Practicing Presentations

So, you have finished preparing your presentation. Congratulations! Now, it is time to move to the next step, which is to practice, practice, practice! Not only does this aid in preparation, but it also works to ease speech anxiety or any uneasiness you may be feeling. Here are some best practices:

**Practice aloud.** Although practicing in your head may make sense in a crowded room, it is best when you speak aloud and hear if your thoughts flow together well. You’ll notice right way that speaking aloud is different from simply thinking about your speech.

**Visualize the setting.** Imagine the room where you will give your presentation. Plan how you might move around, where you will stand, where will you place your notes. If possible, practice once in the actual speech location.

**Find out what you are allowed to use during the speech.** Sometimes instructors allow note cards or a keyword outline. Others require you use no aids at all. If you are allowed to use some form of notes, practice with them and become familiar with the information that is on it. If you are not able to bring notes with you then memorize talking points, but not every word.

**Use a timer.** Find out what the time limit is for the presentation. Staying within time limits is important; just think about a professor who keeps the class for longer than the allotted time! More importantly, your audience may become impatient and lose focus if your presentation is too long.

**Take breaks.** If you are becoming too frustrated with yourself and you cannot focus, take a break! Find a place to stop and then try again in a few hours or the next day. However, it is still important to find a time to continue practicing.

**Find a live audience.** Talk to someone you know will give you helpful feedback. This could include friends, relatives, and/or a tutor at the Speaking Center. It is not a good idea to ask “how did I do,” because most responses will be “you did a good job” or “you did fine.” Instead, request that they find at least 2 or 3 things that were done well and 2 or 3 things you can improve.
Videotape yourself. The Speaking Center has the equipment necessary for you or a tutor to record your presentation. When you watch your video, you can hear “ums,” “likes,” and other verbal fillers. Recording your speech best enables you to eliminate these from your vocabulary. Also, this will help you notice and fix problematic non-verbal communication.

The “Do Nots”

Do not stop. After you have said your speech from beginning to end, don’t stop when you mess-up. Rather, continue through the speech and fix the problem after you have finished. This will help you correct mistakes that may happen during the actual presentation.

Do not wait until the last minute to practice. You want to ensure that you have enough time to make adjustments to your speech if need be. Give yourself at least a few (3-4) days in advance to practice and become comfortable with the speech.

Do not lose focus. If you are easily distracted by the television, music, or phone/text messaging, make sure that you have turned off all electronics so you can stay focused while practicing.

Do not underestimate the power of introductions and conclusions. The introduction is designed to get your audience interested and the conclusion is to make them remember the speech. Your introduction and conclusion should be memorized and perfected as much as possible so that you can begin and end effectively.

Do not put yourself down. Use positive and encouraging self-talk when faced with the task of preparing and giving a public presentation. Remind yourself that you do not have to be perfect, but you do have to be prepared.