Communicate Virtually Anything
Communications solutions for virtually any organizational challenge

8 Tips on Preparing Prodigious Presentations

Whether you are presenting in a public setting or virtually where you can't see the audience, being able to present well can make your career; these 8 tips will help you prepare prodigious presentations.

1. **Know your audience**

   By knowing who you are talking to you can choose the right words and concepts and how to frame your topic so that your audience can understand what you are saying. Remember, this is a presentation not a speech, so you have the opportunity to frame your talk with a series of slides to support your topic.

2. **Create effective support material**

   To support a business talk, keep the slides looking professional. And if your organization has a standard format, use it. Don't go all arty with colors and winking icons. You have more leeway outside of business (where you can go a bit more arty) – but you still want to make sure people can follow your talk and not fall into the artwork on your slides. On your slides, keep them text light – like 6 points per slide – and make them your main talking points. Remember, they are there to support your talk, not be your talk.

3. **Know your stuff**

   Whether they asked you to talk or you volunteered (that does happen on occasion) prepare your material with you as the expert. And <u>be</u> the expert in the room during your presentation. You might know every detail, but if you cannot talk from confidence you won't look like or sound like the expert. Part of having confidence is in the preparation. Dale Carnegie has chapters on the topic. I take it from the other side – fear of failure – my mantra is "don't fail."

4. **Write notes that will trigger your memory**

   The nice part of preparing the slides is that it gives you a chance to work on your notes at the same time. I find that writing everything up and knowing I have the notes in my back-pocket gives me a chance to learn my topic and how I am going to talk about it as I am preparing the slides. The notes should be triggers to make it look like a conversation, not a lecture. The notes should trigger your memory and spark your talk. You don't want to read a speech, unless you are passing out pillows along with your notes.

5. **Proof your slide text**

   Don't just rely on spell checks, you need to proof your slides. It's even better if you can get a trusted resource to look at them, too. You want to make sure you have the words you want to use (and the correct versions of them – principle rather than principal and site rather than cite or sight). And that you are always working at meeting your points.

6. **Know your surroundings (and tools)**

   Knowing your surroundings will help with a number of things. You look professional and won't be up there in front of people saying "Let's see. How does this work again?" If you are working virtually, you want to do a dry-run with the sharing tool to make sure you know about all of the controls (some on the information in 8 Tips on Running Better Virtual Meetings can help you here). And once you have tried the tools or know the room you can walk in (or sign in) with confidence. No fumbling around. This will help keep you focused on your talk not on all of the periphery stuff.

7. **Do a trial run**

   Don't just read it to yourself; you need try the presentation at least once. Like really doing it out loud and, if possible, with the tools you will use when doing it live. This will give you one last chance to make sure the slides flow effectively with the words and that you are leading your audience to your conclusions. Talking it out loud also makes sure you can hit a natural pace and that your presentation effectively fills your time slot. Remember, the only thing worse than being 15 minutes short is being 15 minutes long.

8. **Be prepared for just about anything**

   Now that you know it all, be prepared for the things you don't know. Meetings are like improvisational theater – even with the best trial runs and preparation stuff still happens. Like the people presenting before you running really long. Can you make your 30-minute presentation fit into a 15-minute slot? You can if you know your topic and prepared your slides to cover the key points. Can you locate your slides on a machine where the network crashes? You can if you have the slides on that flash drive you have on your key-chain.