



A Primer on Presentations



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Introduction to Presentations

What is a Presentation?

A presentation is a method used to communicate an idea by showing and/or telling. It is a way to present information to others, to teach and share what you know or have learned in a structured way.

Any time you learn something new and then show or tell another person about it, you are giving a presentation. Even when you are simply sharing something you already know, you can be giving a presentation. Presentations can vary in length and they can be given in a variety of settings.

Giving presentations is an important part of the 4-H experience. No matter what project area you are in, you can give a presentation. Every 4-H member is encouraged to give at least one presentation every year. You can also select presentations as a communications project.

Why should you give a Presentation?

All through your life, you will need to speak in front of others. Whether it's at school, at work, or at home, you will need to know how to ask for things, how to explain things, or how to speak persuasively enough to win the support of others. Speaking skills will help you in job interviews and allow you to give effective presentations to your peers.

In the career world, communication skills are critical. When professionals are asked which skills are most important to success, public speaking usually ranks number one. Unfortunately, speaking in front of others is something that makes many people feel uncomfortable. Giving presentations in 4-H can help you feel more at ease. With practice, public speaking is a skill almost everyone can learn. The earlier you start and the more you do, the easier it becomes. Each time you present, you will feel more at ease and more confident.

Giving a presentation adds variety to other 4-H projects. It can be a fun and interesting way for you to gain new knowledge and then share that knowledge with others. When you do the work to prepare a presentation and then teach others, you are more likely to remember the material.

Giving presentations in 4-H will teach you many skills that will help you later in life. You will gain self-confidence and poise. You will be able to identify major points and know how to emphasize them. Learning effective delivery techniques will help you develop a stage presence. In addition, you will develop all the following marketable skills:

- How to organize your thoughts in a logical manner
- How to find information and research a subject
- How to express yourself clearly and convincingly

- How to prepare visuals and use them to support what you say
- How to listen to the opinions of others and accept feedback
- How to teach others
- How to manage your time
- How to manage stress

Presenting is an activity that allows you to use your creative ability. Whether it's selecting a title, designing posters, or choosing your outfit, let the "inner you" show through!

Completing a presentation will not only give you a true feeling of accomplishment, but you will become a valuable leader to others. Other members often listen and learn better from youth than from an adult.

Where can you give Presentations?

There are many places you can give your presentation. Begin with small, known audiences such as your 4-H club. As you become more comfortable with speaking in front of others, you can progress to larger audiences and to people you don't know.

Perhaps you could share your presentation with other 4-H clubs, with other county 4-H programs, or at a county or state workshop. Schools are excellent places to give your presentation. You could give it in your classroom or to a parent/teacher group.

Speaking to groups outside of 4-H can be a great way to promote 4-H in the community. Service clubs such as Altrusa, Kiwanis, Lions, Zonta or Rotary are often happy to have you come and speak. Your topic may be one you could share with other youth organizations such as Scouts or Boys and Girls Club.

And, of course, there are presentation contests in which you may participate. Contests give you the opportunity to be evaluated and to receive feedback from a judge on what you can do to improve. Every contest will have its own rules, and it is important that you are familiar with these rules before you participate. Each contest's rules should address the following:

- Are there age divisions? In 4-H, this is usually junior, intermediate, and senior.
- What are the time limits (for ages and presentation type)? Junior time limits are usually shorter than intermediates or seniors; impromptu speeches are shorter than public speeches, and both are shorter than demonstrations or illustrated talks
- Are there any restrictions on the topic?
- Is help allowed in setting up?
- What is the definition of a team? (number of members, can ages be mixed?)
- What equipment will be supplied?
- Will there be a penalty for using notes?
- What happens if equipment malfunctions?
- What system of scoring/awards will be used?

In Oregon 4-H, there are three main opportunities for competitive presentations: your county contest, State Fair, and Spring Horse Classic. Before you present at your county, check your county contest rules. State Fair guidelines can be found in the State Fair Exhibitor Handbook and Spring Horse Classic rules in the SHC Presentation Contest Guidelines. State Fair and Spring Horse Classic materials may be found on the state 4-H website <http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu> or at your county extension office.

Types of Presentations for 4-H Competitions

There are many types of presentations, but most 4-H presentation contests use only these four:

- Demonstrations
- Illustrated Talks
- Public Speeches
- Impromptu Speeches

Remember to check the rules for the specific contest you will be entering as each contest will have slight variations.

Demonstrations

A demonstration puts words into action. With this type of presentation, you will **show** how to do something at the same time you **tell** how to do it. There is a finished product at the end. If you have given a successful demonstration, the audience should leave knowing how to do what you have demonstrated.

Examples of demonstrations are:

- How to braid hair
- How to clean tack
- How to sew on a button
- How to pot a plant
- How to groom a show calf

A demonstration is usually the easiest type of presentation to do. It often has a step-by-step process that makes planning and organizing simple. The hardest part may be to remember to keep talking while you are demonstrating or doing something. Try not to have long periods of silence.

If time doesn't permit you to complete each step, it's okay to skip some as long as you tell about them. You might make examples of some parts ahead of time to show each stage of the process. An example would be demonstrating how to make bread. You wouldn't have time to let dough rise or to bake it, but you could show how to make the dough and then have a sample of a completed loaf. You might even be able to show a sample of risen dough, started earlier, and demonstrate how to punch it down.

Illustrated Talks

An illustrated talk is a way to share information with the audience. The topic should be educational in nature, but it can be very basic.

No finished product is necessary, but visual aids must be used to help explain what is being said. Visual aids can include posters, slides, transparencies, models, or actual items.

Examples of illustrated talks are:

- Evolution of the horse using pictures of the various stages
- Nutritional requirements using charts and graphs
- Milking parlor requirements using a scale model
- Items in a first aid kit using samples of the items
- Tree identification using leaf/needle samples

Public Speeches

A public speech is just talking. No visual aids or props can be used. A speech can be informative or persuasive with the purpose to stimulate thought or present a point of view. Speeches should not simply entertain. They need to persuade the audience to agree with you, educate the audience, or get an emotional reaction from the audience. Speeches often have a personal tie-in, a way the topic relates to something that happened in your life.

A speech may be the most difficult type of presentation. It requires careful planning and effective delivery. Since no visual aids are allowed, gestures and voice variety are very important. There also needs to be a clear theme or thesis and understandable points to follow. A speech is not an effective way to teach a difficult concept.

Impromptu Speeches

As the name implies, impromptu speeches require the presenter to compose and deliver a speech with little previous preparation. Like public speeches, no visual aids are used unless the speaker is given an object to talk about.

Impromptu speeches require you to “think on your feet.” You need to be able to come up with ideas on the spur of the moment and quickly organize them in a logical manner. Acquiring the skill to express yourself quickly is extremely beneficial. You will encounter many situations where it will be helpful to be able to give input on the spot.

While younger members may have fun practicing impromptu speeches at a club meeting, contests are recommended for intermediates and seniors only. Examples of contest topics are:

- What is your favorite summer activity and why?
- If you could be any animal, what animal would you be and why?
- Should school uniforms be required? Why or why not?
- Draw an object from a bag and talk about its uses.

Team Presentations

Demonstrations and illustrated talks may be done as an individual or team. (Public speaking and impromptu speeches are for individuals only.) A team usually consists of two members of the same age division.

Team presentations are good when four hands are needed to demonstrate something or when it is hard to do the work and talk at the same time. First-time presenters often like to work as a team because they don't have to be in front of an audience by themselves. It can be comforting to have a friend up there with you.

When giving a team presentation, there needs to be a balance between the two team members. Both should talk equal amounts and/or demonstrate equal amounts. You should rotate between the speakers frequently without making it choppy. Shifts in speakers should seem natural. Don't change speakers in the middle of a thought or a process. You can use a change in speakers to show transitions in the talk. At the end, the members should take turns answering questions. After giving an answer, ask if your partner has anything to add.

In addition to speaking to the audience, there should be interaction between the team members. Asking each other questions is an easy way to do this. It's not good for one person to talk a long time and then the other to talk a long time. Approaching a team presentation as a conversation between two people is a good way to plan at least part of your talk.

Team presentations are a good way to learn teamwork and cooperation. You need to be aware, however, that it can be difficult to do a really good team presentation. They require a lot of planning and practice in order to flow smoothly. Also be aware that some topics lend themselves to a team presentation better than others. Be sure that the topic you have chosen is one that works for a team and wouldn't better be done by one person.

Parts of a Presentation

All types of presentations consist of three basic parts: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. In general, the introduction should be about 10-15% of your speaking time, the body around 75%, and the conclusion only 10%. The old adage is that in the introduction you tell them what you will tell them; in the body you tell them; and in the conclusion you tell them what you told them. Let's look at each part more in depth.

The Introduction

The introduction is the most important part of your presentation as it sets the tone for the entire presentation. Its primary purpose is to capture the attention of the audience, usually within the first 15 seconds. Make those first few words count!

There are many styles you can use to get the audience's attention. Here are just a few:

- Ask a question. (This is probably the easiest but least creative choice.)
- Share a fascinating fact or startling statistic.
- Quote someone.
- Share a personal story. (This is often good for speeches.)
- Show a completed product.
- Show an unusual object.
- State a problem.
- Wear a mask or costume.
- Sing, dance, or do a skit. (Be sure it doesn't last too long and don't be silly.)
- Enter in an unusual way such as popping up from behind the table.
- Demonstrate an action without speaking.

The best introductions are those that are creative and original, so use your imagination!

After this attention-getter, you need to introduce yourself, usually just with your name, your club, and your year in 4-H. If you are giving a team presentation, you may introduce each other or each of you can each introduce yourself. Sometimes, it may even work for one person to introduce both of you.

Finally, you need to state what your presentation will be about including the major points you will cover. In some cases you might want to include why you selected this topic or what you hope the audience will learn. And it's always nice if something in your introduction relates to your title.

It should be noted that these guidelines are suggestions only. You may speak in situations where someone else introduces you or your topic may lend itself to a different order. In such cases, adapt your introduction to fit the circumstance.

The introduction has to accomplish a lot, but it needs to be brief so that there is plenty of time for the main part of the presentation. An introduction over a minute or two is probably too long.

When your introduction is finished, you need to make a smooth transition into the body of your talk.

The Body

The body is the main part of your presentation. This is where you explain your topic and where all your information is presented. The organization of the body is critical because the audience needs to be able to follow what you are saying and/or doing.

A demonstration is the easiest to organize because you can simply go through the steps in order. The audience must know **what** is being done, **how** it's being done, and **why** it's being done.

Illustrated talks or speeches are usually organized by arranging major points and discussing them. You should limit these major points to three to five. If you have more than five, the audience can get lost or confused. If you have fewer than three, you probably don't have enough information or your topic is too simple or narrow.

Arrange your points in a logical order and then give information to support each point. Examples of ways to organize points are to number them (1, 2, 3...); put them in a time frame (past, present, future); use narration (tell a story from beginning to end); or present them as a problem-effect-solution (state a problem, describe its effect, then suggest ways to solve the problem).

No matter how you organize the body of your presentation, you must have clear transitions from point to point or step to step. There are many ways you can help the audience identify these transitions. Count on your fingers, step 1, step 2, etc. Use transition words such as then, next, finally, or one reason, another reason, or first, second, third. Pauses are a good way to emphasize transitions. Movement can also indicate a transition. Try changing your position in front of the audience or switching posters.

All information you present in the body of your presentation must be accurate and understandable. You need to offer enough information to cover your topic thoroughly while eliminating any unnecessary information.

The Conclusion

Your conclusion should be short and concise. It should summarize or highlight the main points you made or emphasize what the audience should have learned. Do not restate everything you said in the body and never introduce new information at this time.

A good conclusion ties together all the parts of your presentation. Try to include some sort of link to your introduction. Avoid false or multiple endings. End with a catchy phrase and leave the audience with a good impression.

After your conclusion, you need to state your sources of information. These could include books, magazine articles, or interviews with people. If you've used material from the Internet, don't state entire websites. Just give key search words.

Last, you need to ask for questions. Be sure that you repeat each question before you give an answer. Not only does this ensure everyone hears the question, but it gives you the chance to make sure you understood the question. If you get a question you can't answer, simply say you don't know. Never make up an answer or bluff. If possible, provide a resource where the answer could be found. It isn't practical to offer to look it up and get back to the person.

When there are no more questions, a simple "thank you" to finish is enough. Don't thank the judge for listening or various people for giving you help. If it's appropriate, you can invite the audience to sample or inspect your final product or items you used. You could also pass out copies of recipes, a list of websites, or other handouts.

Steps in Planning a Presentation

In general, there are seven steps in planning a presentation:

1. Choose your topic
2. Determine your purpose
3. Gather information
4. Develop an outline or write your speech
5. Select visual aids
6. Choose a title
7. Practice

Depending on the type of presentation you are doing, you may do some or all of these steps. Speeches do not require visual aids, so you would skip step 5. If you are giving an Impromptu Speech, your topic will be given to you and you will essentially just have to quickly map out the outline of your speech. With all types of presentations, however, time spent planning and practicing will benefit you greatly.

Step 1: Choose Your Topic

Choosing a topic is the most important step in the presentation planning process. If you do not choose a subject you are interested in and will enjoy, you will likely not do a good job. Your personal curiosity about a topic can give you energy to complete all the steps required to reach the finished product, and the audience will be able to sense your enthusiasm when you give your talk.

The list of topics you can choose from is endless. You can select something that relates to your 4-H project area, but even that is not necessary. The only requirement is that you choose a new topic each year. Keep in mind that topics should be age-appropriate and in good taste. Advocacy of political or religious views is not recommended.

Choose a topic that fits your knowledge and skill level. If it's your first time giving a presentation, it is probably best if you pick a topic with which you are familiar. That way, you can spend more time working on "how" you present instead of worrying about the content of "what" you present. You will feel more comfortable in front of an audience and will have an easier time answering questions. If you are an experienced presenter, challenge yourself. Explore a new area or try a different type of presentation. Use this as an opportunity to grow and learn.

The subject of your presentation doesn't have to be controversial or earth-shattering. If you decide on an old tried-and-true topic, try presenting it in an original way. Or you can take an everyday topic and find new information to share about it.

The topic you select should be neither too broad nor too narrow. If your topic is too broad, you won't have enough time to cover the subject adequately and your talk will end up being very superficial. On the other hand, if your topic is too narrow, you might not be able to find enough information to fill the required length of time. Focus on one principle theme or idea that has several supporting points or steps. As examples, "How to Cook" would be too broad of a topic while "How to Toss a Salad" may be too narrow. In between might be "How to Prepare and Toss a Salad."

If you are going to give a demonstration, ask yourself if there will be enough action to hold the audience's attention. For an illustrated talk, can you have enough visuals to maintain interest? In either case, if the answer is "no," maybe you should consider doing a public speech instead.

Depending on where and why you will be giving your presentation, you may need to consider your audience when selecting your topic. It might not be appropriate to talk about how to butcher a steer at a garden club meeting or demonstrate making brownies to a dieter's club. Think about how much your audience knows about the subject. Don't choose a topic so technical or advanced that they can't understand it. You will also need to consider the size of your audience, especially for demonstrations. How much will they be able to see of what you are doing?

If you are having trouble thinking of a topic, ask others for ideas. The final selection, however, should be yours. Just remember that subjects abound. Here are just a few ideas from a wide range of projects:

- How to make an apple pie
- Recommended equine vaccinations
- How to study for a test
- Giving fantastic birthday parties
- The Endangered Species Act
- Sheep tail-docking issues

Step 2: Determine Your Purpose

Now that you have decided what your presentation will be about, you need to decide what type of presentation you will give. You will also need to decide whether to do it by yourself or with a teammate.

How do you decide which type of presentation to do? You need to choose the most effective method for your topic. Look at the information you have and how you plan to communicate it. Ask yourself what the purpose of your presentation is and what response you want from the audience.

Do you want to teach the audience how to do something? Will you show actual steps in a process? Will you have a finished product to show? A demonstration will probably be the best choice.

Do you want to inform your audience about something? Will you need visuals to explain your topic? Are there issues that will limit your ability to show all steps in a process (such as space, time, power requirements, etc.)? In these cases, an illustrated talk might work better.

Do you want to persuade the audience that one way is better than another? Do you want to get a reaction from the audience or urge them to take action on some issue. Then a public speech is the way to go.

Step 3: Gather Information

Now it is time to do some research and gather information about your topic. This takes some time, so allow yourself at least a month for this step. You want to learn as much as possible about your subject. The more you know, the more confident you will feel when you are presenting and the easier it will be to answer questions. There is no substitute for being well-informed.

You can acquire information from several different sources. Sources can include:

- Books and/or magazines
- Extension publications and project books
- Experts/authorities on subject
- Your own experiences
- Teachers
- 4-H Leaders
- Other 4-H members
- Newspapers
- Reputable websites

Keep a list of all the sources you use. People like to know where your information came from, and you will need to cite your sources in your talk.

Information you gather needs to be current and accurate. Be sure you know the difference between fact and opinion. A fact is something that has been proven to be true. An opinion is something someone believes to be true but has not been proven. If you are using someone's opinion, try to find a second source to confirm it.

You will need to record the information you find. Making notecards is an efficient method for doing this. You can put different points or steps on different cards. This makes it very easy to rearrange them into a logical order. You can also take notes on a computer, collecting like information together. Some people cut apart rough drafts, rearrange the parts, and tape them back together in a logical order. Others cut and paste on the computer. Do what works best for you. The most important thing is to gather complete information and to know where your information comes from.

Step 4: Outline or Write

There are many ways of preparing what you will actually say in your presentation. Some people only use outlines; some use an outline but write out their introduction and conclusion; others prefer to write out their entire talk. You will need to experiment to determine what works best for you.

Whichever method you use, begin with forming an outline. List the important points you want to make and arrange them in a logical order. Under each main heading, list the details you need to cover. Include any materials or visual aids you will need. Outlines for the different types of presentations may look like these:

Demonstration

- I. Introduction
 - a. Opening/attention-getter
 - b. Introduce yourself
 - c. Preview of what you will demonstrate
- II. Body
 - a. Step 1 explain how to do each step and why you do it that way
 - b. Step 2
 - c. Step 3
 - d. Finished product
- III. Conclusion
 - a. summary of steps
 - b. catchy ending
 - c. cite sources

Illustrated Talk and Speeches

- I. Introduction
 - a. Opening/Attention-getter
 - b. Introduce yourself
 - c. Preview of what you plan to tell them

- II. Body
 - a. Main point 1
 - Support
 - Support
 - b. Main point 2
 - Support
 - Support
 - c. Main point 3
 - Support
 - Support
- III. Conclusion
 - a. summary of steps
 - b. catchy ending
 - c. cite sources

visual aids

Once you have an outline, you can begin work on planning your entire talk. Although it may sound odd, plan the body of your presentation first. Next write the conclusion and write the introduction last. You will find it easier to write an introduction if you know exactly what will be included, and you can tie everything together.

If you like to work from an outline, once it is complete you can begin talking through your presentation, trying various words and phrases. You might want to make notecards of major points or certain phrases you don't want to forget. You will need to go through your presentation many times until you can talk easily and everything flows together.

If you like to write out your entire presentation, work from your outline, and write more than you think you will need. It is better to have too much information as you can always cut out any excess later. When you are done writing, let it sit for a few days and then come back to edit it. When you are satisfied with what you have, start simplifying it onto notecards.

Use simple but colorful language. If you need to include complex or technical terms, be sure to explain them. Don't use slang. Include descriptive phrases that can help the audience visualize what you are saying. For example, instead of saying "100 yards," say "as long as a football field." Using transition words (next, finally, first, etc.) will greatly help the audience follow along and not get lost. (Avoid over-using the same transition word.)

Be sure when you are talking through your presentation that you think about more than just the words you are saying. In a demonstration, you need to plan how you will do the action required while you are talking. In an illustrated talk, you need to plan how and when visual aids will be used. In a speech, you must think about what gestures to use, how to vary your voice, and how you can use movement to emphasize points.

Practice your presentation using notecards, and keep working to cut down the number of notecards needed. If it helps, highlight important words or phrases so your eyes can find them quickly. Ideally, you will get to the point where you don't need any notecards at all. If you use notecards, be sure to number them to help keep them in proper order.

Don't memorize your entire presentation. You want to talk TO the audience, not AT the audience, sounding natural and not stilted. If you thoroughly know your material, you will not need to memorize. You will only need to learn the sequence of your talk. Not memorizing will allow you flexibility if something unexpected happens during your presentation, and you won't be lost if you accidentally forget a line. The only parts of your presentation you should probably memorize are the introduction and the conclusion. These are extremely important and you should know them well enough to never have to refer to notes during these times.

Step 5: Select your Visual Aids

Visual aids come in many forms: actual objects, posters, videos, charts, slides, overhead transparencies, etc. If you are giving a demonstration or an illustrated talk, you must have at least one visual aid. Remember, no visual aids are allowed for speeches.

Visual aids are used to enhance your presentation. They can add sparkle and help keep the audience's interest. They are often useful in explaining complex ideas. They can help the audience learn faster, understand better, and remember longer. As the saying goes, a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Visual aids can make the difference between an excellent and a mediocre presentation, but you must select your visual aids carefully and make sure you choose the best type for the job you want it to do.

Make sure your visual aid has a purpose, that it is truly needed. A visual should add something to the presentation and not just be there for "looks."

You also want to make sure your visual aid is easy to use or show. You don't want to be fumbling with complicated objects or have items that are too small for the audience to see. Your visual aids should fit smoothly into your presentation and help the audience follow along.

Remember that visual aids should not overpower your presentation but rather simply reinforce what you are saying. Too many visual aids can be distracting. Beware of turning your presentation into an audio-visual show. While good visual aids are crucial, the emphasis still needs to be on you as the presenter.

(Be sure to read the section on "Preparing and Using Visual Aids.")

Step 6: Choose a Title

After you have your presentation all planned out, it's time to think of a catchy title. The title is your first opportunity to capture the interest of the audience. It should make the audience want to hear your presentation and wonder what it is about. You want your title to suggest the topic without giving away the whole story.

Spend some time thinking about your title. Be creative and original. An effective title meets one or more of these criteria:

- It is short and to the point.
- It is descriptive.
- It is provocative.
- It is image-making.
- It is fun!

Here are some examples of turning bland titles into interesting titles.

Trail Riding Safety
Recipes for Bananas
Tortoises of the Galapagos Islands
Reintroduction of Wolves to Yellowstone
How to Give a Chicken a Bath

Happy Trails!
Let's Go Bananas!
Giants in a Small Land
The Pack is Back
A Bubble Bath for Buddy

If you are giving a demonstration or an illustrated talk, make a title poster. A public speech may have a title but will not have a poster. You generally will not have a title for an impromptu speech.

Step 7: Practice

No matter how much time you spend on all the other steps in planning a presentation, nothing takes the place of practicing. The more you practice, the more comfortable and confident you will be when giving your talk.

Practice does not mean memorizing. Instead, it means knowing your material so well that you can present it in your own words in a natural manner. You can begin practicing using notecards, but try to get to the point where you don't need them.

When you practice, you need to talk out loud, not just in your head. Get in the habit of using complete sentences. When giving your presentation, you don't want to trail off in the middle of a thought.

Practice the entire presentation at once. This will allow you to see if everything flows smoothly together, if you have enough information, and how long it takes. Try to anticipate questions that might be asked and practice answering them.

If you are giving a demonstration or illustrated talk, be sure you practice with all your visual aids. You need to be able to synchronize your actions with your words. Determine where you will place everything and what you will do with each item when you are done with it. Practicing with the actual visuals will ensure that you are able to use equipment or show items skillfully and that everything works properly.

If you can, practice in front of other people. Your family, friends, or 4-H leader are usually happy to listen. Ask them for feedback, and use their suggestions to improve. Try practicing in front of a mirror so you can see your facial expressions and gestures. Or have someone videotape you so you can evaluate yourself. It's also a good idea to practice in a variety of places so you feel comfortable in different settings.

Do a final practice shortly before you are scheduled to give your presentation. This way, everything will be fresh in your mind.

Even if you are giving an impromptu speech, it is important to practice. Mark Twain is credited with saying, "It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech." You may not have a topic and you won't have done the other preparation, but you can practice the technique. Have people give you topics at random and practice quickly determining your thesis and finding 2-3 supporting points. Then practice giving short speeches, making sure they have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

The Mechanics of Presenting

The effectiveness of a presentation depends as much on how you look and speak as on what you say. When you are practicing, try various techniques. Speak softly and then more loudly. Change from a slow pace to a faster one. See what works best for what you want to convey.

Every presenter is unique, and as you develop your skills, you will formulate a style that is effective and comfortable for you. Keep in mind, however, the common standards and practices detailed below.

Appearance

Before you even say anything, the audience will form an impression of you based on how you appear. You should be neat and clean. Your hair should be combed and not blocking your face. If you are cooking or using equipment, you may need to have your hair tied back. Hands and fingernails should be clean.

Dress comfortably. You want to be able to concentrate on what you are doing and saying, not be distracted by constricting clothes or uncomfortable shoes. Be sure there are no inappropriate logos or slogans on your clothing. Jewelry that jingles or dangles can get in the way or make distracting noise.

The way you dress can be a visual aid and support your theme. If you are giving a presentation on how to change the oil in a car, you might wear coveralls. Wearing a lab coat can enhance a talk on how to check a horse's vital signs. Your dress should always be appropriate for your subject. An apron is appropriate for a cooking demonstration but not for sewing. Boots are appropriate for a livestock speech but not for a talk on marathon running.

For maximum effect, match your dress with your visuals in color and design. This gives a pleasing look to the presentation and shows that you put time into planning. Team presenters look best when their appearance matches or complements each other.

Posture and Movement

Body language is extremely important. You say almost as much with your body as you do with your mouth! Your posture tells a lot about how comfortable and confident you feel giving your presentation, and how you move can have an impact on the success of your presentation.

Stand in a comfortable position. You should be erect, but not stiff, with your shoulders square. No slouching! Stand with your feet slightly apart (about shoulder-width) and flat on the floor. Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet, and try not to lock your knees. Let your

hands hang comfortably at your side unless you are using them to handle a visual or make a gesture.

Don't lean on the podium or table as this gives the audience the impression you are bored with your own talk. Be careful to not shift your weight from side to side or to rock back and forth. If you become tired standing, move one foot slightly forward or back. This will change your position without looking like swaying.

Try to have your back to the audience as little as possible, and be sure you are facing the audience when you are talking so they can hear you.

You can move and walk around, but don't pace. Switching from one side of the speaking area to the other can be a good way to show transitions. You can also move closer to the audience when you want to emphasize points. Try standing at a slight angle to the audience when what you are saying is supporting points. Then stand square with the audience for important, major points. You will be surprised at how these non-verbal cues help the audience connect.

In an illustrated talk, you should spend most of your time about halfway between the visual aids and the audience. Approach the visuals only when you actually use them. You want to minimize having the audience shift from viewing you to looking at the visual aids. With a demonstration, you will have less time to move away from what you are working on, but move toward the audience when you have a chance.

Eye contact

Eye contact is critical. It invites people into your presentation and makes a difference in how they react to you. Each person should feel like you are talking specifically to them.

The introduction and conclusion are the most important times to maintain eye contact. Make sure you have these parts down pat so you don't have to look at your notecards.

In a contest, don't just look at the judge. You should let your eyes travel from person to person and make contact with everyone in the audience. Try to look directly into their eyes and not over their heads. If you have a large audience, looking at the back third of the room will help you keep your head up. Be sure you don't end up staring at a fixed object.

If you are nervous, look for friendly faces and concentrate more on them. Practice moving your eyes in patterns. For small audiences, moving your eyes back and forth in a semi-circle works well. With large audiences, speakers often move their eyes in a figure eight pattern. As you advance and become more comfortable speaking in front of an audience, you can look for people's reactions to what you are saying and even make some adjustments to your talk.

Delivery

The delivery of your presentation should sound natural, not memorized or like writing. Show enthusiasm; if you are not excited about your subject, why should the audience be? Your delivery style should suit you. Be yourself. Don't imitate others. A distinct style that is all your own will make your presentation memorable.

Nothing puts an audience to sleep faster than listening to someone speak in a boring monotone. Use variation in your delivery. A change in the pitch, volume, or speed and the use of inflections will help maintain interest. To help emphasize main points, try pausing a few moments or change the volume of your speech.

You need to speak loudly enough for everyone in the audience to hear you, even those clear in the back of the room. Usually this means speaking a little louder than you would in normal conversation. Avoid the tendency to drop your voice at the end of sentences.

Most people tend to talk too fast when they are presenting. Make a conscious effort to slow down and make yourself pause, especially between sections of your talk or major points. Speak at a comfortable pace that people can follow. Everyone needs to be able to understand what you saying and have time to process it.

The diction you use is also important. Be sure to speak in complete sentences, using proper grammar and pronunciation. Enunciate clearly. Don't slur your words, and don't use slang. Avoid fillers such as "umm," "er," or "you know." A conversational tone using familiar words is best.

Facial Expressions and Gestures

Facial expressions and gestures can add greatly to your presentation. Expressions show feelings, determination, and confidence. Smiling puts the audience at ease and makes you look like you are enjoying what you are doing. Don't overdo the cheeriness, though; you should look serious if the subject is serious.

Gestures are movements of the body or limbs to emphasize an idea. Common gestures include pointing, shrugging your shoulders, or shaking your fist. Gestures can be very powerful, but they can also be distracting. Make sure they enhance your presentation, not detract from it. Don't overuse them. Gestures should appear to be spontaneous and look natural. If using gestures does not come naturally to you, don't use them. Trying to "act" when you are not comfortable with it usually doesn't work.

Poise

Something that is difficult to measure is poise or a sense of a stage presence. Poised presenters will enter and leave the speaking area with confidence. They will appear relaxed, prepared, and self-assured.

Poise is often assessed by how a presenter handles things that go wrong. Remember that problems or errors usually seem much worse to you than they do to the audience. When something unexpected happens, simply continue on. If possible, explain what happened and how it should have been. There is no need to apologize. Mistakes happen to everyone, so don't let them upset you. If you cope and move on, you will get high marks for poise.

Humor

Depending on the topic of your presentation, humor can be a great addition. Beware, however, of overdoing it. Remember the purpose of a presentation should not be solely to entertain; there should be some education involved as well.

Use of Notes

Ideally, you should have practiced your presentation enough that you won't need to use notes. Use them only if they are necessary. The less you use them, the better.

If you do need to use notes, it's best to use notecards, not full sheets of paper. Use a full sheet of paper only if you can fit everything on one sheet that you can lay on a table or podium.

The print on the notecards should be large enough for you to read it a quick glance. Try to limit your notecards to just main ideas and key words. You don't want to read your presentation.

You can hold the notecards in your hand or lay them on the podium or table. Don't try to hide them. If you are giving an illustrated talk or a demonstration, your visual aids can be your notes. A poster of the outline of your talk is a reminder to you of the order of your presentation and is also a help to the audience in following along.

Mannerisms to Avoid

A few common mannerisms are very distracting. Work hard to avoid these. They include:

- Jangling change or jewelry
- Playing with your hair
- Rocking back and forth
- Chewing gum

Preparing and Using Visual Aids

There are many types of visual aids. If you are giving a demonstration or an illustrated talk, you must have at least one visual aid. (No visual aids are allowed for speeches.) Following are some of the commonly used visuals:

posters	charts
PowerPoint slides	models
pictures/photos	dry erase boards
overhead transparencies	articles made
equipment	animals
movie clips	audio clips

You will need to choose the visual aid that will work best for the purpose you have in mind. For additional information on choosing visuals, read the section “Select Your Visual Aids” in the handout “Steps in Planning a Presentation.”

It is important to know details of the location where you will be giving your presentation. Be sure you know what equipment/supplies they will have available and what you will need to bring yourself. The size of the room, the lighting options, the noise level, etc. may all have an impact on your selection of visual aids.

Whatever types of visual aids you choose, be sure you practice using them ahead of time. During your presentation, you should be able to use every visual smoothly and with confidence.

If you have a lot of visual aids, you might want to make a list of everything you need before hand. Then you can check each item off as you pack it to take with you.

A common error is using an educational display as a presentation visual aid. Educational displays are meant to stand on their own without verbal explanation. The writing and pictures are too small to be of use to an audience during a presentation.

Setting Up Your Visual Aids

Set up all your visual aids yourself unless you need help with large or heavy objects. If you have a lot of visual aids, sometimes in the interest of time you can have other people help you carry things in, but you should arrange them.

How you place your visual aids is important. Be sure the audience can see everything and that none of your visuals block the audience’s view of you. Place taller items in the back and arrange

items in the order you will use them. Having movement flow from the audience's left to right can help them follow along.

All of your visual aids should be within easy reach and convenient to use. Avoid clutter. Have only what you will actually need.

Plan the order of your presentation so that you don't have to turn lights on and off multiple times. It always takes some time for eyes to adjust to changes in lighting.

If you have any equipment, check to make sure it is working properly before you begin your talk. If you are borrowing equipment, know how to use it.

Using Your Visual Aids

Even when you are using a visual aid, it is important that you talk to the audience. Don't talk to your visual. Stand beside or behind your visual aid, never between it and the audience. Try to not spend too much time with one visual or the audience will lose interest.

As much as possible, have only what you are using in view or as the center of interest. Plan what to do with a visual when you are finished with it. Generally, you do not want to throw things on the floor or toss them in a heap on a table. Set them aside neatly. In some cases you may need a garbage bag to put items in (try taping it to the back of the table). If you have a title board with an outline of presentation, it can be helpful to the audience to have that in view the entire time.

If you have multiple posters, stack them in order on an easel. When you are finished with one, place it back on the easel behind the other posters instead of setting it on the floor or on a table. The audience will find this less distracting, your posters will stay clean, and the posters will remain in the proper order should you need to refer to them when answering questions.

If you must use noisy equipment during your talk (a blender, sander, etc.), don't talk while the equipment is running. You don't want to have to shout to make yourself heard. Explain what you are doing before and after, and try to not have the equipment running too long.

Do not pass things around while you are presenting. You want the audience to stay focused on you, not some object they are looking at. If there is something you would really like the audience to see up close, invite them to come up at the end.

Guidelines for Specific Visual Aids

Posters, Charts (and variations)

Posters may be the most commonly used visual aid as they are relatively inexpensive and easy to make. You can do them completely by hand or you can use a computer. The important thing is that you do them yourself. This should be a learning experience for you, not your parents or leader. Be sure you look them over carefully when you are done. You don't want any spelling errors, words left out, or photos mislabeled.

Make sure your poster has a purpose. Here are some times a poster is useful:

- Every demonstration or illustrated talk should have a title poster.
- An outline of your talk will help you remember what comes next and lessen your use of notecards. It will also help the audience follow along.
- All kinds of charts and graphs are easy to do as a poster.
- Bulleted lists (of main points, steps in a process, etc.) make good posters.
- Diagrams are useful as posters. These could be of buildings, rooms, farms, etc.

Each poster should have one main idea. It is better to use two or three posters than to try to cram too much information on to one. Keep posters simple, not "busy." Be sure to leave space around the edges so they don't look crowded. You might use the front and back of a poster so you don't have so many to carry around.

When making posters, be original and creative. Posters don't have to be just text written on paper. For variety, add photos or something with texture. Feltboards with velcro objects you can add or move around can be effective.

The design of a poster has a huge impact on its effectiveness. Whether you are making your posters by hand or using a computer, they can look professional if you follow these basic guidelines:

Size

Anything on your posters needs to be large enough for the audience to see. Text should be readable from the back of the room. This requires lettering 1½ to 2 inches high. Photos may need to be enlarged. Small artwork that is barely visible is not useful. Check your posters yourself ahead of time. Stand where the audience would be and see if everything on your poster is readable or visible.

Text

Keep text short. Don't write entire sentences. Instead, list only points or concepts and then explain these with your words. Bullets often work well. Audiences are easily bored if you have too much writing and then just read off of your poster.

Writing can be done by hand, with stencils, or on a computer. If you write by hand, use light pencil marks to guide you so your lines are straight. The pencil marks can later be erased. If you use stencils, it is best to fill the letters in or they are hard to read. If you write your text on a computer, cut out the words or lines neatly and align them correctly on the poster.

Use a lettering style or font that is easy to read and that fits your topic. Ornate fonts are usually not very effective. Be sure you don't use too many different fonts on one poster. Generally, one or two different styles are all you need.

Capital letters are usually more difficult to read than lower case ones. Use capitals only when needed or for special emphasis. Boldface type, italics, and underlining can also be used for emphasis, but again, don't overuse them.

Color

The use of color is extremely important. Color can create a mood, it can match your topic, and it can help tie all of your presentation together. It can be used to highlight major points or to help organize your information.

Don't overuse color; two to three colors per poster generally works best. You will need to experiment until you find a combination of colors that works well for what you are attempting to present. It is best to choose one color of posterboard to use for all your posters. This creates a professional look and unites all your visual aids together.

Make sure the colors you select are readable. Use dark colors on light backgrounds and light colors on dark backgrounds. Good posterboard colors are white, green, blue and gray. Bright yellow, red or orange may be hard to look at for very long although they can be used for special effects. Try to use one dominant color and have a contrast between light and dark colors. Avoid using red and green together as this is difficult for color blind people to see.

Borders

Borders visually force your audience to focus on the text on the poster by acting as a barrier. This barrier stops the audience's eyes from wandering off the paper. Borders can be as simple as a straight black line drawn around the perimeter of the posterboard. They can be more elaborate as long as they do not distract from the content. Decorating the four corners can be an effective border.

Assembly

Create your posters on paper that is heavy enough that it will not bend or buckle. You don't want your poster to fall over in the middle of your talk. Foamboard is a little more expensive than posterboard, but it works well. If you put posterboard on top of foamboard, it strengthens the posterboard, and you can reuse the foamboard many times.

Backing or matting your photos and artwork will give a finished, professional look to your posters. Again, don't use too many colors and make sure everything is cut out neatly.

Arrange all the pieces on your poster in a pleasing design. Using the same design pattern on all of your posters will help the audience follow along. Generally, working from the top to the bottom and left to right works best.

Leave space separating various sections to make it easy for the audience to focus on the item you want. It's good to have about 1/3 of the poster blank. This is visually pleasing to the audience and won't cause eye strain.

Be sure you glue everything down securely. Loose edges look sloppy and decrease the life of your posters. It's a good idea to carry a glue stick with you for last minute repairs before you give your presentation.

Equipment

Select the best possible piece of equipment for the job you need to do. Be sure that your equipment is safe and that you demonstrate correct methods of using it. You must know how to use everything properly and practice ahead of time so there are no surprises.

Before you begin your presentation, make sure all equipment is in good working order. Everything should be neat and clean and safe. If you have jars, bottles, or cans, loosen the tops before you start so that you can open them easily while you are talking. To lessen noise, put down a cloth or paper towels you can set things on when you are finished with them.

If you have equipment that needs electricity, check ahead of time that outlets are available. It's a good idea to take extension cords and spare batteries or bulbs with you. Make sure cords are placed where you won't trip over them.

When using electrical equipment, there is always a chance it can fail. It's wise to have a backup plan just in case things go wrong.

Articles Made

With a demonstration of "how to do" something, having a finished product to show the audience is always advisable. You may also need to bring the article at various stages of completion. This is helpful if time does not permit you to completely demonstrate each step. These samples can also prove useful if you run into problems while demonstrating.

Foods

If you are working with food in your presentation, it is critical that you follow proper procedures for health and safety, especially if you will offer samples to the audience. Keep hot things hot and cold things cold. This may require you to have a heated dish or ice. Perishable ingredients could be brought and kept in an ice chest. Tie up long hair and wear an apron and close-toed shoes.

Your hands, all materials you use, and your work surface must be kept clean. While setting up your presentation, clean the work surface with kitchen antibacterial wipes. Laying out wax paper to mix and measure over will make clean up easy. Have towels or sponges handy to wipe up spills, and tape a sack to the table for garbage. Place a tray or bin nearby to collect utensils that have been used.

Put a towel or mat under bowls and pans to lessen the noise. If there is no mirror over the table, be sure to tip containers so that the audience can see what you have. When needed, demonstrate proper measuring, mixing, or other techniques.

If the product cannot be made from start to finish during the time allowed for the presentation, bring samples that are done at various stages and be sure to thoroughly explain the in-between steps to the audience.

During your demonstration, it is nice to have the recipe on a poster for the audience to see. You might provide your audience with copies of the recipe at the end of your presentation. This will allow them to enjoy watching you prepare your food without having to write down all of the ingredients and instructions.

If you are going to offer samples to your audience, bring all items needed to serve the food to the audience. In a contest, only food made during the presentation can be served to the audience. The judge must have observed each preparation step to insure that proper food safety and handling practices were followed.

Live Animals

Before you choose to use a live animal in your presentation, ask yourself if it is really needed. Don't just have it there to "look cute." Animals are not completely dependable, and your nervousness can make them nervous. They can present a safety concern (especially large animals and dogs) and they can be distracting to the audience.

On the other hand, an animal can add great interest to a presentation. Sometimes having an actual animal present is the best way to get the audience to understand what you are attempting to teach.

Be sure to notify contest officials if you will be using a live animal. Special arrangements may be needed to accommodate large animals. Keep animals a safe distance from the audience. Be aware that you may not be allowed to use live animals in all contests.

If you decide to use a live animal, know that you are responsible for your animal the entire time it is on site. Practice safety at all times. Make sure the entire audience can see what you are doing, but do not let strangers handle your animal. If possible, take the animal to the presentation area ahead of time to let it get used to the place. Practice with your animal around people until it is comfortable. Anticipate problems that might arise (barking, urinating, etc.) and be ready to handle them.

Whenever possible, hold your animal or its lead yourself. Your animal will be more comfortable around you, and you will be better able to control it should it decide to act up. If you must use another person as a handler, instruct them not to talk or draw attention to themselves during the presentation, and make sure they, too, are dressed appropriately. You do not need to introduce them or thank them during your presentation. In fact, this detracts from your presentation by breaking the flow of your talk. Thank them privately after the presentation is over.

Bring out your animal only when you are ready to work with it. If you need to use other visual aids to teach, do these first. Once an animal becomes part of a presentation, what the speaker says is dwarfed by what the animal does. Present the majority of your information while you have your audience's attention.

If you are placing an animal on a table, provide a carpet sample or towel for it to stand on. You must also keep your hands on the animal at all times to make sure it doesn't fall off the table and injure itself. At the end of your presentation, you should use an anti-bacterial wipe to clean the table.

Models

Models can be useful when you want to show something that is too large to bring in or that is too small to be seen. They can also be used to replace live animals.

Models should be well-constructed, neat, and accurate. They need to be large enough to be seen by the entire audience.

Handouts

Handouts should be distributed only when you are done with your presentation. Otherwise they are too distracting. People will be looking at the handout instead of listening to you.

Handouts are not necessary, but they can be useful. If you have prepared a food dish, giving out the recipe is a nice touch. If you've given a demonstration on how to make an item, the audience might enjoy a list of the steps involved. And if you have a lot of references, a list of these could be helpful.

If you decide to distribute a handout, be sure they are neatly made and accurate. Bring enough for everyone.

Overhead Transparencies

Overhead transparencies are good for bulleted lists or steps of a process that you want to reveal one line at a time. They also work well for overlays or when you want to write or draw as you talk. When making overheads, follow many of the design guidelines of a poster (size, text, color).

Be sure you know how to use the projector before you begin your talk. In particular, know how to place the transparency so that it is not backwards or upside down, and know how to focus the machine. It's also a good idea to know how to change the bulb. During your talk is not the time to figure these things out.

Two drawbacks to using transparencies are that you usually have to have the lights off and the projector can be noisy. People need to be able to see you during your presentation, so you don't want the lights off for your entire talk. And you don't want to have to shout over the noise of the projector.

Audio or Visual Clips

When used properly, an audio clip or bit of video can greatly enhance a presentation. Remember, however, that these need to be short. The main focus is on you, and you need to be the one doing the majority of the talking and demonstrating.

Before you begin your presentation, have the tape, DVD, record, etc. set at the correct spot. The audience doesn't want to hear or see extra material, and you don't want to lose their focus as you fumble to get the right bit to play.

The biggest problem with using video clips is getting the equipment there to view them. TV's are heavy and awkward to transport. Computers may not work, especially if you are trying to use your flashdrive with someone else's computer.

Any audio or visual clips you use during your presentation must be controlled by you. You cannot have any one else handle them.

PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint is a presentation computer program that is widely used in schools and businesses. It consists of a series of “slides,” which are individual pages that you design. Just as with posters, it is important that you do the preparation work yourself. Also like posters, the design of the slides has a big impact on their effectiveness.

In general, keep your slides simple. Don’t overload them with too much writing or too many pictures. Leave margins around all the edges, and leave an extra-wide margin at the bottom of the slide. This is the area the audience is the least likely to be able to see.

Use a pale, cool tone rather than white for the background. Remember that colors appear lighter when projected, and white is hard on the eyes. A consistent background can help bring unity to your presentation. Sometimes you may want to change backgrounds with different sections of your talk. Be sure you don’t use a background that distracts from the information on the slide.

Putting too much text on a slide is the most common mistake. Use only key words and phrases. Do not write out full sentences and then read them. The audience should be listening to you and looking at you, not just reading your slides. The only time you should write out full text is if you have a slide of a quotation. As much as possible, use slides of pictures or charts instead of text.

Lettering on the slides needs to be large enough to be read from the back of the room. Depending on the font, this usually means 28-34 in size. It also helps to make the lettering bold. Don’t use too many fonts on one slide and make sure the font can be easily read.

Use color for emphasis, but don’t use too many colors on one slide. Contrast is good. Use light on a darker background or dark on a light background.

PowerPoint has all sorts of special-effect features for moving blocks of information on and off of the slides. Do not over-use these. Too many transition effects can be not only distracting but annoying as well. Also, don’t switch slides too quickly. Each slide should be projected for a minimum of 30 seconds.

When you have prepared all your slides, be sure you proof them. You don’t want any errors in spelling or labeling in the final product.

PowerPoint can be used to great effect when giving a presentation, but you must be aware of its limitations. Any time you are using a computer program to present, it’s best if you have your own equipment. Too often, the format or device you use to save your slides won’t work on another machine. If you have to use someone else’s equipment, you should always have a back up plan in case it doesn’t work. Have a set of transparencies or posters with you just in case.

Another drawback is that a PowerPoint presentation can sometimes overpower you as the speaker. Especially in a contest, you need to be the focal point since you are the one being evaluated. Try to leave the room lights on so the audience can see you. Use a remote so you don't have to just stand by the projector but can move around and interact with the audience. A laser pointer can be helpful to point out specific items on a slide. Most important, don't over-use the PowerPoint. You are the critical part of a presentation, not the computer program.

Top Ten Tips for a Successful Presentation

1. Start planning early. It takes time to prepare a good presentation. Don't wait until the last minute.
2. Use a timeline. Mark when you should have each step of your preparation done. Build in some time for problems that might arise.
3. Make sure you know how to use all equipment and visual aids. And be sure you check with the event coordinator to see if equipment is available or if you have to bring your own.
4. Practice, practice, practice! This can't be stressed enough. The more you practice, the more at ease you will be when you give your presentation.
5. Get plenty of rest the night before you give your presentation. You won't be able to give your best effort if you are tired.
6. Check all your material before you leave home. It's no fun to arrive at a contest and find that one of your posters is missing or that one of your containers is leftover spaghetti and not the butter you thought it was.
7. Be careful what you eat and drink before you give your presentation. Eat light and don't drink carbonated beverages. Take a bottle of water you can sip from to relieve a dry throat.
8. Arrive early. You'll want time to check out the facilities and determine how you will set up without feeling rushed. At a contest, check in with the office or chair, but only talk to the judge when it your turn or appointment time.
9. Learn a stress-reducing routine. Try deep breathing or a quick, brisk exercise. Shake out your body and get loose. Relax your neck, shoulders, and facial muscles. Clench and unclench your hands.
10. Realize that it is normal to get nervous and have some butterflies before and during your presentation. Even experienced speakers do. A bit of nervousness can be a good thing. Being a bit "on edge" can give a spark to your performance and it shows that you care.

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