

## **Presentations: Tools and Tips**

**By Ann Riedling**

I have been honored to speak to numerous school library media specialists—and others—all over the world. I have presented at many conferences locally, nationally and internationally. Some of the most exciting international conferences where I have been a presenter include: the International Association of School Librarians (IASL) in Ramat Gan, Israel, European private school media specialists conference in Waterloo, Belgium, and at a conference for Department of Defense Education personnel in Asia (Tokyo, Japan) and Europe (Wiesbaden, Germany).



Presenting at international conferences can be unforgettable in numerous ways—the people, the discussions about any and everything related to librarianship, the extremely large audiences, the travel and much, much more. Scary, yes, at first, however, with the proper “tools and tips” presenting can be an extremely rewarding and fulfilling experience. I hope to provide you with a wide variety of tools and tips so that you will become a confident, organized and inspiring speaker, regardless of the audience or number of participants.

### ***Your Plan of Action***

It is always helpful for me to begin with a specific plan—on paper (seeing it in black and white makes it clearer). For me, this plan includes the following areas:

- Introduction (snappy!)
- Point one (with sub points)
- Point two (with sub points)
- Point three (with sub points)—I think you are getting the picture
- Conclusion and review of major points

Another simple and direct format is the simple beginning-middle-end format in which the “main meat” of the presentation is contained in the middle and is preceded by an introduction and followed up by a summary and conclusion. Also, prior to the talk, ask yourself the following:

- What is the purpose of the presentation?
- Who will be attending?
- What does the audience already know about the topic?
- What is the audience’s attitude towards you?

I cannot overestimate the importance of careful preparation. With a lot at stake, you must concentrate not only on the information being presented, but on the style, pace, tone and tactics that should be used. As a general rule, you should spend one hour or more for every five minutes of talking. In addition to the plans above, there are other considerations. First, you must formulate precise objectives. These should take the form of simple and concise statements of intent.

Bottom line, if you are not sure at the onset what you are trying to say, it is extremely unlikely that your audience will either. Focus is key! However, the single most important observation is that the objective of any presentation is not the transmission, but the reception. Your talk must be geared to the audience. Your message must be understood and remembered. The average person

has a very short attention span and a million other things to think about. You must hold their attention long enough to make your points perfectly clear.

I have found that if you lose your audience in the first two minutes of your speech, you have lost them for good. Therefore, spend time—a great deal of it—on your introduction. Who is your audience? What do they want to hear from you? Your job is to do something, anything, which captures their attention and make a lasting impression upon them. Your opening remarks imply that you understand the problem/situation/ issue and that you have a “solution;” your audience will be flattered at your attention and attentive to your every word.

The following are areas that I consider when beginning my speech:

- **Get Their Attention:** Pay attention to what your audience is doing. Are they taking off their coats or getting a cup of coffee? Wait until they are settled and ready to listen.
- **Establish a Theme:** You must start the audience thinking about the subject of your presentation. Provide a statement of your main objective. Your audience will have some experience or opinions on this and at the beginning you must make them bring that experience into their own minds.
- **Present a Structure:** If you briefly explain at the beginning of your talk how it will proceed, then the audience will know what to expect. Ultimately, it provides a sense of security and the promise that this speech, too, will end!
- **Create a Rapport:** You should plan exactly how you wish to appear to your audience and use the beginning to establish that relationship. Whatever role you choose must be established at the very beginning.
- **Ending:** The final impression you make is the one that the audience will remember. Thus, it is worth planning your last few sentences with extreme care.

### **Visual Aids**

Most people expect visual reinforcement for any message being delivered. However, there are a few rules that should be followed to ensure they are used effectively. As with all elements of your talk, each visual should have a distinct purpose. Some visuals reinforce your verbal message and assist in recall; others are used to explain or inform, which can be more easily displayed than discussed; some visuals are simply for entertainment and used to pace the presentation.

Keep your visuals simple and professional. All items must be large enough to be viewed by the people in the last rows. Finally, do not merely reiterate exactly what is on the visual and talk to the audience, not the visual aid.

### **Delivery**

Whatever you say and whatever you show, it is you that will remain the focus of the audience’s attention. You have the power to both kill the message or to enhance it to a hundred times its worth. The following deserve attention when presenting:

- **Eyes:** During your presentation use the duration and intensity of eye contact to enhance your rapport with the audience. If possible, attempt to look at all participants; try to hold

your gaze for five seconds at a time. Shortly after each change in position, a slight smile will convince each person that they are acknowledged and that you are ready to begin once again.

- **Voice:** In an ordinary conversation, you can see from the expression, movement of the eyes, and so forth when something has been missed or misunderstood. In front of an audience, you must make sure that this never happens. The simple advice is to slow down and take your time. It is also important to vary the pitch and speed of your presentation.
- **Expression:** The audience will watch your face. If you are smiling, people will wonder why and listen to find out! This message is quite simple, make certain that your facial expressions are natural, confident and happy.
- **Appearance:** Your choice of dress should be deliberately made. It is critical to dress for the audience, not for yourself. If they think you look out of place, then you are.
- **Stance:** When presenting, your stance and posture will convey a great deal about you. Do not allow your stance and posture convey boredom or indifference. Use your entire body as a dynamic tool to reinforce your rapport with the audience.

There is no substitute for rehearsal. You can do it in front of a mirror or to an empty room. Accentuate your gestures and vocal projection.