

How to Give an Effective Presentation

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Introduction

When asked for a definition of CME (continuing medical education), many physicians will describe a short course with instructors presenting didactic lectures to large groups of physicians sitting for long hours in a hotel conference room in rows of narrow tables. The lecture is the staple format of CME course instruction. Lectures have been viewed as a poor method to promote the development of thinking skills for the formation of attitudes [1-3]. The main reason for this is the lack of involvement by the participants who remain passive recipients of information. However, when done effectively, the lecture can allow participants to learn new material, explain difficult concepts, organize thinking, promote problem solving, and challenge attitudes [4-6]. "Teach the teachers" workshops and courses, which introduce participants to interactive lecturing, lead to lectures that increase student participation and involvement in the large class lecture [7]. *The objectives of this presentation are for the participants to be able to differentiate good and bad features of a presentation, evaluate their own and other's presentation skills, and improve their own presentation skills.*

Speaker evaluations from the 2002 STR Course

Analysis of comments from individual speaker evaluations from the STR 2002 Course revealed common features of ineffective lecturing (Table) [8]. The negative feature that was commented on most often (12.4%), and directed at the largest number of faculty (63%) was poor content. Other negative features included poor delivery, image slides, text slides, command of the English language, and handouts. Positive comments did not provide descriptive information regarding effective lectures.

Table. Summary of negative comments from individual speaker evaluations

	# Comments	#Speakers
Poor content	107 (12.4%)	51 (63%)
Poor delivery	74 (8.6%)	31 (38.3%)
Poor image slides	72 (8.4%)	19 (23.5%)
Poor English	58 (6.7%)	9 (11.1%)
Poor text slides	37 (4.3%)	26 (32%)
Poor handout	19 (2.2%)	14 (17.3%)
Other	37 (4.3%)	N/A
Total	404 (46.9%)	N/A

Note: Percents shown represent percent of all comments (n=862) and speakers (n=81).

Presentation skills

Gelula [9] reported on aspects of voice clarity and speaking speed, approaches to using audiovisual aids, effectively using the audience as a resource, and ways to be entertaining as keys to effective lecturing. According to Gagne's conditions of learning [10], it is first necessary to motivate and gain attention of the learner in order for learning to take place. When done properly, this aspect of the lecture offers a distinct advantage over written text or computerized programs. Van Dokkum [11] also offered suggestions for effective lecturing that included audience entertainment. He stated, "The two basic elements of a presentation are that it is both scientific and entertaining at the same time." Gigliotti [12] offered suggestions for developing an effective slide presentation, using novelty and humor. The author's premise was that it will not matter how important the content of a presentation is if it is not heard due to lack of interest. For example, she suggested that a road sign reading "Gas Next Exit" would attract more interest from the audience than a slide that reads "Abdominal distention."

In another study, Copeland et al [13] collected data from physicians participating in lecture-based CME internal medicine courses to determine the most important features of the effective lecture. These features were clarity and visibility of slides, relevance of material to the audience, and the speaker's ability to identify key issues, engage the audience, and present material clearly and with animation. Features determined least likely to affect the attendee's ratings of a lecture included presenter's age, gender, physical appearance, and time of day in which the lecture was delivered.

Features of effective presentations

From evaluation of speakers at the STR Course and the educational literature, specific features of effective presentations were identified. The list of features can be used as a checklist by persons wanting to improve the quality of their presentations and can be used by persons evaluating speakers.

Slides

- Make images with optimal contrast resolution (not too light or too dark).
- Make images big enough to be seen by everyone in the audience, including those in the back of the room.
- Use enough images to illustrate the important points of the presentation, with the appropriate number of text slides relative to image slides.
- Keep slides simple, avoiding too many lines per slide (>6), too many characters per line, lines extending too inferiorly on slide, distracting animation effects, and too many graphs.
- Use color schemes that optimize visualization of the text, avoiding schemes that make the text difficult to read (i.e. purple or red on green).
- Check slides for grammar and spelling errors prior to presentation.

Content

- Provide an appropriate, limited amount of data that is needed to support the findings and conclusions without overloading the audience with too many

- statistics, charts or graphs, or making assumptions without providing supportive data.
- Provide content that is up-to-date and relevant to current practice.
 - Present content in an unbiased fashion without showing favoritism to one or more companies/institutional protocols when there are acceptable alternatives that the audience should be familiar with.
 - Follow the printed program and objectives.
 - Present content that is practical and appropriate for the audience, not too simple or complex or irrelevant to the listeners.
 - Incorporate appropriate humor or anecdotes into the presentation to engage the audience.

Delivery

- Vary voice inflection, speaking in a conversational tone rather than a monotone voice.
- Speak at an appropriate pace, not too fast, and incorporate pauses into the presentation.
- Slow down or pause when showing cine images so that the audience can see the pertinent findings.
- Use the slides to emphasize key points, without reading the slides word-for-word.
- Speak with enthusiasm, showing interest in the topic and regard for the audience's interest.
- Speak loudly enough that everyone in the audience, especially those in the back of the room, can hear.
- Speak clearly and consider rehearsing in front of an appropriate audience, if speaking in a less familiar language than the presenter's primary language.
- Follow time limits.
- Incorporate interaction into the presentation, such as asking the audience questions (rhetorical or otherwise), directing the audience to think of or perform a specific task, using case-based examples, or using an audience response system.
- Use appropriate gesturing and facial expressions and avoid being a dull, immovable object.
- Speak directly into the microphone, even when turning head or moving away from the podium.
- Use a laser pointer/cursor to point out or emphasize important features on a slide, avoiding random, distracting movement.
- Rehearse the presentation in order to be completely familiar with the content and organization of the slides.
- Be familiar with the audiovisual equipment and how to obtain assistance if needed.
- Speak professionally and with confidence, without being apologetic for the content or appearance of slides.

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