

Go for the APPLAUSE



The key to making powerful presentations look like a breeze is preparing yourself completely in advance. Preparing well ahead of time can significantly reduce the chance of failure -- which is what most people fear in the first place. Follow the APPLAUSE guidelines will to plan an outstanding presentation.

Audience. Find out who will be in the audience. Target your presentation to the group to hold their attention and increase your credibility as a speaker. Use research, anecdotes, and terminology from their industry to establish a basis for rapport, help them relate to your message, and demonstrate that you have done your homework.

Plan. Spend time in advance organizing your material. Try dividing your speaking time into four sections. Use a 4-quadrant chart to outline the basic elements to be covered. Use the same principle to organize topic areas and flow. This will provide a logical progression for your listeners and make learning the material much easier.

Props. Visual aids provide useful reinforcement for listeners and are great cues for the speaker. One visual aid for each 10 minutes of speaking time is a good guideline for short presentations. Slides should contain simple, concise information that reinforce the speaker's comments. Avoid small type or charts that can't be read.

Lead. Guide the audience in a logical direction. Be sure each topic area makes a natural progression to the next and that you clarify these transitions for your listeners.

Accentuate. Highlight the main points. Listeners should be able to identify and recall the important sections of the speech quickly. Don't hesitate to repeat important points.

Useful. A practical message that is informative and relevant to the listener is important. All who listen to your presentation should feel as if you have had their individual needs and interests in mind.

Spontaneous. If you are clear about the message you want to leave and the direction you are headed, you will not be thrown off by questions or misplaced notes. Become familiar with blocks of your presentation rather than memorize it. Focus on moving naturally from point to point without reading your notes verbatim.

Evaluate. After each presentation, take time to identify what you learned, what went well, and what you would do differently the next time. Ask your colleagues to evaluate you for repetitive or distracting gestures and phrases. Then work on eliminating them one at a time with each presentation you do.