going to be), decision on media use (blackboard, overhead projector, flip chart, laptop and beamer, small experiments, objects to be shown around, ...).
  - *Conception*.
    Collecting materials, basic structure of the presentation, how to visualize certain points ...
  - *Production*.
    Making your viewgraphs, notes ...
  - *Control*.
    Trying out the viewgraphs, talking to the mirror to find out how long it takes ...
  - *Dress rehearsal*.
    Actually giving the presentation to a few good friends in a suitable environment (not at your apartment with the TV in the background and everybody drinking beer).

Intentions and Goals

- This is the important part. Don't forget: All the good advice about the emotional stuff will do no good if the factual content of your presentation is no good! There is one golden rule:
  - **If you don't know exactly where you want to go to, you shouldn't be surprised if you don't arrive there.**
- The first question you have to ask yourself in preparing a presentation is:
  - What do I want to get across? Which messages do I want to implant firmly into the brains of my audience?
- And do not forget: A presentation is *not* the same thing as a lecture. Your audience is not going to really learn something from you - people never learn anything from a lecture either, they learn it by mulling the issues over themselves. ilivate, in exercise classes, in discussions, in preparing for an exam - but not during the lecture.
  - The audience listening to a presentation will, in general, *not* do this!
  - The sad point about this is that there is very little that you can get across that will "stick" for some time. So keep you message to a *few bare essentials.*.
  - There are very experienced speakers out there who claim that the number of messages that can be firmly delivered in *one* presentation is exaxctly **1**!

Tuning in to the Receiver

- Know your audience! Ask yourself: What do I have to take into account with *this group* of listeners, to get my messages across? Ask yourself relative to your target group (which does not have to be all of the audience, but maybe only some key persons):
  - How does my audience (probably) see the topic?
  - What is their basic attitude? Do they love the issue, but hate to be here it at this time, ...?
  - What does the audience expect from this presentation?
  - What is their knowledge background (Even Professors hate sentences like: "I would be insulting your intelligence by explaining the mass action law in this context; it is, after all, basic high school stuff...")

4. The Introduction

General

- As in aviation, there are two critical phases in a presentation: *Starting* and *landing*.
  - Your start - the *introduction* - determines if you keep your audience interested. The audience wants to recognize early on if this is interesting enough to concentrate on.
  - Ideally your introduction should do two things:
    - Make the listener curious.
    - Signal your competence.
- What can make your *start* interesting, if not outright thrilling? Easy: *Don't do what your audience expects!*.
  - Ask a surprising (rhetorical) question.
  - Find a connection to a recent big event.
  - Start with a good quote.
  - Give a surprising piece of information.
  - Start with a provocation.

Themes and Theses

- A good presentation has a *theme* which can be developed by postulating ***theses.***
- A good theme should be short and with no additional explanation. We are *not* discussing the *title* of the presentation, but the *key sentences* at the beginning!
  - A *good* theme sentence:
    I am going to demonstrate that fuel cells are the *only* option to preserve *your* present mobility in the near future.
  - A *bad* theme sentence:
    As you may know, fuel cells, provided we will be able to make them cheaply enough, will be important in solving some of the problems of transportation sometime in the future, always assuming that nuclear fusion, as we have reason to fear, will not make it, and, of course, if we can get a hydrogen economy going in time.
- Always ask yourself if your theme sentence(s) can be formulated even more succinctly.

Theses

- Theses are the central points of any presentation where you are trying to "*sell*" something, or, more general, to *induce some action* of your audience after the speech.
  - The action may be that they buy your product, give you a job, or elect you to the Bundestag.
  - However, in *scientific presentations*, you may only explain something that your audience didn't know and you do not expect actions. So this part about the theses must be taken with a grain of salt!
- If you do use theses, start with the conclusions! There are several advantages:
  - If you show your intentions right away, you appear more trustworthy.
  - If the audience knows where you are heading to, they have an easier time following you.
- A thesis expressing *your* opinion, could start as follows:
  - I am of the opinion that..
  - I think that...

- I am convinced that...

- A thesis sentence *never* contains
  - Explanations.
  - Examples.
  - Justifications.

What Belongs to an Introduction?

- *Welcoming* the audience, and, depending on the occasion, *introducing* yourself.
- A *starting part* with your surprises, provocations, quotes etc.
- A *theme* sentence.
- The *theses*.
- The *background information* (can be very short); e.g.
  - Relevance of your theme.
  - History (in Germany always refer to the old Greeks).
  - Personal relation to the theme.
- An *orientation* (this is absolutely***de rigeur*** in a scientific talk!). It hould contain most, if not all of the following:
  - Contents and structure.
  - Time plane.
  - What kind of documents are handed out to the participants (You must tell them if they should take notes, or if they do not have to bother). *Never* give your documents out before you are finished!
- The introduction should be within about **15%** of the total time allowed for the presentation!

Previous page

Next page