

A Presentation Skills Company

Visually Speaking

The External Mechanics of Form

Research indicates that *what you look like* and *how you deliver* information communicate the majority of your message. These physical aspects of presenting can actually distract from the verbal aspects, following the old adage “actions speak louder than words.”

This isn't to say that content is unimportant, it just means that you need to make sure that your message isn't diminished by your actions. To avoid distracting body language and to learn how to support your message through delivery, it is important to understand *the mechanics of presenting*.

The *BASIC* delivery skills are a combination of your visual and vocal delivery, that is, the *external* elements of the **BODY** and the **VOICE**. The *visible* or external elements are based around **ACTIONS**. These are *the mechanics of FORM*. The invisible or *internal* elements are focused around **INTENTIONS** and these *advanced* skills are called *the mechanics of FUNCTION*.

Although intentions *drive* actions, and form *follows* function, it is easier to build a consistency by first learning the external (visible) skills, the mechanics of form. These basic skills will help you develop a measurable set of actions that you can add to your personal delivery style.

STAND AND DELIVER

What do you do when you're in front of a group? How do you tell your story? What movements do you make? What gestures do you use? How do your words flow when you speak? It depends on the *relationships* you establish with:

- The Room
- The Audience
- Your Body
- Your Voice
- The Set

THE ROOM

Your relationship to the room begins with your body positioning. There are a few *universal* concepts that translate to every environment:

There are three issues to consider:

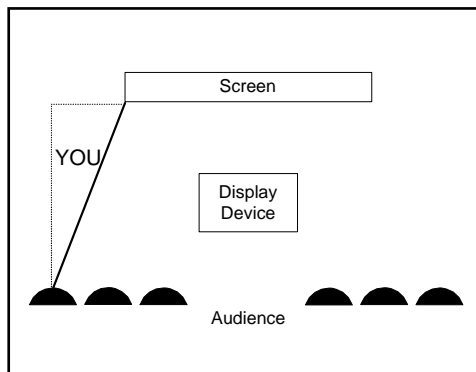
- Stand to the *left*,
- Be aware of *angles*,
- Avoid *upstaging* yourself

Left is Right

You must stand on the left side of the room, from the audience's point-of-view. Since we read words from *left to right*, the eye is less distracted if it sees the presenter speaking from the left, then glances slightly to the right to read the visual (left to right) and then returns to view the speaker again. The pattern is natural. But if you stand on the opposite side of the room (the audience's right), the natural eye pattern for reading and listening is disturbed and your effectiveness is reduced. Of course, if you have *no visuals* for the audience to view, then it doesn't matter which side of the room you present from, as long as people can see and hear you.

Build a Triangle

Every job requires a tailored workspace to gain optimum efficiency. When presenting, your workspace is a *Presenter's Triangle™* within which you can "play."



To build your Presenter's Triangle, stand at a fixed distance from the display equipment and draw an imaginary line from the audience member sitting farthest to the right, to the left edge of the screen. This becomes the long side of the Triangle or the "angled wall." If you penetrate this wall, you will block the view of the screen.

To complete your Triangle, draw two straight lines meeting at a 90° angle and connecting the person seated to the far right and the line of the screen.

Within your Triangle, you only have three positions to occupy. The *middle* of the Triangle, where you should be most of the time; the *back* of the Triangle, much closer to

the screen; and, the *front* of the Triangle, much closer to the audience. These three positions allow you to navigate along the angled wall.

The key to all body actions is *moving with authority*. You must treat the three positions of the Triangle as stopping points. Presenters lose effectiveness when they *meander* aimlessly while speaking. You must have a reason to move and you must know where your body is going.

Angle Your Shoulders

Initially, you need to establish a *45-degree angle* by pointing your shoulders to the *opposite* corner of the room. This *non-threatening position* makes it easier for the audience to absorb information and it opens your body to the screen when you need to gesture or move. This is called the *Rest Position*.

Once you establish a 45-degree angle to the room, you then gain the opportunity to use the *power* of your *left shoulder*. The theatrical move of *squaring your shoulders* by pointing them to the back wall of the room is a move of power and strength. It's a signal that the information being communicated is of *greater importance*. This is called the *Power Position*.

Now you can combine the two body angles within the three positions of the Triangle, to add more meaning to your words.

No Upstaging

When a part of the body passes between the speaker's face and the audience, the result is called *upstaging*.

Turning your back to the audience is the most vivid example of upstaging. Besides hiding your expressions, turning your back projects your voice away from the audience and therefore makes it less audible.

Avoid turning your back, by using the "Rule of the Right Shoulder": The front of your right shoulder should always be visible to the person seated on your far right.

Crossing the upper body with your right hand is another example of upstaging. This happens, for example, when you gesture to the screen, with your right hand.

To avoid this, use the "Rule of the Left Foot": Anything to the left of your left foot, use your left hand to gesture. Anything to the right of your left foot, use your right hand to gesture.

THE AUDIENCE

You must understand that the relationship between you and your audience is mutually beneficial. Presenting is two-way communication and you must engage your audience to be effective.

Establish Eye Contact

Making eye contact is critical to the communication process. The more eye contact you make with people the more involved they will feel. If you find it difficult making direct eye contact with audience members, try this technique: Don't look *directly* into a person's eyes, look *between* the eyes. Look at the point where the bridge of the nose meets the brows and it will seem *as if* you are looking into the person's eyes.

Play to *back-third* of the group. This will allow your chin to tilt slightly higher, opening your throat and allowing your voice to project more clearly. In addition, your gestures will become more obvious as you make contact with people farther back.

Reach Out

The *hand gesture* of the palm up and arms extended outward is a very *friendly* move. When you reach out to the audience you appear sincere, as if you want the group involved in the event. Reaching out is pleasing to the eye and indicates warmth of expression.

Phrase and Pause

Pause naturally between your phrases so that you can control the momentum or timing of your presentation. Each pause gives you a chance to make eye contact, breathe, or even think. Phrasing and pausing allows for smooth transitions and more consistent delivery. It also helps eliminate the verbal fillers such as "*um, uh, er, you know, okay, again*" and other sounds. Simply replace them with silence.

Talk to Individuals

If you *know* a person's name use it. Addressing individuals by name makes the audience members more conscious of one another and makes you more respected since you care enough to individualize people in the group.

Get Agreement

If you nod your head to a person in the audience, chances are they will return the gesture and nod back to you. If you make the effort to get agreement or acknowledgment, the points you make gain greater acceptance. As more people in the group notice others agreeing with you, the overall impact of your story becomes more powerful.

Smile

If you aren't having a good time *giving* the presentation, what makes you think the audience is having a good time *watching* it? Unless the subject is tragic (disaster, war, crime, death), chances are, smiling during the presentation can only help. A presenter who smiles creates a comfortable feeling for the audience and people learn and retain more when they feel comfortable.

YOUR BODY

Finding the right moves and gestures for a given presentation takes time. Your body tells a story just like your visuals and your words.

What should you do with your hands?

If used properly, the hands can orchestrate the eyes of the audience. Casual or emphatic gestures to the screen can create a visual inflection that helps the group recognize what is important.

The eyes go where the hands go, so never hide your hands from the audience (such as behind your back or in your pockets). Also avoid clasping your hands together in front of you. When your hands touch for several seconds, the audience tends to look at them and not at your face. The distraction not only reduces your effectiveness, but it is a sign of nervousness.

If you aren't making gestures, then keep your hands naturally at your sides.

As you begin to make gestures, you will need to shift your weight to one foot or the other in order to make the gestures look natural. If both heels are on the floor when you gesture it will appear rigid. Once you learn to shift your weight properly, gesturing will be more comfortable and effective.

YOUR VOICE

Your ability to vocalize means more than just speaking up so the audience can hear you. Your voice is a powerful tool that allows you to use tone, inflection, and volume to communicate more than words.

Breathe Between Phrases

If you move around frequently and do not breathe properly, you will eventually lose your breath. Breathe *between* phrases, not *during* phrases. If you are speaking quickly and your words run together, your emphasis and inflection will be lost. By having enough air and controlling your breathing, you can say a longer phrase more slowly, and add inflection to help the audience understand more easily.

Project Your Voice

People from all areas in the room must be able to hear *every* word you say. By breathing properly and concentrating on projecting to the back of the room, you'll keep your head up and facing forward as often as possible.

When fielding responses from the audience make sure you repeat the question or comment so the entire group can hear it. If you fail to do this, then your discussion will make sense only to those who heard the question or comment in the first place.

When in Doubt, Pause

Have you ever been asked a question during your presentation and you didn't know the answer? In these situations, you can enhance your credibility by pausing for a moment as you consider the question. Then, glance away as you search for the answer, and then look back to the person while saying, "*Let me get back to you on that.*" The pause allows the audience to understand that, at the very least, you made an effort to draft a response.

THE SET

As electronic presentations become more the rule than the exception, the environment or the “set” used for the presentation needs to be considered.

Depending on your ability to control the environment, strong lighting is a big asset to your presentation. Try to create an *unequal distribution* of light by directing most of the light on the presenter, some light on the audience, and no light on the screen.

When presenting electronically, the image itself is dependent on the display device and the source of the visual information (usually your PC). Make sure the specifications of both the display device and the image source are compatible and that the projector is bright enough in relation to your environment.

Flat, non-glare, matte-white screens offer the best viewing angles. In some cases, a rear projection screen might be required, especially if people plan to walk in front of the image, such as during an awards ceremony.

Electronic presentation technology lends itself to the use of video, audio, animation, special effects, and more. Be careful that the technology doesn't overshadow the message. Multimedia can become “multimania” if you are not careful. The key to using any technology in a presentation is to make it transparent to the audience so it doesn't distract from the presenter.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN STYLE

Don't try to imitate other presenters, just be the best presenter you can be. The medium is not the message; the message is the message, and that message is YOU! Develop a style and method of delivery that is *natural* and comfortable *for you*. To do this you must not only *rehearse* but you must *always believe* in the information you are presenting.

The following formula may help you understand effective communication.

Language +

Inflection +

Natural
Expression =

Success

In other words, know your **LINES**.

Your success would be a *gain* for your audience. The key element in that equation has to do with *your own style*. If you look at the formula and remove the most important element, then everything changes. By removing what is “natural” in your expression, the LINES would become LIES. When the expression is not natural, that’s how an audience sees through a presenter. Any success would then be at the *expense* of your audience. An audience deserves your natural expression. They deserve your sense of the *truth*.

Remember...

The audience knows if you’re less than prepared.
The audience knows if you’re less than convinced.
The audience always knows!

NOTE: The information in this handout supports the MediaNet lecture “Visually Speaking.”

Additional support for this and other topics can be found in several publications including:

--- *Special Edition Using Microsoft PowerPoint 2007* by Patrice-Ann Rutledge and Tom Mucciolo (Copyright 2006, QUE, Pearson Publishing, MediaNet, Inc.).

--- *Purpose, Movement, Color* by Tom and Rich Mucciolo (Copyright 1994, 1999, MediaNet, Inc.)

--- *Mechanics-Basic Skills* CD-ROM (Copyright 2002, MediaNet, Inc.) an interactive tutorial.

--- *Teaching Effectiveness* research study, published April, 2008, available on our website.

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