

Tips for Effective Demonstrations

Demonstrations are talks that show, one step at a time, how to perform an activity.

Planning Tips

Your demonstration may take only 10 minutes, but the time you spend planning those 10 minutes will determine your success or failure. Here are some questions to ask yourself and points to consider:

Will my topic work as a demonstration?

- Pick a well-defined skill or activity that can be demonstrated in a short time period. For example, showing how to toss a salad is easier than explaining how to cook.
- Select a topic that can be easily broken down into illustrated steps that the audience can be successful at doing themselves. For example, you may be able to wiggle your ears, but others may not find it as easy to do!
- Consider how much background your audience will need on your topic before you begin demonstrating. For example, if you are showing how to saddle a horse, you may need to first explain how to approach the horse and make it hold still.

What is my audience going to be like?

- Plan your demonstration around the size of the group. Will you have a small group that can cluster around you, or will you need large visual aids and a microphone to be seen and heard?
- Try to anticipate how much your audience may already know about your topic. Pick a skill level that you think will be high enough to hold your audience's attention but not so high that they can't keep up with you.

What do I want my demonstration to accomplish?

- Decide if the purpose of your demonstration will be to **educate** the audience on how to do something, **inform** them on how something works or **persuade** them that one method works better than another. You can do all of these in one demonstration if you plan well.
- Think about what response you want from your audience. For example, do you want them to try a new skill, or change an old way of doing something?
- Consider how much time you have, the skill level of your audience and your own expertise.

Organizing

Once your initial planning is done, make a detailed outline or script for what you plan to cover in your talk and what visuals or props you will need for each step. A well-organized speech contains the following basic parts:

Introduction – Where you capture the audience's attention with a relevant story, quote, challenge or other interesting remarks and then explain what the demonstration will be about.

Body – Where you present a step-by-step procedure, explaining key points as you go along. You can outline the steps by doing the activity and writing the steps down as you go.

Conclusion – Where you restate the purpose of your demonstration and give a brief summary of the steps.

Tips for Choosing & Using Visual Aids

- Use visuals such as posters, slides and overheads to help the audience understand your topic.
- Visuals can help keep the audience's attention, but don't overdo it – too many visuals can be distracting. It's very important to practice your demonstration using your visuals.
- Keep them within reach and in the order you will present them. When you're done using each visual aid, set it aside so it doesn't distract from your next point. Make sure your visuals:
 - Are attractive.
 - Are readable from the farthest distance they will be viewed.
 - Highlight important points.
 - Are simple and neat.
 - Are easy to use.

Props may be helpful when realism is needed. Make sure that your props are practical for the setting you will be in. For instance, including your dog as part of a demonstration on pet grooming might make it more realistic, but you'll also need to think about any problems that might arise from bringing an animal into an unfamiliar situation.

If you're planning to use electronic equipment, make sure you'll have outlets available nearby and anticipate any replacement bulbs or batteries you might need. Have a back-up plan in case your equipment fails.

Tips for Good Delivery

- Be enthusiastic!
- Dress for the part.
- Briefly introduce yourself, explaining your interest or special skills in your topic.
- Start with your opening, then get right into the action. Keep things moving but don't rush.
- Know your subject and explain what you're doing as you do it.
- Practice in advance, but if something doesn't go the way you planned it in the final demonstration, explain briefly what happened and continue.
- Speak clearly. If you must use noisy equipment like a blender, explain what you're doing before and after you use it. Don't try to shout over the noise.
- Stay within your allotted time. To show all the steps of a process, you may need to have materials ready to show in various stages (baking bread, for example).
- End your demonstration by showing the audience your finished product and letting them ask questions. If you don't know an answer, say so – don't guess.

Practice Makes Perfect

Assemble everything you need for your presentation (and find friendly volunteers to be your test audience) and **practice**. Recording your practice demonstration is another good way to help you fine-tune it. Afterwards ask yourself (or your test audience):

- Are my actions in logical order?
- Did I explain what I was doing while I was doing it?
- Did I give complete information?
- Are my visual aids effective?
- Did I keep to my time limit?
- Do I know enough about my topic to answer questions from the audience?