



UNIT12

Presentation skills

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Explore various presentation skills and how to apply them
- ✓ Explain how to deal with difficult trainees

Unit 12

Presentation Skills

Telling vs. Showing

Limitations of Telling

Telling a person how to do a job may be an excellent means of instruction when used properly, but it has limitations. (Think of how most of us resist being told what to do.)

Telling alone is not very useful as an instruction tool when, for example, the objective of the instruction is to develop new manual skills. It may be used to your advantage, however, when the objective is to impart information, if the information can be interpreted easily by the worker in terms of past knowledge and experience. When the telling tool is used in instruction, it is particularly important that the instructor follow the telling by checking the learner's understanding of what was told.

Telling has some value when it is used sparingly in combination with showing and asking, or if there is a limited amount of new information to be passed on to the worker. Even when seeing a job from the proper angle, most people don't get it. Most of us copy motions; this doesn't mean we understand. Many motions are hard to copy and finer points are missed. We don't know what to look for. We can't translate what we see into what we should do. Countless numbers of employees are being shown how to do their job. How many of them understand?

Limitations of Showing

Showing alone is better than just telling when new skills are to be developed, but it is of greatest value when it is used in combination with telling and asking.

Showing is particularly useful in the presentation step of a job when workers are being taught to do something which they could not do before. Showing with the actual tools and equipment which the worker will use on the job is most desirable.

The Delivery

Overcoming Nervousness

Slight nervousness is normal for anyone, especially the first few times that you put on training. Eventually, however, many people overcome the jitters and allow themselves to enjoy making a presentation. Their secret is not necessarily the confidence that comes from experience, although that helps, but a change in attitude: they have learned to shift their focus from themselves to the audience.

Nervousness has two sources. One is the constant stream of internal **negative comments** that nags speakers when they begin to think about the presentation. ("I wonder how I'll come across this time. Last time I made a presentation, I was sure everyone was laughing at me when I had so much trouble with the equipment.")

This kind of nervousness tends to evaporate when you **reprogram your thought process**. If you have a logical argument and you're prepared, you can stop worrying about flaws in your reasoning and technical problems. Instead, you can focus on convincing the group that your position is correct. **Think about it this way:** You believe in what you're saying. You're prepared. In fact, you're the only person who is so well prepared for this course! Your trainees need to know what you have to say.

With these thoughts in mind, you can **change your inner negative messages** to more positive ones. List your concerns on a sheet of paper before the workshop. Then, for every negative message, substitute a positive one. For instance, if your negative message is, "I'm a nervous wreck," write, "I can channel this nervous energy into training and give a more enthusiastic performance." This effort may take some repetition, but eventually it works.

Another source of tension comes from **hyper-responsibility**: the trainer feels that they are responsible for the reactions and well-being of everyone in the room. This kind of nervousness can also be fought. Come to terms with the fact that not everyone in the room will accept your ideas. It's not your job to please everyone. Your job is to get your message across in clearly understandable terms to the people who must have the information and to convince them (as much as possible) to make the behavioral changes that are the objectives of training. **Concentrate on the decision maker and on those who respond positively to you.** Forget the others.

Because it is hard to counteract nervousness if you do not feel in control of the situation, take time before the training begins to **put yourself in control**:

- Allow plenty of time to check out the room and equipment.
- Start on time. Unless the decision maker in your audience is delayed, don't wait for laggards. Delaying will make you and your group fidgety.
- Greet people as they come in. Chat casually with people you know until it's time to start.
- Eliminate any physical barriers that stand between the class and you. If you're behind a table or lectern, move away from it. Don't cling to the lectern or projector.
- Do some deep breathing. The increased oxygen helps, and the rhythm of regular breathing helps you to focus.
- Avoid caffeine, which can increase anxiety and jitters.

Using Non-Verbal Communication

You're confident. You've rehearsed. You've got a powerful, logical argument. You're ready now to take on the task of presenting your information to support the learning objectives. Once you're aware of the way people react to you, you can control the way you present yourself.

Leave the Appropriate Distance between You and the Audience

With a **large group**, a trainer or public speaker may be 12 to 15 feet (4 to 5 meters) from the first row of listeners without being viewed as aloof and impersonal. With a **smaller group**, you should be about 4 to 5 feet (1.5 to 2 meters) away. If you're any farther, the students may regard you as either stuffy or fearful. If you're any closer, people will become uncomfortable.

When you're speaking to a group with whom you have had little or no personal or professional relationship, start speaking from a position farther away and move in slightly as the presentation progresses and as you establish rapport. But don't get too close. A tall presenter, for example, who approaches within inches of his listeners and leans forward, is expressing dominance more than friendliness. To judge whether you tend to invade others' personal space, recall whether people ever inched away from you when you were engaged in informal conversations.

Physical distance rules vary from one culture to another, so make sure that you understand who you are speaking with. As a general rule, people of Middle Eastern cultures tend to be very close when they speak, whereas the Japanese expect even more distance than Americans.

Stand Erect

Good posture gives the impression of authority. You can correct poor posture without difficulty by standing against a wall and pressing your spine flat against it. While you're training, make a conscious effort **not to fold your arms**. Folded arms seem to encourage slouching, and it certainly sends a message of defending or protecting yourself.

There is a **difference between good posture and stiffness**, however. If you march briskly to the front of the room and do not move for the rest of the presentation, you signal rigidity more than authority.

Consider Your Appearance

Psychologists have found that attractive people are more persuasive than unattractive people. They are not referring to a person's appearance. Anyone can **cultivate attractiveness** through good grooming and clean, neat, professional dress. A training seminar is not the place to make a statement with your clothes – flashy clothes can divert attention from your learning points. Be professional and choose clothes that suit you.

Standard business dress is appropriate. Even if your students take advantage of a day out of the workplace to dress casually, you should be dressed for business. Clean, pressed clothing; polished shoes; and clean and tidy hair all make positive statements.

Although standards in nontraditional organizations may be more lenient, in general, it is safer to stay conservative. Anything too far from the norm will cause the audience to fix on the distracting feature rather than your argument. Women who are on their feet all day do not need to feel obligated to wear uncomfortable pumps. There are plenty of smart looking footwear options that are both professional and foot friendly.

Move About and Use Gestures

A trainer who stays glued to the overhead projector, the lectern, or any other one position is terrified, and everyone soon knows it. To give the impression of **self-confidence**, move about the room and use your hands. You may even convince yourself that all is well.

Take advantage of your **natural gestures**, but avoid using one over and over, and try not to be conducting an orchestra. Some trainers, when told that they need to add movement, adopt one gesture

(raising an arm, for example) and use it repeatedly. At worst, such programmed gestures send the audience into a hypnotic state; at best, they're distracting.

Tailor your gestures to reinforce your point. For instance, by bringing your hands together, you can assure your audience that your proposal “brings it all together.” Similarly, you can refer to the ramifications of a problem by tracing ever-widening circles in the air.

Because many workshops involve visual aids, you can add movement by simply pointing out the most important features on the visual. **Moving** around the room is helpful if it does not deteriorate into the measured pacing of a caged tiger. By **pausing** completely, you emphasize to your listeners the importance of what you are saying.

Control Your Facial Expressions and Mannerisms

Although we all know people who say, “If you cut off my hands, I wouldn't be able to talk,” very few people actually overdo **gestures**. **Facial expressions**, on the other hand, are difficult to control and often give an embarrassingly accurate clue as to how you really feel. Beyond checking yourself on videotape, the best way to control facial expressions is to make sure you're comfortable with your material and prepared to respond honestly and openly to any questions.

Try to maintain an **accessible, open presence**. Remember that a **smile** breaks down barriers. When you smile at someone, they generally smile back. Also, as you talk, show interest in what you're saying. If you're not interested, how can your audience be?

Maintain Eye Contact

You will lose support faster by staring at your notes, looking only at the visual, or focusing on a spot high on the back wall than by any mistakes you may make in the content of your workshop.

Try, at some point in each seminar, to look at each participant with the goal of giving each person the brief message, “I can see that you grasp what I'm saying.” Then, for your own comfort, **focus on people who respond with a nod or smile** rather than on people who seem bored or hostile.

Using Notes

It's hard to imagine anyone trying to memorize a training workshop word for word. Recall takes so much energy that you would have little left for relating to the audience. Don't ever consider memorizing. Instead, learn to use notes **unobtrusively** and **effectively**.

Many instructors use their **visuals** as notes. This often works in short presentations, but is not as helpful in full day or multiple day sessions. If your visuals are not sufficient to remind you of the details, you can construct notes in several forms. However you do it, they should be easy to use. In terms of **content**, you should include your opening remarks as well as your ending remarks and any statistical information that is too difficult to remember and will not appear on your visuals. If you plan to use extensive notes, underline key points or use a highlighting pen. In either case, never use full sentences because you may lapse into reading them and thus destroy your phrasing.

Some popular note taking devices are to write simple key words or phrases on index cards, in the margins of your presentation guide, on flip charts, or using the notes frame available on PowerPoint slides.

Index Cards

If you use index cards, never walk around holding them. Let them remain on the lectern or the table so that you are free to make assertive gestures without waving your notes around.

You may want to put sheets of 8 ½ x 11 inch paper with additional notes between the pages of your instructor guide. The fact that the audience can't see you using such notes will make your delivery smooth and enhance your confidence.

Managing the Question and Answer Period

Just as you should encourage questions during your training sessions, be sure **to invite participation when you are wrapping up the training**. Say something simple like, "I'll be glad to answer any questions you have." In some cases, you may want to ask people you know to pose one or two questions just to get the discussion going.

No matter how well you've prepared, someone in this group may have information you don't have or may contribute something you haven't thought of. Your **ultimate goal** is to contribute to the success of your organization. Questions, comments, and discussion serve that goal very well. The more people who participate and the more questions they ask, the more effective you're likely to be.

The first step in **responding to questions** is to listen very carefully. Nod to show that you are paying attention. Don't be surprised if the question has to do with a point you're sure you covered. You may not have communicated your point as clearly as you thought. Remember that the other members of the audience invariably identify with the questioner, not the trainer. To say, "Well, I thought I covered that in Session Three," or to sigh resignedly and roll your eyes, cuts off discussion and damages your credibility with the audience.

General Guidelines

Let people finish. Always be polite. Wait until you are sure the person has finished before you answer. If the questioner attempts to dominate with repeated questions, allow him or her to finish a question, respond to it, and then turn to call on someone else. Some communication consultants recommend looking away from the questioner when you have finished your answer to discourage another question.

Respond to everything, even statements. Many people feel a need to participate on some level even if they have no questions to ask. Their statements do serve a function; in fact, they often register approval of whatever the trainer has said and, as such, are valuable in building consensus for a decision.

Merely nodding agreement to such a statement is not enough. Say something like, "Thanks for sharing your point of view with us," or "I agree with you. It's vitally important that we..." (This gives you an opportunity to reinforce your main point.) Restate the question, since others may not have heard it. You

also want to confirm that you understood it correctly, plus you give yourself time to think of the appropriate answer.

Don't feel rushed. If you pause before you respond, it is a compliment to the questioner, not a sign of indecision.

Stay on track. Particularly when the question is a long one, it is easy to let boredom, or the fact that the speaker's words have triggered a wholly different thought, distract you.

Admit that you don't know the answer. No one expects you to know everything. Frequently, the person who asked the question actually knows the answer and is merely testing to see whether you know it as well. Bluffing in these situations can be immensely harmful. If you don't have the information, say so, and offer to provide the data as soon as possible.

Tips for Stunning Visuals

Think about using some visual aids in your training, and think beyond PowerPoint. PowerPoint has been a great tool, but has also been misused so frequently that bad presentations get called “**death by PowerPoint.**”

Good visuals help you give a lot of information in a very short space of time. They are really quick snapshots of situations, developments, events, and processes that would take a long time to explain fully in words.

Good visuals speak for themselves and require little or no description but you often need to draw your audience's attention to one or two key points. The effect of good visuals can be ruined by reading them word for word. Instead, refer to the highlights or most significant part, explain why they are important, and help the audience draw conclusions.

Here are some more **tips**:

- Be generous with white space.
- Use clear headings and sub-headings.
- Highlight, but don't overdo it.
- Types of highlighting can include bullets, italic print, underlining, bold, and color.
- Use graphics with caution. Make sure they mean the same thing to the audience that they do to you. Make sure that they look okay when on a screen, since they can get washed out or very pale looking when enlarged.
- Make sure you have legally purchased the rights to use any copyrighted material, including clip art and stock photography. Most of them allow you to use them for personal reasons, but not commercially unless you purchase the rights to do so.
- Don't ask technology to do your job. It is a tool that supports the presentation you deliver, and is not responsible for the success of the training.
- Always have a backup plan in case the technology fails, because it will!

About **type styles and size:**

- Choose a solid, plain typeface that is easy to read.
- Don't combine a lot of fonts on one page. If you do use different fonts, use them consistently. Designers tell us that we should not have more than two different fonts per page.
- Make sure the type size is big enough for trainees to read.
- Don't use all capital letters, except in headings or brief statements.
- Headings should be noticeably larger than text.
- Serif typefaces, with hooks on each letter, make text easier to read.

Types of Visual Aids

Here is a chart detailing the various methods of adding some punch to your presentation. Remember, you should ALWAYS have a backup plan!

| Type | Advantage | Disadvantage | Notes |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| Slides | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quality images ✓ Efficient ✓ Reusable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cost for stock photography/clip art ✓ Take time to prepare ✓ Projector not always available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Focus ✓ Make sure they are properly saturated (deep color) |
| Whiteboard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inexpensive ✓ Flexible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Not impressive ✓ Smell of markers ✓ Dirties hands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Write neatly ✓ Have eraser handy and extra markers |
| VCR/DVD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stimulating to audience ✓ May be supplied free of charge by public libraries ✓ Can insert DVD clips directly into slides | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Audiences drift ✓ Tricky to run | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ May want to cue to several instances, rather than whole film |
| Flip Charts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Pre-writing makes them easy to use ✓ Available everywhere | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Too small for more than 20 people ✓ Wasting paper? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use top 2/3 of page only ✓ 5x5 rule ✓ Practice writing |
| Handouts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inexpensive ✓ Flexible ✓ Easy to prepare | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Take time to prepare ✓ Wasting paper? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Must look professional ✓ Proofread |

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Models | ✓ Effective if notes attached | ✓ May get lost if passed around ✓ Difficult to find appropriate ones ✓ Expensive to buy | ✓ Must be visible |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|

A Word about Flip Charts

Picture this: You're scrawling away on a flipchart in the middle of a training workshop and everything seems to be going great. Participants are interacting with you, you're capturing their input on the flip chart, and when you're done you step back so everyone can see what you've written. Oh, no! Your flipchart is nearly illegible. The lines are crooked, your lettering gets smaller and smaller so that it's almost impossible to read at the end of each line, and the printing looks like something out of your fourth grade art class.

To avoid this scenario, follow these suggestions for writing well on flipcharts.

- Write in a straight line. Buy pre-lined paper or draw faint pencil lines across the pages before the workshop if you need to.
- When you're writing, make sure you're positioned correctly in relation to the flip chart. Right-handed presenters should stand just off center to the left of the easel as you face it, and vice versa for left-handed scribes.
- Stand to the side to avoid blocking readers' views.
- Writing rapidly and not talking while writing can also help you write in a straight line.
- Write legibly. If possible, write out your charts well in advance of your presentation so you have time to write slowly.
- Choose a style that works and stick with it.
- Organize clearly. The more white space you provide, the easier it is to follow your presentation. Here are some general considerations regarding size:
 - If your letters are about 2 inches high, leave about 1 inch between lines; otherwise, the lines will appear to merge from a distance.
 - Generally, use capital letters for title lines only. Use a combination of upper and lower case letters for text lines.
- If you have trainees sitting more than 50 feet away, consider using a projector and a laptop with a tablet style screen. Your flipchart will be difficult to read even for someone with good eyesight.
- Be consistent. The ability to create a look and carry it through the presentation is important to the presentation's success.
- Use the same style, angle, and size for your letters.
- Maintain the same distance between letters and lines.
- Repeat the color, patterns, and bullets.
- Repetition helps you and your participants follow the theme.

Dealing with Difficult Trainees

Test your knowledge

Group Exercise

Big Talkers

The Kidder

Exhausted and Droopy

Not Into It!

Poor Follow-Through on Assignments

Failure of Participants to Arrive/Return from Breaks on Time

Whisperers

Debrief

Big Talkers

Typical Error

If a particular person seems to be monopolizing the discussion, inexperienced trainers may try to control this person with a phrase like, “Excuse me, do you mind if someone else answers now?” Or even more damaging, they may say something like, “Excuse me, you’re taking up a lot of the group’s time.”

Another similar error is a trainer who talks too much. Remember that you are an adult educator. People don’t like to be lectured without the opportunity to interact, think aloud, and get to know their classroom counterparts a little.

Successful Trainer Response

The best strategy is to focus your energy on the participants who are not talking and draw them out. Encourage them to participate.

You may need to address the big talker at some point if their chatty behavior continues. Although spending your energy on the talkative person can reinforce their chattiness, you may need to find out what the underlying issue is to curb recurring behavior and/or to avoid having them become belligerent or obnoxious.

If you feel that you might be talking too much, remember that your presence is not the reason for the participants to come to training. You need to be quiet at times to allow others to speak. Sometimes we have so much to offer, and so much fascinating information to share, that we forget to stop talking. Save some of your gems for future training, too.

The Kidder

Typical Error

Do you have a class clown who makes a joke of everything? Many trainers will respond to this person by trying to shut them down rather harshly, or even get into a power struggle with them. Statements like, “Okay, funny person, let’s see if we can get on track here,” can make the situation worse. Recognize that the kidder may actually have something serious to add, but may not be sure how to go about it, especially if he is in a class of his peers who expect him to take everything lightly.

Successful Trainer Response

If things are getting out of hand, arrange for a break as quickly as possible. Let people know that the energy is pretty high at the moment and you want to give them a chance to burn it off before they fall off their chairs. Then, try to speak with the kidder at the break. Let them know, tactfully, that you see they are very effective at engaging the group, but you are also concerned that perhaps they have something to offer the group that they are hesitating about. Usually that kind of discussion is enough to curb their disruptive behavior, and you may be impressed to learn that they do have something serious to add to the class.

Exhausted and Droopy

Typical Error

Is someone your class having a hard time keeping their eyes open? A typical error is for the trainer to startle the group: drop something, make a loud noise on a table, or pick the sleeper out of the crowd and try to shock them into waking up. We also encourage these people to fill themselves up with stimulants such as coffee or colas.

Successful Trainer Response

We really have no idea why this person is drifting off, but we can develop a few theories. They may not be sleeping well, perhaps the room is too warm, or maybe they have a lot of other things on their mind. Or perhaps your presentation is just not appealing to them and they are bored! Small group sessions can add some additional energy for someone, as can a break that offers them the chance to move around, take a bio-break, and get some water to re-hydrate.

Not Into It!

Typical Error

Most workshops have one or two participants who just aren't engaged. A typical error is for the trainer to ignore them (since they are an easy participant in many ways) or to act as though their silence signifies agreement with what is going on. You may find that your perceptions are totally wrong when the individual completes an evaluation that states your session was a waste of their time.

Successful Trainer Response

Challenge people who come to your session as a mini-vacation or a chance to socialize. As you roll out the introduction to the course, get them involved by identifying their personal reasons for attending. Look for opportunities to engage them with questions like, "What's important to me about this learning session?" This gives everyone a chance to assess their own stake in the outcome. Where possible, mixing up learning methods (such as large group discussion, individual reading, case studies, and videos) can help appeal to all the learners in your group.

Poor Follow-Through on Assignments

Typical Error

Not every course requires assignments, but they should all require the learner to think and transfer what they've learned to their work or the rest of their lives. However, it can be difficult when not all participants have completed the work.

A typical error is for the trainer to say that the information isn't really needed, so we'll move on without it. Or, they may focus their energy on the one or two people who actually did the assignment.

Successful Trainer Response

Have people complete their assignments in teams, with accountability for completion held among members of the team. Build in some reporting process in the middle of the assignment period so that people who are having trouble getting into it have a chance to get caught up.

Failure of Participants to Arrive/Return from Breaks on Time

Typical Error

It can be tricky to get participants going on schedule. Some trainers wait until the last person arrives before getting started. Or, they may have the group applaud as people finally make it into the room.

Successful Trainer Response

Start at the appointed time so that you are respecting the people who arrived on time. This will also not encourage continued tardiness. To reinforce good behaviors, some trainers will put the names of people who return from breaks on time into a special prize draw. Others will offer a special tip for people who return on time, which tardy students won't hear because they are not there.

Otherwise, we recommend that you do not allow their interruptions to disturb your flow (in other words, ignore them if you can), but don't go out of your way to humiliate them (such as the applause in the error above).

If you are working with participants for more than one day and have some people who are late after every break, speak with them privately and see if there is a reason for this that you can help them with. Most of the time, the fact that you spoke with them cures the behavior.

Whisperers

Typical Error

Do you have whisperers in your group? A typical error is to ignore this behavior in the hope that it will stop. This is not likely to be the case.

Successful Trainer Response

A seasoned trainer will use tact and ask participants to stop whispering. They may say something like, "As you know, it can be hard to focus on what's going on when people are whispering or having sidebars," or, "Please wait a moment and I'll ask you to share with the group."

The trainer also needs to determine the issue that is provoking the behavior. If it's a social thing, the trainer can remind participants about rules of the class, which would include courtesy and respect. If it's that a concept is not well understood, the trainer will have to reteach, amend, or reconsider the material. If the topic has become boring and participants are looking for some stimulation, the trainer needs to fix that too.

Further Reading:

