

Tips for Great Demonstrations

Choice of Topic

Pick a topic that lends itself to showing how to do something. That's what a demonstration is all about.....showing the audience how to do something. Sometimes you need to be very creative and construct props that will allow you to demonstrate the topic without using the actual tool, animal, equipment etc. Many times you can use the real thing, and that's great when you can. Avoid a topic that you can only talk about. If you select a topic and can't think of any way you can actually "do it", you're not on the right track for a topic.

Avoid a topic that is too broad (like how to raise chickens for example). Select a specific skill, task, or project to show. Some demonstrators try to cover far too much information, pick a specific topic you can do well and show how to do expertly.

Here's an example: Topic 1: How to Sew

(Far too broad, this could take years to teach)

Topic 2: How to make X,Y, Z seam finishes

(Good choice, can actually show how to do, why to use each, etc.)

Make it a Demonstration

A demonstration is different than a talk, a reading, or a recitation. You are not going to just talk about your topic, you are going to show how to do something. Think through logical steps, then create the items needed to show each step. Often you will have examples in various stages of "done" and, have a finished product already done. This often works much better than actually trying to create a "finished product" in front of the audience. Show them how you did it, then show the end result, which you have already completed ahead of time.

The Flow of the Demonstration

A good demonstration has 3 main parts: Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. A good introduction tells the audience what they are going to hear about, and why they might or should be interested in your topic, how it can be useful, etc. A good introduction catches the audience's attention and makes them sit up and listen. An introduction can be very creative, as long as it gets the point of what the demonstration is about across.

The body is the main content you are demonstrating, the steps, or process to complete. It should flow logically from a starting point to an ending point. This is easy if you have chosen a specific, focused topic.

The conclusion is a brief review of what you have covered, and a quick summary about why it is important, interesting, etc. It should *not* be a "repeating" of everything you have just said. At the end of your conclusion, you should say "Thank you, are there any questions?" Note that this statement should not *be* the conclusion, it should signal that you have just finished your conclusion. The conclusion tends to be the weakest part of many demonstrations. Think through what you want your audience to remember, or, what the key points are, and make these a part of your conclusion.

Posters

The important rules for posters:

1. They should stand on an easel, not the table, they are to be seen by the audience, not you.
2. Everything on the poster should be able to be read from 10 feet away. No letters should be less than 1 inch high, preferably 2-4 inches high. Snap shots are too small. Anything that can't be seen clearly from 10 feet away is too small to put on a demonstration poster.

Posters should be used as a summary of your important points. They should not contain all the information you are going to share. For example, a poster can briefly state the major steps you are going to demonstrate, or, have the ingredients in a recipe you are demonstrating. Your poster can serve as a good “cheat sheet” for you. You can follow along the steps on a well organized poster, just as your audience can. You should not turn and talk toward the poster, but you can remain facing forward and point with your hand, to features of your poster, as you talk about them.

Note Cards

This will sound strange, but here’s the tip on notes. It’s fine to have note cards, and, it is not fine to look like you are reading them. In a great demonstration, your eyes should be focused on the audience, you should be talking to the audience all the time. Your notes should only be used as a back up, in case you get lost, they can help you get back on track. Your notes should never be in your hand, being read like a book. They should be small, (on index cards for example) and laying on the table beside your other props, so that you can glance at them, if needed.

As you practice, it is okay to write out what you plan to say, and use those notes to practice. As you practice, reduce your notes, so you learn to rely on them less and less, until all your note cards have is a brief outline, or the first line of each paragraph you plan to say.

Other tips.....the difference between good and great demonstrations.

Smile and be enthusiastic. Doing a demonstration is a little bit like being a salesperson. You want to “sell” or tell the audience why this topic is interesting or important. Very often nervous tension makes enthusiasm go right out the window, and demonstrators look at the floor, mumble, talk too softly, squirm, talk very fast, or read their notes word for word.

Stand still and know what to do with your hands. Other frequent nervous habits are things like shifting, swaying back and forth, standing on one foot, etc. Practice standing straight and tall (good posture) behind the table, looking straight at the audience. Think about what to do with your hands. Ideally they should be busy “demonstrating”...i.e. doing something all the time. If not, pay attention to what you do with them.

No “Dead Space”. What does this mean? In a great demonstration, there should be no “dead space” meaning, time you are not talking. You all know this sounds easier than it is, but in a great demonstration, there should be no time you are not talking. If you are waiting for something to simmer, you should be talking, if you are taking 20 stitches to get to the edge of the leather, you should be talking, if you are getting the animal out of the cage, you should be talking, if you are slicing or dicing paper or veggies, you should be talking. Not rambling, but filling in interesting points that pertain to what you are doing. Basically you have to get good at talking and doing at the same time. This takes practice. Many times a demonstrator will say a step, and then do it, say another step and then stop talking and do it, but in a great demonstration, you’ve got to talk and demonstrate at the same time.

Be the expert on your topic

On the day of your demonstration, you should know everything you can about your topic. You should know how to correctly pronounce every word you use, you should understand how to use any tools, items, or props you have on the table. You should anticipate basic questions the judges might ask and be able to answer them clearly and concisely.

Get rid of the “UMM’s”

Lots of folks tend to put a lot of “umm’s” in their speech. Some start almost every sentence with “Umm....now I’m going to.....” GET RID OF THE UMM’S! Have someone listen to your demonstration and count the number of time you say Umm. While practicing, have someone listen and silently raise their hand each time you say umm to call your attention to it. Getting rid of the umm’s will make you a much, much better speaker and demonstrator.