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# Tips for Making Good Presentations

## Lessons Learned from Disseminating DHS Data



Public speaking does not have to be an ordeal! Listed below are a few simple suggestions to help you present DHS data in energizing and entertaining ways.

*"Grasp the subject. The words will follow."  
-Cato the Elder*

**1. Know your material.** Make sure you understand your topic thoroughly. Read all background materials (preliminary report, previous summary reports). Read the relevant chapters in the Final Report. Ask someone at the survey's implementing agency to clarify anything you are not sure of. Look through your presentation slides and read your text of the presentation several times. Then stand up and practice your presentation in front of a

mirror. Practice a few more times until you feel comfortable. The better you feel the more credibility you'll have with your audience.

**2. Know your audience.** Tailor your presentation to your audience. Are they medical doctors or community members? Are they comfortable with technical language, or do you need to provide them with some background information or definitions? If you're speaking to a group of child health specialists, then they may want to hear all the details about disease treatment. But if your audience is a group of concerned mothers, they will want to hear about the basic trends and what they can do to keep their children healthy. Keep this in mind as you plan your presentation. And check in with your audience to make sure they are understanding the material as you make your presentation.

**3. Know your surroundings.** Get to the room where you will be speaking early. If you are using any equipment (microphone, overhead projector, laptop), try it out before your audience arrives. Make sure that any print materials are ready to be handed out. Stand at the lectern or microphone and practice speaking for a minute. Knowing the environment will help reduce nervousness and make you feel more at ease.

**4. Don't be too formal.** Speak in a conversational way as if you are talking to friends, not lecturing to strangers. Speak to your audience, not to your notes. Look at people in the audience; maintain eye contact with someone for a few seconds, and then look at someone else. Looking at your audience helps engage them in the presentation. Speak in simple non-technical language.

**5. Control your nervousness.** Don't worry if you are nervous, in fact, you should expect to be nervous. Take deep breaths. Some people recommend that you visualize yourself speaking successfully as a way to control your nerves. Realize that your audience wants you to succeed. Everyone wants to hear the latest information from the DHS. They are looking forward to hearing you! They are on your side. Finally, remember the audience does not know how you feel, only how you look. So look confident! Stand up straight; smile; hold your chin up; speak loudly. Looking confident will help you feel confident.

*"There are two types of public speakers:  
those who admit they are nervous  
and those who are liars."  
- Mark Twain*

**6. Keep to Schedule.** If you are scheduled to speak for 20 minutes, then stay on time. Nothing is worse than having to rush through the key points of your presentation because time is running short. Remember that most people have an attention span of about 30 minutes. If you speak any longer, you will lose your audience. The only way to be sure your presentation is not too long is to practice. Time yourself so you know how long your presentation is. If necessary, get rid of a couple of slides. Focus on the major points, not the minor details.

*"Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening."  
– Dorothy Sarnoff*



**7. Vary the tone and pitch of your voice.** Don't speak in a monotone. This will put your audience to sleep, especially when the lights are dim. Speak in an animated way and make sure that you raise and lower your voice. It's not always easy to know if you are changing the pitch of your voice. Ask a friend to listen to you and give you honest feedback.

**8. Summarize your key points at the beginning and again at the end.** What do you want your audience to remember? What are the key things you want people to take away from your presentation? Most people can only keep 3 or 4 main points in their heads, and they need to hear these points several times. The old saying about speaking is still true: "Tell your audience what you are going to tell them; then tell them; and then tell them what you told them." If you follow this rule, people are much more likely to remember the major points of your presentation.

**9. Don't read your notes, slides, or handouts.** Notes and PowerPoint slides are tools to guide your presentation. Use them as a jumping off point. Don't read the notes or slides word for word. Your audience can also read. They do not want you to read to them. Instead, restate what is on the slide or in your notes, using similar language and adding more detail or describing the implications of the information.

**10. Think about the best presentations you have heard.** What caught your attention most? Why or how did the speaker engage your interest? Try to identify what makes some speakers and some presentations successful and try to achieve the same style and approach in your presentations.

**11. Save time for questions.** Your audience may have questions or comments. Make sure to save some time at the end of your presentation to hear these and offer your responses.

**12. Practice, practice, practice.** Go over your presentation from start to finish at least 3 times. Give your presentation to your family, friends, and even your pet. If you know your presentation well you will be more comfortable and confident.

