

Conversational Presentations

How to talk with (not at) your audience



Conversational Presentations

Modern-day presentations often incorporate slides with **video**, **animation**, and **interactivity** that can be very polished and slick. But they can often be perceived as artificial and insincere by target audiences. The most effective presentations [engage audiences](#) in **conversations** that are honest, focused on business issues, and how services can best be leveraged. The goal is to establish **trust**, build **confidence**, and convey **ideas**.

These “**conversations**” are, by design, presented in an **informal** style that intentionally evokes audience **participation**. As audience comments reveal their most important needs, the presentation can be focused on addressing those specific issues.

Instill Confidence

This form of dialogue is essential in **engaging audiences**, communicating **credibility**, and engendering **trust**. Leveraging one’s unique conversational style, while incorporating common characteristics of conversation, provides a structure that can dramatically increase a presentation’s overall impact.

In order to provide a starting point, presenters often model their presentation approach to emulate notable speakers from past history. Unfortunately, this approach risks portraying the speaker as **artificial** and **insincere**.

A good speech coach can counsel a presenter to improve body language, gesturing, eye contact, and vocal intonation, without producing artificiality. But this “personality” must **transcend** the presentation, extending to the **real interactions** the presenter has with his or audience before and after the presentation, if credibility is to be maintained.

To preserve presenter integrity, the audience must observe the **authenticity** they’d expect if speaking one-on-one, in a **personal**, **natural** communication style. This consistency is what makes **effective** communicators – possessing a style that evokes the confidence of speaking with a trusted friend.

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Open With Impact

To establish a dialogue with an audience, presentations should start with a **strong, captivating statement**, then be structured around key points with supporting evidence. For example, you may state the opinion, “Professional athletes are very overpaid. That’s why ticket prices are so high.” You state your **point** and **conclusion**. It would sound unnatural to start a conversation by saying something like “I’m going to begin by speaking about the high cost of attending sporting events,” yet that’s how most presentations begin. Not exemplifying the most conversational tone...

Provoke Thought

To summarize, spoken communications normally take the form of a main point, followed by reinforcing information. Likewise, presentations built according to that same structure will feel like conversations.

The evidence used to establish the key points in a presentation must be **intellectually thought-provoking**. A well-executed **visual** example or **narrative** will paint a much better picture than continual statements of fact. Graphics stimulate improved audience observation and **retention**, much more effectively than text alone.

But how can a one-on-one style of dialogue be introduced when presenting to a larger audience? Consider introducing a **silent pause** after presenting an idea. This extra moment of time encourages greater audience consideration, inspiring potential questions and dialog.

Effective presentation conversations are “**viewer-driven**,” with the presenter taking cues directly from the audience. When speaking naturally, our eyes wander, occasionally scanning the audience for their reactions. Responses may be smiles, nods, or other recognition that our message has been **received**. The audience thus becomes **engaged** in the discussion and is compelled to consider ideas being presented. Incorporate key examples into well-crafted anecdotes, and your audience will relate the ideas to their own experiences.

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Welcome Challenges

Presentations designed to stimulate thinking result in audiences that provide key details as to **their own** state of affairs. Without these “conversations,” post-presentation questions are generally obligatory and only marginally related to actual audience objectives. So, in your next presentation, if key points are **questioned, critiqued,** and even **openly challenged,** welcome and encourage the dialog. It’s the best way of realizing true audience engagement.

Other Resources

- ▶ [Going Up? 7 Key Steps to Creating an Effective Elevator Pitch](#)
- ▶ [Inspiring Words – Top 6 Tips to Motivate Your Audience](#)
- ▶ [Leveraging Stage Fright – Going from Fears to Cheers](#)