



Many wonder what to say during the first 90 seconds, but this is the time the audience thinks about their prejudices about you. You need to take these into account. Why? Well, your introduction determines how the audience will view the rest of your performance, so make sure it's right from the start.

Never tell your audience what they think about you, because you can never know for sure. But you can work with your first 90 seconds and use them to highlight the negative prejudices you think the audience might have. The goal is to make them think what you want them to think. In order to work out prejudices they could have, you need to put yourself in perspective.



PUT YOURSELF IN PERSPECTIVE

Depending on the context, the people you speak to can have three different types of prejudices. People who have never met you will think of – your looks. Consider what they could think, what you want them to think and what you need to say to make them think what you would like them to think. People who know your job title but not much else about you will have prejudices based on your title. You have the possibility to create a new attitude towards your title by presenting it with a definition before you present the title.

You can use presentations such as these:

I work with smiles – *I'm a dentist.*

I work with the leaders of tomorrow – *I'm a preschool teacher.*

I help people get the most out of their lives – *I'm a doctor.*

People who know you have a social perception about you. And depending on your relationship with the audience you will have different social roles. These roles decide how your audience perceives your message. For this reason, set social goals for yourself and act on them to make others change their social perception about you – if necessary!



Your clothes affect how your message is received. They speak and you need to make sure they express exactly what you want, in every occasion. This does not mean that you need to buy a whole new wardrobe, but that you need to choose your clothes strategically when opening your wardrobe each morning. There are four strategies for dressing and you can use them to achieve your goal.

The proximity strategy – If you want to bond with your audience, dress like them.

The position strategy – Dress according to the position or job title you have in the situation, or take a different position for the moment.

The valuation strategy – The audience creates an impression of your values partly from your clothes and accessories. Therefore, make sure to choose an outfit that represents the values you would like to claim. Have a look in your wardrobe and you will find the tools.

The message strategy – Make sure that your clothes harmonize with your message. If you are speaking about orderliness, a coffee stain on your blouse looks bad.



To achieve authority and credibility you need to drop your intonation at the end of sentences. That way, you use your voice to show that you are serious. If you raise your intonation at the end of the sentence, the audience could easily think it's a question. When it turns out that it was not a question you could be perceived as insecure and less credible.

Everyone needs to hear you speak, so if you see someone leaning forward and turning their ear towards you it is time to raise the volume considerably. Otherwise, you risk coming across as overly cautious or even anxious and scared.

To express the right feeling when you speak, your tone of voice needs to be varied and you need to harmonize it with your subject. The audience needs to hear from your voice if your subject is personal, matter-of-fact, hard, fun,

professional or secret. Otherwise your audience will wonder if you really mean what you say.

If you have a dialect or an accent that is unusual in the setting, you could benefit from telling the audience early. That way they know where you are from and don't need to think about it.



A big part of our message is expressed through our body language. It is therefore important that the body language harmonizes with your message. Use your body language to clarify your message. Study yourself and your body language when speaking to someone you feel comfortable with. Use the same body language during a presentation or an important meeting. If you feel comfortable, the listener feels comfortable!

The image shows five pawns on a reflective surface. Four are red and are grouped together on the left. One is blue and is positioned to the right, standing alone. The pawns are reflected on the surface below them. The background is a light yellow gradient.

ARGUMENTATION TECHNIQUES

In order to be convincing, you need to learn to argue efficiently. You need to consider all rhetoric tools for convincing. You also need to formulate a clear thesis, discuss and disprove possible objections to your thesis, and arrange your arguments in an appropriate way.

The thesis: Your thesis is the core of your argumentation; what you want to convince others about. Present your thesis as a concrete call for action (for example, “Start exercising!”) and avoid negations (“Stop eating candy!”). Calls for action give your audience a sense of knowing what to do, and this gives power of action. Negations don’t and therefore lessen your chances of succeeding.

Three means to sound convincing:

Ethos – how well an argument is received largely depends on who is presenting it. Make sure the audience knows why they should listen to you, for example by arguing based on an experience you’ve made. You can also strengthen your *ethos* by referencing to an authority the audience finds credible – for example, referencing to someone else’s experience.

Logos – in order to make your argumentation convincing, it needs to be logical or reasonable. Make sure that your arguments are well-founded and in line with what the audience finds reasonable. It is a good idea to refer to studies, facts, statistics, etc.

Pathos – humans are convinced as much by our feelings as by our reason. Therefore, consider the feelings of the audience, and instill them with the feelings they need to hear your call for action. Are you arguing for them to donate money to a charity? Make sure you awaken their compassion. Are you suggesting to someone that they should start exercising? Stir their longing for a healthy lifestyle, a fit body or a long life, and so on. You need to stir the feelings you think will make your audience think as you or do as you suggest.

Counter-arguments – you always need to discuss and disprove the strongest possible counter-argument against your thesis. This shows that you can be critical and see the argument from the opposite perspective – and still be convinced. One way to phrase this is, “I know some people think that ... and I understand the idea. The problem with that idea is ...”



Make sure your argumentation uses *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. Then, pick the three strongest arguments and focus on them. Grade their strengths – based on how you think the *audience* perceives them. Afterwards, arrange your arguments in this order:

The second-best argument

The weakest argument

Counter-argument (which you disprove)

The strongest argument



Our brains think in pictures, and therefore you should speak in pictures. To make your message stick it is important you tell stories we can imagine. Open your box of experiences – your own and others’ – and share! Your stories must be true and relevant for your message. To help the audience paint the picture in their heads you also need details. Don’t just say, “in my childhood,” but describe, “when I was a 7-year-old with bright yellow curls.” Give us details – that’s the brain’s fuel for painting pictures! When a presentation is finished the audience rarely describe the PowerPoint slides, but rather the images your story created. It is also important that you dare to be personal – “I got a divorce 20 years ago” – but never cross the border to becoming private – “my wife never wanted to have sex.” Avoid sticky information – information that sticks and that the audience really doesn’t want to picture.

Start collecting stories and make a box of stories you can pick from when you need.



The checklist for your communication challenges

Understand the situation – In what situation should you convince whom, about what, under what circumstances and with which means? Which day, time of day and room, and who will be there?

Figure out what to say – Write down everything you want to say. Make sure to include *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. Emphasize the information that is relevant for your audience and leave out the rest – in other words, kill your darlings.

Arrange the contents – Divide your information so it fits into the following order:

Introduction, background, thesis, your arguments in the correct order, summary and conclusion.

Think about the language level – Are you going to use academia or make it easier to understand? Make strategic word choices and stories to make your point.

Memorize what you want to say – It's easier to trust a speaker who skips the script. If you know what you are talking about you can keep eye contact with the audience instead of looking at your script or the PowerPoint slides.

Practice your presentation – Don't let the real-life situation be the first time you give your presentation. Try it out at home in your living room in front of an invisible audience, or perhaps your family can be your test audience and give you some feedback.

Feedback – When you have completed your communication challenge you need to get feedback from someone who was there. This gives you valuable information which helps you make a better performance next time, whether it's during an interview or a salary negotiation.

Good luck!

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