

Tips for Faculty

The basic purpose of a continuing medical education activity is to share the speaker's skills and experience with others. The speaker must always be aware of the audience's needs and present information that will produce maximum understanding and retention.

As a speaker at a Texas Heart Institute continuing medical education activity, you have special responsibilities to ensure the success of the activity. The professional polish and poise a speaker demonstrates greatly enforces the content, message and value of a presentation.

The most common complaints audiences have about speakers are –

- Speakers did not coordinate with each other
- Speaker's graphics were illegible
- Speaker was unprepared or did not rehearse the presentation
- Speaker did not talk loud enough to be heard

Preparing Yourself

You will find that careful preparation is worth your effort. Your audience will be attentive, appreciative, and wanting to hear you again.

Be certain you fully understand your responsibilities. Don't hesitate to question your program director about the program's scope and purpose. Find out who the other speakers are and how you fit into the overall program. We encourage you to discuss your topic with other speakers. This will avoid repetition with other presentations and avoid omissions in coverage of a topic.

Know your audience. Think about what they want to know, not necessarily what you want to talk about. You will be talking to an audience with a wide span in age and experience. As adult learners, your audience will want a speaker who is interesting and entertaining, but the primary desire is for practical, realistic suggestions.

Keep the content current. Physicians attend conferences for useful and up-to-date information. The audience is looking for immediate application; therefore, your talk should emphasize the problems and concerns of one who has experience with the subject.

Approaching the Subject Matter

Make your presentation as "nuts-and-bolts" as possible. Give information or tips that you would like to have had the first time you encountered a particular problem or situation. Or provide advice for physicians entering a new stage of a problem.

Usually a speaker tries to be comprehensive. Instead, cover the important or key topics. It is more effective to put significant ideas across thoroughly than it is to skim across a long history. Remember to say more about fewer subjects than say a little about many subjects.

Remember, audiences will be more interested in what you have to say about how to address an issue or a situation. In short, plan to get to the point of your presentation quickly – in 20 minutes or less.

Sticking to the Time Schedule

You have been assigned a specific time slot by the program director. As good as a presentation may be, audiences become frustrated and lose concentration if a speaker extends beyond his or her allotted time.

It is always a good idea to practice your presentation several times prior to your speaking engagement. Budget your time. You have been allotted a certain amount of time. Plan to use all of it, but do not go over the allotted time.

Speakers talking beyond the time limits of their presentations is a common problem. It is discourteous to other speakers and creates problems for the entire symposium schedule. Your moderator will remind you of your time limit and will signal you as you come to the end of the time limit. The moderator will interrupt forcefully but respectfully if you extend your time limit.

Your Delivery

Your delivery should be carefully planned, but you should not read your talk. Instead, talk from your notes.

Stand next to the podium so you can glance at your outline from time to time. Standing behind the podium erects a barrier between you and the audience. If you are part of a seated panel, make an effort to project energy by leaning forward while speaking and turning your head to face the other speakers.

Keep your hands out of your pockets. Don't cross your arms, which can suggest insecurity or hostility to your audience. Be natural, not dramatic. Natural gestures reflect your personal style.

Speak loudly enough for all to hear. Public address systems vary. Some microphones require you to stand very close and others work best if you keep your distance. Please treat each microphone as a new challenge and ask your audience if they can hear you clearly. Our staff can assist you with any microphone/audio equipment difficulties.

You do not have to have a powerful or melodious voice to give a successful presentation. Just watch your pacing and inflection. If you are a little nervous, slow down and take a few deep breaths. Use pauses to allow your message to sink in.

Never begin your talk by apologizing. You were selected to give a presentation and the audience is there to hear you. The audience wants you to succeed.

Do not attack the host organization, your host, or your moderator. No matter how frustrating you may be with arrangements, you will appear both ungracious and unprofessional if you attack. Address your problems in private. Always appear unflappable in public.

Do not use profanity, tell off-color or political jokes, or repeat stories in which certain racial, ethnic, gender, religious or political groups are denigrated. You are certain to offend someone in the audience. It is better to omit a questionable remark than to risk destroying your credibility with the audience.

Always plan to arrive at least 30 minutes prior to your presentation time. Whenever you arrive at a symposium or conference, determine who the technical support staff are and where they are located. That way, if there is a technical problem during your presentation, you know where to find help quickly.

Remember to always practice your presentation thoroughly with your PowerPoint or other visual aids.

In Conclusion

Every hour you invest in organizing what you want to say and perfecting your skill in saying it will reap abundant returns from your audience. We have found while physician audiences are knowledgeable and critical, they are also extremely appreciative of well-prepared and carefully presented presentations.

Adapted from the American Planning Association Speaker's Guide 2005.