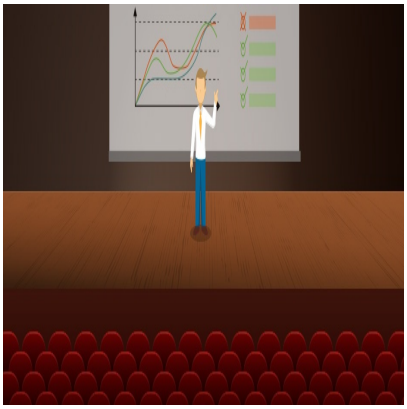

Description

No matter how well a researcher knows the material, rehearsals are important to ensure a smooth delivery of a presentation. Actors rehearse, singers rehearse, and so should scientists. All the necessary information may be in your mind, but getting it out and turning it into words that others can understand takes practice. Professional dancers talk about the importance of “muscle memory,” the smooth performance of a routine that only comes by repeating the steps. This same concept applies to verbal performances. Here are some tips for getting the most out of presentation rehearsals.

Visit the Venue

If possible, rehearse in the same lecture hall where the presentation will be given. This way you can become comfortable with the arrangements and acoustics. Is there a lectern, a podium, or will you be free to walk back and forth in front of the room? How do you get from your seat to the speaking area? Questions like this are best answered by inspecting the hall.

Can You Hear Me?

Will there be a fixed microphone, a clip-on mic, or will your own lung power have to do the projection? If the last, place a friend in the most distant seat in the hall and have him raise his hand whenever he can’t hear you.

Can You See My Slides?

Ditto for your visual aids. Your friend in the back row should be able to read the smallest print and understand the most complex drawing.

Special Effects

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Modern visual aids allow impressive add on effects, but some of them can be tricky to use. Once I embedded a 10-second video into a presentation. It looked great on my computer but it wouldn't play during my lecture. I had to explain to my audience what happened to the still photo they were staring at.

The Start

The opening remarks should be practiced more than any other part of a presentation. Not only do they summarize the subject of the presentation, but they establish rapport with the audience and get the lecture off to a good start. Practice these few seconds over and over—at home, in the office, in front of a mirror—until you have them down pat.

The End

The concluding remarks are also crucial. People tend to remember what is said at the beginning and at the end more than any other part of a presentation.

The Rest of the Story

It's best to run through the entire presentation from start to finish, and rehearse as many times as necessary to ensure a smooth delivery. Your rehearsal partners can point out any sections that seem unclear and make comments on verbal delivery, non-verbal tics, etc. If much of the material has already been presented before audiences you might not need to go through the entire talk word for word, but should summarize what you plan to say as you click through the slides. Your partners will let you know if the flow is logical.

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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