

# Presentation Techniques

## Tips for Helping Your Audience Listen

**Follow the 5-Minute Rule:** Regardless of the time scheduled for a presentation or discussion, plan your approach so that your key points and most important supporting information can be delivered in the first five minutes. As a result, you'll be prepared if the meeting is suddenly cut short, and you'll keep your audience's attention.

**Focus Your Discussion:** Outline in advance all of the topics and sub-points you must discuss - then, cut your list in half. The average listener absorbs only a small portion of what you say and cannot generally make sense of more than two or three points delivered verbally.

**Repeat, Repeat, And Repeat:** Emphasize your core message to your audience multiple times during a discussion or presentation. Don't hesitate to use the same descriptive phrase each time. It may seem repetitive to you as the speaker, but this tactic aids the memory of your listeners.

**Simplify:** Although readers may be able to digest a 50-word sentence or a long description of a complex idea, listeners generally cannot. The most effective speakers use short sentences and direct language. Good speakers also introduce ideas in a simple form and build on them later as necessary.

**Use Verbal Cues to Get Their Attention:** When you come to a critical message point that you want to be sure your audience hears, let them know it is time to pay attention. Verbal cues focus audiences and aid their memories. Don't overuse cues or they lose their effectiveness. Verbal cues include phrases like "read my lips..." "I want to leave you with one final point..." "if there is one thing I want you to take away from our discussion..." etc.

**Pause Strategically:** If handled confidently, use of pauses and silence can be a tool for maintaining interest and control. By stopping the flow of words momentarily, you gain your audience's full attention. Make eye contact during the pauses and observe body language to see if the audience seems to understand you.

**Summarize Your Key Points:** By summarizing your key points at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of a speech or presentation, you give your audience a mental framework or roadmap for following your ideas. This technique also allows you to repeat and reemphasize ideas.

**Don't Forget About Your Audience:** Every good speech or presentation should have a degree of interactivity - even if achieved through simple eye contact between presenter and audience. As a presenter or discussion leader, you must constantly assess your audience's interest, understanding and mindsets.

## Tips for Handling Difficult Questions

**Prepare and anticipate:** brainstorm likely difficult questions and possible answers in advance.

**Have an agenda ... and stick with it:** don't let difficult questions during a discussion or presentation distract you from your sole purpose -achieving your objective. Acknowledge and/or address the question but then build a verbal bridge back to one of your key points.

**Clarify the question:** ask the questioner to restate or further explain the question. This technique puts subtle pressure on the person asking the question and often makes him or her attempt to justify the question. When clarifying a question, the questioner will usually reveal his or her bias. In this way, you also buy time to consider an answer.

**Acknowledge the question or concern:** Many people who ask difficult questions are seeking recognition for a particular issue or point of view. Before answering, acknowledge their question and let them know that their issue has been heard.

**Correct skewed, negative characterizations:** Frequently, a person will introduce a question with a negative interpretation of an issue or a situation. Without repeating the hostile, negative or inflammatory language, tell the person that you don't accept their interpretation of the issue before providing a response.

**Point out obvious biases:** People with extreme opinions like to ask difficult questions. By drawing attention to a bias inherent in a particular question, you reduce the credibility of the questioner.

**Admit it if you don't have the answer:** If you simply don't have the facts, knowledge

**Give shorter answers:** If the question is tougher, make your answer shorter. People asking difficult questions don't have much opportunity for follow up if your answers are simple and straightforward.

**Maintain your calm and focus:** When you lose your composure, you lose control of the situation. Pause for a minute before answering a question that has struck a nerve and set aside your emotions. Good preparation before the discussion or presentation can help you anticipate and handle highly charged topics.