



## 1.23

**PRESENTATIONS**

**At the completion of this fact sheet you will:**

- **Know how long and how much preparation to put into a presentation**
- **How many slides to use, what to use them for and what should be in them**
- **How to pitch your presentation to the audience**

**HOW LONG SHOULD A PRESENTATION BE?**

Experience shows that 20 minutes is good. Less seems insubstantial; more is boring. An hour is the maximum. You should give the audience a mental break at least every 20 minutes and wake them up. You can do this by getting them involved by asking questions, asking for a show of hands or getting them to offer an opinion. If you're asked to speak for longer than an hour, stop at least every hour and give your audience a break, force them to move around and if possible offer them coffee. This will wake them up and hopefully seed some conversation in the room and raise the level of interest in what you are talking about.

**HOW MUCH PREPARATION SHOULD I DO?**

For a new presentation a good rule of thumb is 30 – 45 minutes of preparation for every minute of presentation time. This will allow you to develop truly useful visuals. Start by putting points on what you would like to say on each slide, and then spend some time transforming those points into useful diagrams.

**ARE TECHNICAL TALKS INHERENTLY BORING?**

Many engineers, when faced with giving a talk, do so with a minimum of preparation - perhaps because they feel that the topic is so cut and dried that a straightforward recitation of the facts is sufficient. But it isn't. If your voice drones in a monotone, or your talk is dry, or the content lacks excitement or news or useful information, your audience will be bored. And you will lose them early on in the speech. Make your topic fascinating by digging for useful applications, immediate benefits, new developments, or little-known facts.

**HOW SHOULD YOU PACE YOUR VISUALS?**

As a general rule of thumb you should have one slide every 2 minutes. So for a 40 minute presentation you should only use 20 slides. Most people try to cram too much detail into their presentations and the slides go by before the audience can observe them. Cut down on the detail and have some back-up slides ready should any tricky questions arise.

**YOUR SLIDES ARE FOR THE AUDIENCE NOT YOU**

When composing your slides it is important to keep one fact in mind – the visuals are there to add clarity to your presentation and help the audience to better understand what you are talking about. The primary function of the slides is not to remind you what to say. Your slides should add to your presentation not mimic it. Unless you are on SBS your audience does not expect subtitles, so don't simply paraphrase your talk.

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### USE GRAPHICS AND DIAGRAMS WHERE POSSIBLE

Slides offer the perfect opportunity to use graphics and diagrams to get across your message in a different way. A large portion of your audience, especially engineers, will respond better to graphics and diagrams. It is unlikely that those people who don't understand it when they hear it will understand it when it is written in point form on the screen, so use diagrams and graphics to get your message across to those in the audience who think "visually".

### THE AUDIENCE CAN READ!

If you do have a definition or quotation to give the audience, it can often be useful to project it on a slide, pause and let the audience read it. If you read to the audience while it is on the screen, they will concentrate on making sure you read it correctly and not on meaning. This technique can often be useful in the middle of a presentation for getting attention, when you go silent the audience usually awakens and wants to know what is going on.

### KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

It cannot be stressed enough, if you want to keep your audience's attention you have to know what they want to hear. Too often speakers inject too much detail into their presentations, particularly at university presentations. Remember if you are giving a presentation to a wide audience they usually want to hear, the *what?* the *who?* the *why?* the *when?* and usually don't care much about the *how*. A narrow audience are usually very interested in the *how* and already have a good idea of the *who*, *when*, *what* and *why*.

### ARRIVE EARLY AND CHECK THE TECHNOLOGY

It seems obvious but people still have dramas with projectors and microphones, so turn up early and make sure it works – and try to have back up OHTs just in case.

### SET THE SCENE

At the beginning of every presentation always set the scene. Know your purpose. Always try to start with a motivation slide that says why you are giving the presentation. The amount of time you spend on background information depends on the audience. For a broad audience spend considerable time on it, it is usually more interesting and easier to understand. A narrow audience will know these details so you can afford to skim over it.

### THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

After setting the scene it is time to move onto the detail. This is the time when you will tend to lose your audience, and the time when you should ensure your explanations are clear and you use visual aids to your full advantage. You are better dealing with an issue properly and ensuring the audience understands what you are talking about than brushing over a number of different topics and risk losing the audience by confusing them. Once they tune out you have lost them for good. Establish a narrow theme and stick to it, you don't have to tell them everything you know on a particular topic.

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### DELIVERING YOUR PRESENTATION

Just a few obvious things to keep your audience attentive

1. maintain eye contact
2. speak loudly and vary your tone
3. use gestures
4. stick to the point
5. use your visuals to draw attention to what you are saying

### SUMMARISE

At the end of your presentation always summarise the key points you want the audience to take away and let them know where they can get more information if they want it. Remember some people are as apprehensive about asking questions as you might be about presenting.

### DEALING WITH QUESTIONS

Repeat the question – this ensures everyone in the audience has heard what was asked. It also gives you time to think about your response. After you answer the question check with the person who asked it if you have answered it to their satisfaction.

### DO A DRY RUN

Always practice your presentation. Preferably do a dry run with some of your close peers or colleagues. They will be able to give you feedback on areas where you can improve your presentation. A practice session with a few people will also serve to build your confidence.

### Summary

- A presentation should run between between 20 minutes and an hour.
- For a new presentation, you should spend approximately 30 minutes preparation for every minute you intend speaking.
- Don't use more than a slide every two minutes, and remember the slides are there to reinforce your message not to remind you what to say.
- Know your audience and pitch your presentation accordingly.
- Always make sure the audience knows why you are giving the presentation: Set the Scene.
- Summarise by giving the audience some take home points.

### References

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