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Speaking at various occasions

Which of you have had to take part in giving a presentation to top management? Who has had to give the speech at Auntie Ann and Uncle Bert's silver wedding anniversary dinner? All of us have found ourselves in situations where we've been faced with addressing a group of people. These situations can vary immensely, so they require different approaches. At the silver wedding anniversary, the speaker is perhaps someone who knows the couple well and can deliver a fluent, humorous speech. At the presentation to top management, the likely candidate is an expert on content and is capable of answering important questions. When looking for someone to speak at a congress, it will likely be a well-known authority who has earned his right to speak about the topic, is a fascinating storyteller and is able to draw crowds. Every event requires a specific type of speaker and, at some point in time, every one of us will have to face being that specific speaker.

However different they may be, the speakers at all of the above occasions must possess a number of basic skills in order to gain satisfactory results, such as:

- The speaker must be intelligible.
- The speaker must be able to compose his thoughts so that his speech can be clearly followed and understood by the audience.
- The speaker must control his anxiety levels to be able to continue functioning properly.
- The speaker must be capable of holding the audience captive, so as not to lose their attention.
- The speaker must be capable of making contact with the audience.

There is a significant difference between speeches made at social occasions and the verbal presentation of information at business level. Not only do the objectives differ, so do the technical aids and the interaction with the audience. We'll expand on this in Chapter 2. During more technical, content-based business presentations, use will be made of aids, such as a beamer during PowerPoint presentations. There will be more interaction and discussion with the audience than during, say, an anniversary speech or where the speaker addressing a packed congress hall will be required to move around with the microphone and hold the attention of a silent audience in an entertaining way.

However diverse these forms of verbal presentation may be, the one thing they have in common is that we refer to them collectively as ‘public speaking’ or ‘presentations’ in this book. Specific relevant issues, like the use of technical aids and dealing with questions, will be handled separately. The one binding factor that remains is the skill required in order to be effective and relaxed when addressing a group of people.

People spend their entire lives learning various skills. Cycling is an example of something that can be learnt through lots of practice. It can be mastered even if you don’t have a talent for doing it. However, when it comes to public speaking, it seems as though learning and practicing aren’t even mentioned as options. Who doesn’t know the following expression: *either you have it or you don’t and he is a born presenter and I’m not!*

The point that we are trying to make is that public speaking is a skill that can be learnt. It can be learnt in the same way as all other skills – by obtaining knowledge and practicing those skills. Obviously, not everyone who learns to cycle is going to become a Lance Armstrong. Similarly, not everyone who learns how to speak in public will become a charismatic orator. There is no such thing as a born speaker; there are only speakers who learn more easily than others.

Strength / weakness analysis

In order to focus your attention as you go through this book, please make an estimate of your level of experience. What strengths and weaknesses do you notice in your verbal presentation skills in various situations? Make a list of points of interest which will be important while you’re reading this book. Use the questionnaire below to help you:

Experience

- 1 How often during my life have I spoken in public during the following situations?
 - Speech to relatives or acquaintances _____ times
 - Business presentation at work _____ times
 - Business presentation to outsiders _____ times
 - Anniversary or farewell speech outside my circle of family and friends _____ times
 - Other situations _____ times

- 2 According to the details above, do I see myself as an experienced, novice or inexperienced speaker?

- 3 How satisfied am I with my presentation performance? Indicate level of satisfaction using numbers 1 to 5. 1 is most dissatisfied and 5 is most satisfied.

	<i>Satisfaction score</i>
Preparation	_____
Content	_____
Structure of the presentation	_____
Audience captivation	_____
Correct use of language	_____
Use of voice	_____
Use of aids	_____
Anxiety / apprehension	_____
Dealing with questions	_____
Other aspects	_____

4 Once I have read this book and completed the exercises, I would like to concentrate on acquiring the following skills:

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How should I prepare my speech?

If you're required to make a speech, begin by preparing its contents. What do I know about the specified topic? What would I like to tell the audience about this topic? It's often obvious in hindsight, that the presentation was unsuitable for the audience or the occasion, or that the speaker spent too much time on preparation. Before preparing the content, we advise that you ask yourself the following questions:

- What would I like to achieve through my presentation or speech?
- Who is my audience?
- What exactly are the circumstances?

Let's deal with these three questions before we move on to the efficient preparation of content.

What would I like to achieve through my presentation or speech?

When you are doing your preparation, it is absolutely vital that you clearly define the goal of your presentation and the effect you would like it to have on the audience. This will, to a large extent, determine the content of the presentation, the strategy to follow and the aids that you will use. Once you have determined your goal you can, according to the content, distinguish between the main- and secondary points and make an informed decision about which aids to use. In most cases, one of the following goals, or a combination of them, are set:

1 Transfer of information

For example, think about this in the context of a group of students meeting before the start of a course. After your presentation, the students should know where to collect their timetables and where their first class will be held.

2 *Influencing opinions*

For example, public opinion on one of your company's products is negative. You would like to use your presentation to reverse this.

3 *Influencing behaviour*

For example, you are an accident prevention officer for the regional police force. You are addressing young pupils at primary schools and your aim is to encourage them to use adequate lighting on their bicycles when cycling home that very night.

It's clear that these goals are interconnected and overlap one another. Take a sales presentation as an example:

Specific *information* is provided ('this is what this machine can do') to influence *opinion* (the buyer must think to himself: 'Hey, this is handy, I need it') which subsequently influences *behaviour* (purchasing it).

Despite this overlapping, it's important that you clearly determine your goals from the outset. If your aim is the *transfer of information*, you will need to choose which information should feature most prominently. This choice is essential, because the human memory and attention span is limited. The most important information can be emphasised on a slide or displayed in a brochure. To influence or sway people's opinions, you will have to work out the arguments that will convince a critical audience. This will affect the order of your presentation – it's a known fact that points made at the beginning and the end leave the greatest impression. If your goal is to influence behaviour, it's important that the desired behaviour is highlighted as much as possible during your presentation, and that the audience is made aware of the benefits of this behaviour.

In the previous chapter, we mentioned a fourth, slightly different type of goal: the atmosphere that you would like to create. A speech presented at an anniversary celebration is meant to really affect the atmosphere. You obviously want to add to the festive atmosphere at a wedding reception or a tribute ceremony with your speech. It goes without saying that this determines what kind of material you will gather for your speech – no graphs and figures, but certainly some funny personal anecdotes.

Who is my audience?

A CEO to an audience of employees: 'The most important goal for our company during the upcoming year is to increase profit!' A psychologist to parents at a suburban school PTA meeting: 'During the learning process, the stimulation-response ratio and the reinforcements must be closely monitored.'

Obviously, both these speakers have not determined the nature of their audiences. The employees aren't informed about anything which relates to them, like retaining their jobs, and the parents don't understand any of the jargon offered to them regarding their

children's education. In situations like these, chances are that the audience will rapidly lose interest. So, before preparing the content for a speech or presentation, it's very important to ask yourself who is my audience and how will they react to what I say?

In order to grab the audience's attention, the presentation must be on the same level of knowledge about their experience in, and their attitude towards the subject matter you are dealing with. Important questions regarding your audience are:

- What is the level of education?
- How much background information does the audience have?
- Does the audience expect a formal or informal discussion?
- How much interest is there in my subject?
- Who asked me to do this presentation and why?
- What is the prevailing opinion on this subject?

Using the answers to these questions, you can determine the following:

- The amount of information necessary and how fully it must be explained
- The language used.
- What depth do I add?
- What illustrations are necessary?
- Strategies to be used to create interest.

In order to get an idea of the make-up of the audience, talk to the organisers of the event in advance, and if possible ask for the opinions of other speakers taking part.

To put it briefly, ask yourself the following questions before your presentation so that you are familiar with the information that you would like to convey:

- What does the audience already know about the subject?
- What would the audience like to know about the subject?
- What would I like the audience to know about the subject?

What exactly are the circumstances?

This question refers to the context of your presentation, the time available and the technical specifications. The answer will determine how much content you are going to include and how you will select it.

Furthermore, the technical specifications will provide you with an idea of the aids you can use. Important questions to ask yourself are:

- How much time have I got?
- What exactly are the circumstances? Is this a meeting where I am one of many presenters, or is the audience here only to see me?
- How was the presentation announced?

- What went on before my presentation?
- Am I the first person to broach this subject, or perhaps the seventh? What are the other speakers talking about? (If you manage to be the first speaker in line, the others will have to adapt to you and you will have more freedom in the planning of content and message.)
- Will I be standing behind a podium or sitting down?
- What aids will I be able to use?
- What kind of room is it?
- Am I to be introduced by anyone or should I introduce myself?
- At what time am I meant to speak? It makes a difference if you are scheduled to speak just before or after lunch.

This is an indication of just how important it is to talk to the organiser and possibly the master of ceremonies in advance.

A final hint: Sometimes a client or organiser has specific expectations about the results of your presentation. He might have his own goals which you don't know about. If you've been commissioned, we advise that you discuss your client's goals with him in advance.

Preparation with respect to content

You must prepare thoroughly, especially if you are a beginner, in order to present a comprehensible speech. Preparation will also increase your confidence and help ease stage fright because you'll know exactly what your aims are and what you are going to talk about. By doing a practice run you can determine whether you are on the right track to achieving your goals and what improvements you may have to make. Below are a number of suggestions you could follow in your preparation:

- Make some short notes with answers to the questions you answered in the previous paragraph: What would I like to achieve with my presentation? What kind of audience do I have? How much time do I have? What technical aids are available? Etc.
- Before starting your preparation, work through the next chapter dealing with the structuring and categorisation of presentations.
- After that, create a short and concise summary of your presentation or speech (ten to twenty lines).
- Now, record the content in concept form and read the text out loud to find out whether the words and sentences gel in spoken form. If the content is written out in full, there is a risk that it might be too wordy, or have too much jargon and complex structures, for example: 'It's been proven that there are good opportunities for dynamic third-generation qualifications to run parallel with integrated digital communication techniques through the systematic removal of qualified political program packets in conjunction with random digital means'.

- Another method is to record your speech, referring to your brief notes, using a dictaphone (Mobile phones and PDAs also have this function) and then writing it out in full. By doing this you are more likely to sound like you are actually speaking to someone, not reading from notes. It's important that your preparation is a verbal exercise and not exclusively a written one.
- For beginners it's especially useful to test your speech. Give your presentation at least once out loud, using the aids you have selected. Once is the absolute minimum. Then it would be a good idea to try it out on housemates, colleagues or friends. Try to make it as realistic as possible by perhaps using the kitchen table as the podium and asking your 'audience' to sit as far away from you as they can. Give them the role of critical audience members who will bombard you with pithy questions and comments afterwards.

TASK

Keep your next presentation in mind and answer the following questions according to what we've covered in this chapter:

- What exactly would I like to achieve through this presentation or speech?
- Who is my audience?
- What exactly are the circumstances?
- How will I prepare this presentation?
- What steps shall I take?

Don't prepare the contents just yet. First read about categorisation and the use of aids in chapters 3 and 4.

3

How do I categorise my speech?

So, now you know what you'd like to achieve, who your audience is and under what circumstances you'll be speaking. It is also important to categorise logically, just as you would if you were writing a book or script. This step is quite often left out so that the audience can't follow the gist of the speech. Have you ever listened to a speaker who conveys information in a messy way? Eventually you lose interest because the speaker does not make clear what is important and what isn't.

An effective speaker doesn't just speak well, he prepares well. He is someone who, when he is researching his topic, really works on the categorisation and structure of his speech. An effective speaker leads the audience through his presentation and the audience enjoys listening to him, because he is so easy to follow. Below is a simple pattern to follow when planning a short speech:

- Bring your *point* across.
- Follow this with the *explanation* and *underpinning* of the point.
- Conclude by *repeating* your point using different words.

For example:

1. *Point*: 'The mental well-being of divorcees is under threat because of the retrieval orders imposed on ex-partners of welfare-dependants by communities.'
2. *Explanation and underpinning*: 'Let me illustrate this using the following examples... These figures indicate that...'
3. *Repeating*: 'New welfare legislation hasn't taken the legally binding agreements between ex-partners into account, and this will result in old issues rearing their heads.'

Explanation and underpinning will answer the imaginary questions being asked in the minds of the audience, questions like:

- What exactly are you saying?
- What do you mean by...?
- Do you have hard evidence?
- Is that just your opinion or do other experts agree with you?

All speeches consist of:

- 1 *Introduction:* – focuses attention to the topic
– indicates the contents of the speech
- 2 *Core or body* – information
– arguments
- 3 *Closing* – summary
– conclusions

The introduction

Have you ever attended a presentation where the speaker was most of the way through his story before he had grabbed your full attention? Or a presentation where the speaker went ahead with his presentation without the full attention of the audience, totally ignoring the mutterings from the crowd? You should always, somehow, ensure that you have the full attention of your audience. Make sure that the audience knows that you're about to begin and that everybody's attention is focused on the topic.

Compare this to the actions of an orchestra conductor. By raising his arms, he indicates that he's about to start and the audience stops chattering at once as everyone's attention turns towards the stage. By drawing the audience's attention using something that is relevant to them or to the goal of your speech, you can also 'conduct' their attention. But don't use just 'anything' – there are various ways of drawing attention. Here are a few suggestions:

- Explain your reasons for choosing your particular topic. Perhaps the audience asked for the presentation or maybe instructions for the use of one of your products are unclear.
- Kick off with a quote, such as: 'Feed them breast milk, not expensive formula from the chemist!' (Luther)
- If, for example, your speech is about the advantages and disadvantages of space travel, give an exciting, fictitious account of the atmosphere inside the Apollo spacecraft moments before launch.
- Begin with a famous anecdote, like Heinrich Boll's 'The decline of the work ethic' if you are going to talk about unemployment.
- If your speech were to be titled 'Seize the Day', start with a wake-up remark such as 'Ladies and gentlemen. Within ten years, many of us won't be alive anymore!'
- Employ a newspaper headline or television report that ties in with your topic.
- Start your speech with an action, like ascending the stage with a trolley full of reports if your speech concerns constantly changing government legislation...

Find out beforehand whether you'll be announced. If not, make sure that you introduce yourself briefly once you have the audience's full attention. Then introduce the topic, the goal and the structure of your presentation clearly to the audience. It

can be compared to the contents page of a book and can be quite short. Below are a few suggestions you could use when preparing your introduction:

- Briefly explain why the topic is of interest to you and why it may be of interest to the audience.
- Explain to the audience how they can use the information which you're about to give them.
- Tell the audience why you're there.
- Share a personal experience or use a practical example but be sure to keep it short.
- Display a physical item.
- Don't use clichés like: 'It's an honour to be here...', 'It's great to see so many of you here...' or 'People have always asked me...'
- Keep it short by limiting your introduction to ten to fifteen percent of the total presentation time.

Don't forget to conclude your introduction by telling your audience if and when you'll be taking questions. People often forget about this. It will put the audience at ease, because now they know if and when they may ask questions. It also provides a smooth transition from the introduction to the body of your speech.

Now you are thinking: When should questions be taken? Our advice is that you follow your own personal preference. A speaker who knows that he'll be more comfortable interacting with the audience every so often, would do well to indicate that people are welcome to interrupt him with questions during his speech.

A speaker, whose anxiety levels drop when answering questions, will also welcome questions during his presentation. However, someone who completely loses his train of thought if he's interrupted should tell the audience that questions may be asked at the end of his speech. Those speakers who tend to answer questions in detail and veer off the subject will, almost always, exceed their allotted time period. These people can avoid this by answering questions at the end of the speech. Whatever the circumstances, remember that answering questions will take up a lot of time.

In certain cases, you'll realise that it'll be impossible to complete your speech if you answer all questions asked. If this happens, take a moment to work out what's important and what's not. Then you can:

- answer further questions at a different time or place, or
- choose to continue answering questions and, by doing so, not complete your presentation.

If you choose to answer questions at the end of your speech, the audience must be made aware exactly when the time for questions has begun. This could be once you've finished presenting the contents and you might say: 'Do you have any questions', or 'If you have any questions, I'd be more than happy to answer them now.' Then, give

the audience a moment to think about their questions and ask them. Some members of the audience may find it stressful to ask questions – it's like crossing a threshold to them. Presenting them with an invitation removes some of the obstacles and makes asking questions easier. Only once you're sure that all questions have been asked should you officially round off your speech and thank the audience.

TASK

- Now consider the current status of the introductions to your presentations so far.
 - Did you include any attention-grabbing tactics?
 - Are your introductions the right length?
 - Are you clear about people asking questions?
- Prepare the introduction for your next presentation and do a trial run. If it's a success, work out how you can use what you've learned in the future.

The core or body

Now that you've completed your brief introduction, you'll move on to the actual information and the line of reasoning (this part will take up approximately 75% of your total allocated presentation time). Divide the body of your speech into clearly identifiable, logically structured sections. One of your priorities is to ensure that the audience is able to follow you throughout the presentation, so make it obvious when you move from one topic or section to another. You could do this by:

- Repeating a similar type of sentence. For example: 'My first point is...' and 'My second point is...'
- Summarising briefly. This allows you to emphasise the more important aspects of your speech.
- Asking the audience whether they've understood everything so far and then announcing a new focal point.
- You can also use visual aids such as PowerPoint when you are switching from one topic to another. The next chapter will go into this more fully.

Now you should structure the core or body of your speech. Here are some suggestions:

- chronologically
- geographically
- alphabetically
- qualitatively
- comparatively

You must really be aware that there is a significant difference between spoken- and written text. An audience cannot refer back to spoken text as they could to written

text. If someone in the audience were to ask you to clarify a certain point, it would be up to you to do this while keeping to the structure of your presentation.

How to explain and emphasise

It's not easy to ensure that the most important points of your presentation remain embedded in the minds of the audience, or to keep the attention constantly focused on you. Of course you would like your audience to remember the essence of your speech and you can achieve this by categorising what you are going to say to make it more clear and compelling. These suggestions may help you:

- *Repeating a point or definition using different words.*
For example: 'The fact that ex-partners may, years after their divorce, still be held liable for welfare received by the other party, will place a large number of people in financial difficulty and 'punish' them for their feelings.'
- *Conveying factual information such as statistics and figures.*
For example: 'Recent studies have shown that aggression in Social Services clients has increased by fifty percent.' Social Services report a thirty percent increase in welfare requests following divorce.'
- *Providing examples.*
For instance: 'I know someone who, after his divorce, signed over his home and its contents to his wife and children and still pays alimony for one child. He's been divorced for ten years now and suddenly has to pay 500 per month because his ex-wife is on welfare.'
- *Using comparisons or contrasts.*
For example: 'How would you react if you were told that you must now, ten years after dissolving your partnership, pay money to your ex-business partner simply because he's been unable to find a job?'
- *Expert opinion.*
For example: 'A well-known jurist and professor of psychology, recently said on television that anyone entering into marriage is also signing his life away to the government. He strongly discourages marriage.'
- *Visual aids.*
Models, replicas, blueprints, plans, graphs, histograms, etc.

TASK

Have a look at some of your past presentations and analyse their cores with respect to categorisation and structure.

- Is the categorisation logical?
- Are the transitions between points clear?
- Will your audience remain interested?
- What could be improved?

Now you can experiment, try out your new categorising and ask for other people's comments. Finally make new propositions to use in the future.

The closing

Have you ever attended a presentation which ended before you were actually able to get involved? Perhaps you've listened to a speech that began with great gusto, but then flickered out like a dying candle? This was probably because the speaker didn't make it clear that he had finished, or didn't present a formal conclusion.

The audience should know when the build up to the conclusion starts. Let them know that you're about to close, give a concise overview and then draw your conclusions. (The closing should occupy around ten to fifteen percent of your total allocated presentation time.)

You could possibly incorporate your most compelling evidence, arguments and advantages or disadvantages into this section. Close in a light-hearted way, refer to your introduction by perhaps re-using an image or an anecdote.

Plan your closing in the same way that you planned your introduction. You might use a visual aid containing the essence of the presentation or a call to action, or you might refer to a point which you made at the start of the speech. However, don't use clichés like, 'I'll be concluding now...' or 'That is all I have to say...' or 'I'm out of time, so I'll finish...'

TASK

How did you make it clear to the audience that you were about to close?

- Did you draw conclusions?
- Did you provide an overview?
- Has anyone commented on this? Have you asked a member of the audience? Perhaps you could ask for help, advice or examples from someone else.

When you're ready to experiment with the structuring of your presentation, there are various clear, orderly structural alternatives to think about.

The following is an example of one such alternative:

At the start of your presentation, list the questions that the audience want answered. Do this in front of the audience using a flip chart or a laptop equipped with a beamer. Take some time to mull over the questions and let the audience know what you're doing: 'Ok, let me think about how I can answer these questions...' Then go ahead with your presentation.

By answering the questions systematically, you go through your presentation in a structured way and meet all the demands of your audience. (Alternatively, you could present your prepared speech and check off questions afterwards.) In using both of these methods, make sure you keep sight of your aims. It is crucial that you can effectively and quickly switch between your interests and the interests of the audience. Experience, determination and a good knowledge of the topic are essential when using the above method. See chapter 12 for more information.

In this chapter, we examined the introduction, the body and the closing, the three parts that make up a speech. As before, take some time to look at your progress. You now have a blueprint that you can use to categorise and structure your presentations. Do trial runs, ask for feedback, make adjustments and plan to work according to your 'personal script' in the future.