Perspectives on Science & Technical Communication:

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OBJECTIVE:

To develop and present a well-organized, meaningful, outreach presentation.

Key point: The purpose of presenting is to actuate. You want to persuade people. You want to persuade them to think, or get excited about something, or act in response to what you present. Otherwise there is no point in making the effort of preparing and delivering your presentation.

Presentations do not necessarily need to be meaningful for you. You already know the meaning of your message. Deliver the message from the audiences' point of view. (Another way to say this: What *you* want to present is not as important as *what the audience needs to hear* in order for your message to come across clearly, simply.) Remember that an audience will judge a presentation on the basis of *how meaningful is was for them*.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when putting together your presentation:

1. How can I limit my presentation content so that my objectives, methods, results and conclusions can be seen with clarity and ease of understanding?

2. How can I make my message more meaningful and memorable?

3. How will I relate my information to this specific audience?

4. What will get and keep the attention of this audience?

There are many components involved in the preparation of a good presentation. The content should include a clear purpose or mission. Let your audience know up front what your mission is and why it is important. Specifically, let them know why it is important to *them*. Provide sufficient background information to indicate why your efforts are important, as well as to attest your grasp of the literature and your authority in the field. You need to have credibility in order to be believed. Credibility will be established, in part, by judiciously reviewing what is known in your area of endeavor, and then relating it to the big picture.

One of the important challenges in developing a good presentation is distilling your content. Beyond defining the mission of your work, and providing the necessary background information, there need to be limited (i.e., only 2 or 3), focal key points to support your mission. Compose your presentation as a story such that there is an easy flow beginning with your **introduction** (scope of your work, importance, appropriate background information, and a preview of what your story will be). Then lay out to your audience your **key supporting points** (goals, methods to meet your goals, what your results were based on the specific methods, conclusions based on results). **Conclude** with a summary of your study and what was gained; provide a singular take-home message.

Based on the concept that perception is often more important than facts, consider that up to 90% of the development effort for a truly outstanding presentation is based on organization, practice, facial expression and body language, tone of voice and a polished delivery. The other 10% is based on the content. Although this weighting may seem skewed, it is likely true. So, as you develop your presentation, keep in mind that this content portion of your effort

represents an extremely important 10%,

without which the other 90% is meaningless. Therefore, keep in mind that non-verbal signals and communication are critical components in getting your message across.

Interpersonal Communication.

Appearance. Dress professionally, stand comfortably and avoid gripping furniture and hands in pockets or on hips.

Eye contact. Good eye contact with individuals in your audience is essential for communicating with them (versus *to them*). Provides necessary feedback on how your presentation is going and how your audience is responding.

Smile. A smile at the opening, and on occasion throughout your talk sends a positive signal that you are welcoming your audience and that you are relaxed, comfortable, self-assured and in control. Increases rapport with the audience.

Hand gestures. These can add emphasis to your words. Avoid being too flamboyant.

Voice. Ensure sufficient volume and clarity. Vary the speed and volume of your delivery. Monotone deliveries are boring! Use pauses for emphasis, and after the introduction of a new key point. Pauses serve as effective "punctuation" and help to provide a strong delivery.

Ask a question or provide a quote. The sparing use of questions for your audience can help stimulate their thinking and bring everyone together. Questions can serve as a good transition or opener for a new key point. Use of a single, relevant quote can provide a "big picture" outlook, some humor, or an important perspective. Can also provide credibility for the presenter. Need a quote? Try http://www.quoteland.com.

Timing. Practice your talk so that you finish on time, allowing sufficient time for questions prior to going over time. Lay your watch down on a table or the podium to help you keep track of time. Going over time can unfair to subsequent speakers.

Tips to deal with nervousness. Practice your talk until you know it. Memorize challenging portions of it, if necessary. Do not read your talk, since this prevents connecting with your audience. Practice in front of friends or colleagues. Practice with a video recorder and be willing to be constructive with yourself. Know the order of your AV materials. Know your room, lighting controls and any AV equipment you will be using. Drink a warm/hot beverage (water, herbal tea); this can relax your vocal chords. Pretend that your are a confident, experience speaker, and enjoy yourself. Don't forget to practice (did I say that?). Seize opportunities to make live presentations. With flight time, you will get there!

NOTES:

Prepare your talk in this order:

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1. Your objective
2. Key points with supporting material and transitions
3. Preview and summary
4. Opener
5. Closing
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Present your talk in this order:

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Introduction
        Opener
                Objective
                Preview
Body
        Key Point 1
                Supporting material
                Transition
        Key Point 2
                Supporting material
                Transition
        Key Point 3
                Supporting material
Closing
        Summary and "To do"
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The Three T's:

Preview   T-1: Tell them what you are going to tell them.

Body   T-2: Tell them.

Summary   T-3: Tell them what you told them.

This concept may seem repetitious, and like you are holding your audience's hand. But audiences, even bright, educated audiences, need excellent organization and repetition to help delivery your product successfully.

Ask yourself (*really*) "What do I what to accomplish by delivering this presentation?"

If a concept or visual doesn't support the objective, don't use it.

By the conclusion of this presentation, people should/will _____(what?).
Stating an objective this way helps to focus attention what you want your audience to do with the message. Typically, a presentation is geared at getting people to:

                Understand something, or
                Be able to do something, or
                Do it.

Media elements

Supportive media elements should be graphic and creative. They should fit the setting, support the message, awaken the audience, and be used appropriately and in moderation. Visuals which portray data should show causality. Use of color should be used only to help the data speak for itself. Avoid glitz. Elements include flip charts, visual boards, overhead transparencies, poster boards, props, 35 mm slides, film, audio tape, video tape, Powerpoint, and other "high-tech" computer stuff.

Slides:
Well-designed slides, either 2x2's or Powerpoint, can do wonders for a presentation. Poorly designed slides can detract from what otherwise might be wonderful and important information. Here are a few points to keep in mind:

Avoid using more than 1 slide per minute of talk, on average. As an exception, if you find it is important to show a rapid series of slides, which might closely follow key words of a sentence or photographs showing changes in a sequence, allow for at least 15 seconds per slide (minimum time needed to digest visual information).

Use of slides generally requires that the room be darkened. This allows for heightened visual acuity of visuals on the screen. The down side of using slides, however, is that the audience is now in the dark-literally. It is your job to consider and manage the level of audience attentiveness. Consider dimming the lights rather than turning them off (this also helps to prevent the "terror squint" when lights brightly come back on). Use bright slides. The brighter the slide, the more light penetrates the pupils of your audience's eyes!

Know how to load and reload your slide carousel rapidly and correctly. This can take practice. Practice it! Number or label your slides in the event that the projectionist should drop the carousel and the retaining ring drops off.   Also, be personally responsible for loading your own slides. Check them out on a projector in your carousel, privately, prior to your presentation. Learn how to remove a "fatally dropped" slide from beneath a loaded carousel during a presentation.

Check for spelling errors. A typo projected onto a large screen is genuinely avoidable and can be a distraction. If you made your slides on a computer, run them through a spell checker. And, no matter how many times you proof them, have someone else take a look at them as well.

In the event that you have go to bat with a slide containing a spelling error, don't point it out to the audience. Chances are that they won't see it. If it's a glaring error, obfuscating the meaning of the slide, don't use it.

Avoid using all upper-or lowercase text, except for titles. Avoid more than two colors on any text slide. Avoid mixing more that two fonts or three point sizes. Avoid extravagant fonts (i.e., use conservative fonts without serifs such as Helvetica, Arial and Geneva that are easy to read).

Don't use too much text. One rule of thumb is not to exceed 20% of the total slide area with text. Consider the 5 x 5 rule... limit the slide to 5 lines with no more than 5 words per line. Text size should be sufficient so that you can read the slide 25 cm from your eye (arm's length).

Be consistent with your visuals - try to maintain use of a single template. For example, it is distracting to have a series of nicely colored slides, and then have several black and white (or diazo) slides thrown in the middle. If possible try to have all your slides oriented similarly, i.e., landscape, not portrait (portrait slides, amidst an otherwise landscape slide presentation, may distractingly go off the screen).

Allow yourself sufficient time to prepare your visuals prior to your presentation. Give yourself enough time (1-2 weeks) to theoretically be able to produce your visuals twice before your presentation (so that if a major mishap occurs, you can still make them again). This also affords you time to practice your presentation as a finished product.

Overhead transparencies. Although this media form has lowest "resolution" of any visual aid, it has it's place. ADVANTAGES of overheads is that they are bright and therefore you do not necessarily need to turn off the lights. You can write notes to yourself on cardboard frames around the transparencies (frames are available from most art and A/V stores). You can rearrange transparencies during your talk (can't do with slides). Overheads are easy to create and do not necessitate sending them out to a photo lab. Copy machines allow you to cut and paste pictures, charts and graphs; add some text; use a color copier and/or apply color markers to the transparency. *Overheads permit data presentation "hot off the press."* DISADVANTAGES of overhead transparencies is that the image may not be clearly seen throughout a large audience, there is commonly image distortion, and there can be distracting glare from the sides of the transparencies. The latter can be overcome, in part, with cardboard transparency frames and masking tape to mask off the area of the projection glass which is not covered by the transparencies.

Space considerations and utilization. Arrive early. Check out the room and facilities. Take a look at the A/V equipment and be sure that it is working. Stand at the podium and look out at the space that will soon be filled with your audience. Anticipate problems that might occur. Find the light dimmers and figure out how to use them. If there is not an A/V person supervising the room, figure out the sound system. Check out the microphone to feel and hear what you sound like in that room (if practical and permissible). Locate the bathrooms and water cooler. These little exercises may help you feel more confident in your ability to utilize the "presentation space" and handle unforeseen mishaps during your talk (or that of one of your colleagues). End on time (early enough to *finish* answering questions within the allotted time slot).

Powerpoint and other computer-presented formats. Welcome to the new millenium. Many presenters use computer-based programs such as Powerpoint, Director, and HTML. The ADVANTAGES are clear: you create a template (or Bill Gates does it for you…) and a presentation can be generated in almost no time, so long as it is content-rich to begin with. These presentation software packages permit the inclusion of text, animation, sound, movies, transitions, and live links to other programs or the web. However, there are also serious DISADVANTAGES as well. Too much glitz, such as transitions, flying text or sound effects, can serve as major distractions to your audience. Sure, they can show off your digital prowess, but they can also seriously battle for the mind of your listeners. Also, consider the possibility that one of many components of the computer system can fail you, including the computer itself, the media, and/or the LCD projector. As with using a 35 mm slide projector, be ready to give your talk in the (heaven forbid) absence of your A/V materials. Arrive extra-early to set up, and consider bringing your own computer and projector system if you question the availability or caliper of your host's system.

NOTES:

Speaker Exercise

OUTLINE SHEET
(use key words and bullets -- do not write out your talk)

<u>Introduction</u>: Title, significance, say what you will say.

<u>Main Body of Talk</u>: Say it in an organized manor with supporting key points.

<u>Conclusion</u>: Tell them what you've told them; give them the "Big Picture" take home message; closure.

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