

Tips for Presenting to Adult Learners: How to Design for Learning

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Information adapted from: Garmston, R. J., & Wellman, B. M. (1992). How to make presentations that teach and transform. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Who are you?

From which position are you choosing to speak: (1) boss – stance based on positional authority; participants may listen to the position more than the presentation; (2) expert – share information and correct misinformation; most vulnerable to attack; (3) colleague – you are perceived by participants as one of them; remain open to discovering new information from participants; use words like “we” and “us;” (4) sister/brother – communicate concern and warmth; appeal to the family spirit of a working team; (5) novice – stance based on enthusiasm; admit to lacking a comprehensive background but well-informed about recent discoveries; freshness of approach can awaken the interest of your audience.

What are your intended outcomes?

What do you want your participants to carry away from your presentation? **A clear outcome is the single most important criteria to a successful presentation.**

It is important to distinguish between outcomes and objectives. An outcome represents an end point in a journey. Objectives represent stepping stones lead to your end point.

Outcomes must be attainable (within the amount of time the presenter has to work with the group) and observable (evidence that will indicate your degree of success).

Good presentation outcomes are always related to some larger purpose.

Critical questions guiding the construction of objectives: What do participants need to learn to reach an outcome? What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions are required?

Consider outcomes from a macro and micro perspective.

Macro Maps – What are your overall objectives?

Macro Map 1: Always speak to four audiences. Presenters should attend to the following groups: (1) those seeking facts, data, and references; (2) those wishing to relate the topic to themselves through interaction with colleagues; (3) those who wish to reason and explore; and, (4) those interested in adapting, modifying, and creating new ideas and procedures as a result of attending the presentation.

Macro Map 2: Leverage presentation time by choosing the most powerful levels of intervention. The levels, in ascending order of ability to produce powerful change, are (1) behaviors, (2) capabilities (mental strategies that guide behavior), (3) beliefs, and (4) identity.

Macro Map 3: Empower the audience. Perception shapes reality. Participants need to believe that they are capable of taking charge and producing results. Offer participants choices (e.g., who to partner with, where to sit, breaks, etc.); Use language that presupposes efficacy (e.g., “As you examine your strengths...”); Allow participants to shape the agenda to meet their training needs.

Choose an effective presentation framework

Each individual section of your presentation, as well as the overall organization should be simple, logical, and clear. Seven effective frameworks: (1) time sequence, (2) question-answer, (3) three ideas (focusing on the three most salient features of your topic), (4) startling statement/reasons – solutions (using a profound statement to establish a state of intense alertness), (5) problem-solution, (6) spatial order, (7) topical grouping (useful for large topics; divide overall topic into several subtopics and discuss each; framework is often used and less compelling than the other frameworks).

Scaffold your presentation

Scaffolding allows a presenter a way to think about the overall organization of the event. A generic presentation scaffold includes an (1) informal welcome (before the opening), (2) welcome and self-introduction, (3) overview of the topic (i.e., relevance, outcomes, present presentation framework), (4) major points (i.e., processing, mini-reviews, bridging), (5) summary, and an (6) evaluation.

How much content?

Content is not as important as the audience’s interaction with the content.

A logical progression of increased processing time exists as your outcomes move from the participants’ acquisition of knowledge to the development of their attitudes, skills, and commitment to applying knowledge.