

### During the session

#### Open and close with a bang!

The introduction and conclusion to your session should be chosen with great care, as the former is essential to grab your audience's attention, and the latter is important to leave participants feeling pleased and satisfied with what they have heard.

For the first five minutes the learners' attention will be at a high level, so do not disappoint them: state your aim clearly and convince them that the rest will be worth listening to. Their sympathy will be with you, hoping for your sake (as well as theirs) that you are about to deliver a valuable session, and that they will not be wasting their time.

In the last five minutes, participants will need some clear summaries of what you have said, and a skilful lead-up to the questions they should ask (i.e.: the ones for which you have carefully prepared answers!).

Some trainers suggest the following as a neat little summary of effective presentation technique:

- tell them what you are going to tell them;
- tell them; then
- tell them what you have just told them!

#### Delivery

No single delivery style is appropriate for all trainers, but the following hints will assist you in optimising the effectiveness of your presentations:

- Speak slowly and distinctly. It is quite common for people to speak more quickly and softly than usual if they are feeling nervous or are unused to public speaking. Make a conscious effort to project your voice (without shouting!) and form your words clearly.
- Make eye contact with learners to give the impression of a personal relationship, and to make sure they are not going to sleep! In this regard, make sure the room is well ventilated, and give the audience a chance to move and cough occasionally .... if this breaks the flow, use a confident tone to attract attention and get them back on track again.
- Keep track of time
  - use your watch or a clock in the room;
  - note time portions in your script (eg: 5 minute intervals);
  - have someone in the audience indicate subtly when there are 5 minutes to go

Whatever the system, you do not want to waste your preparation efforts by cutting out important points or by seeming odd because you suddenly treble your rate of delivery - or perhaps even more odd by suddenly talking very slowly in order to 'pad out' the remaining time.

- Use variety to keep participants awake and concentrating. Adults cannot concentrate for more than 20 minutes unless they are very motivated, so:
  - change your voice, volume and tone;
  - use hand and body movements to emphasise points (within reason);
  - show visuals;
  - ask for audience participation.



**Tip:** Bear in mind the four key activities of listening, reading, writing and speaking. If you can involve your audience in all four activities at some stage, their interest and retention rates will be much higher.

### Questions and Answers

Be courteous, concise and careful. Many people will be too nervous to ask questions, so encourage them; others may be afraid of making fools of themselves by asking stupid questions - so answer everything pleasantly and encouragingly (e.g.: *That's a very interesting question ... / That's a really important point.....*). You may wish to refer particular questions to other participants who have the knowledge or expertise to answer them appropriately.

Do not feel obliged to answer every question immediately or in depth. Politely set aside (note on the board or on your running sheet) all questions that:

- do not pertain directly to what is being taught currently
- will be covered at a later session
- would provide additional information and/or practical examples that are better dealt with in a different context

Acknowledge the validity of these questions and pick up any pertinent items as you move through the material. Ensure that all 'parked' questions have been addressed by the end of the session.

Don't be flustered by unexpected questions. Be prepared to take them on notice and respond at a later stage when you have established the correct answer, rather than pretending you know more than you do. In these situations, make a note of the question and explain how and when you will communicate the answer (eg: check during the break and advise at the beginning of the next session module; follow up after the session and email or call participants with results by the end of the day/week etc.). If you promise to get back to someone, ensure that you do so!

Do not put all your information into the presentation - '*save something for dessert!*'

If there are questions at the end, you will not be stumped for answers; if there are no questions, you can add some extra information and thus avoid the embarrassment of a pregnant silence - *Are there any questions? .....* !



**Tip:** Some speakers have been known to plant questioners in the audience - it saves the embarrassment of fielding either no questions or questions you cannot answer! It also helps to get the Q & A session off the ground and then bring the session to a natural close.

### Overcoming barriers

Potential barriers to learning may be minimised if you consider the following points:

- preparation - consider your choice of language and resources, and identify the best approach for conveying specific information
- feedback - formulate a method of positive feedback, and check regularly to ensure that everything is under control
- language – adopt the KISS principle (Keep It Short + Simple)
- atmosphere - choose an appropriate place and time
- listening skills – keep an open mind and welcome new learning opportunities
- repetition and variation - if you don't get the message across the first time, try a slightly different approach to match different learning styles

This material was adapted from the following sources:

- Biech, E., *Training for Dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 2004
- Luscre, A. *Planning & Preparing Successful Technology Training: Session Design, Training Materials and Presentation*, Mogadore Local School Network online resource 2007
- Sheltercentre free online training services, 2007.