

## Guidelines for Public Speaking and Presentations

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- ❖ Often a good presentation answers the questions **what, why, how, when, where, and who**, though all of these may not always be appropriate, depending on the situation.
- ❖ **Scan the audience while you speak**, making **eye contact** with a variety of people in all parts of the room. If this is too hard, find a few nice faces in different parts of the room and make regular eye contact with them. Be sure that you don't just look at the teacher or moderator.
- ❖ **Bring something to drink** in case your mouth gets dry.
- ❖ **Avoid reading your speech.** Few things are more boring than watching someone read an academic paper in front of a group. For that kind of old-fashioned lecture to succeed, the audience has to be naturally very interested, and the text of the speech has to be very compelling.
- ❖ After you've said what you want to say, **ask for questions**.
- ❖ After you ask for questions, **say *thank you very much*** at the end. Why?
  - It's polite.
  - It cues the audience to applaud.**Do not** end your speech with "that's it" or "that's all I had to say."
- ❖ If you're going to have your hands free, **bring a notebook, book or clipboard** to hold. This will keep your hands occupied and you won't have to worry about where to put them. If you don't have anything to hold, don't try to stuff your hands into tight pants pockets.
- ❖ **Speak loudly enough so that everyone can hear you.** Don't let your voice trail off into a whisper at the end of sentences.
- ❖ Plan your presentation so that the amount you spend **writing on the board** is limited. Writing on the board usually just takes up time, and it's boring to sit in the audience while someone writes a lot of information on the board. It's always better to **prepare an overhead transparency** ahead of time if you have a lot of text or pictures you want to show.
- ❖ Unless you're sure your voice is loud and clear enough to be understood even when you're facing away from the audience, **avoid speaking while your body is turned toward the board or the projector screen**.
- ❖ If you're using **transparencies**, turn around to make sure they're projecting onto the screen correctly.
- ❖ If you're nervous, avoid pointing to the overhead transparency itself; instead, use a pointer to point to the screen onto which the transparency is being projected. Pointing to the transparency means making your hand appear vastly enlarged on the screen behind you, so if your hand is shaking at all, everyone in the room will notice . . . except for you.
- ❖ **Be open to people's wanting to ask questions during your presentation.** Unless there's a national emergency and you're telling people how to save lives, or you're speaking in front of several hundred people at a formal conference, rest assured that you can handle

the occasional question from an interested listener. Telling people to hold their question until the end signals that what you have to say is much too important to be interrupted; it also signals that you'd rather be the exclusive purveyor of information, rather than have an active exchange of ideas. (Both of those are bad things.) How many times have *you* attended a lecture or presentation so important that it couldn't stand the occasional query?

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## How to Be a Good Audience Member

- ❖ **Pay attention.** Even if you aren't really listening, at least look at the person speaking. Only look away constantly if it's your intention to show disrespect—because that's what you'll be doing. Of course it's okay to look away if you're just taking notes.
- ❖ **Be quiet.** When someone is speaking, it's not okay for audience members to speak so loudly that others can hear (and be distracted). If you have to say something to your neighbor, whisper into their ear or write them a note.
- ❖ **Ask questions!** Nothing shows interest and engagement like a question or comment.