Group Presentations

Chapter Menu

With the popularity of teams and groups in

organizations on the rise you're likely to encounter many situations that require you to work with others and then present your information to an audience.[i] Group presentations usually involve both interacting within the group and speaking to those outside the group. A **small group** is a collection of individuals who interact and depend on each other to solve a problem, make a decision, and achieve a common goal or objective. In this class, you may have worked in groups to develop various skills associated with public speaking, such as brainstorming for topics or analyzing your audience. Your instructor might also assign a

group presentation. Working in groups in the classroom setting and giving group presentations prepare you for participating in team-based organizations and other professional contexts.[ii]

small group
a collection of individuals who interact and depend on each other to solve a problem, make a decision, and achieve a common goal or objective

Groups have several advantages over individuals working alone. First, individuals working together often achieve more than each person working alone. For example, history students found they developed a better understanding of course material when they developed and gave a team presentation to the class than when they studied the same topic individually.[iii] Second, you're more likely to innovate when you work with a group.[iv] Bringing together individuals with a variety of perspectives encourages more creative approaches to problems and tasks. Some of the most innovative speeches our students have given occurred in group presentations. Third, groups often develop a wider range of solutions to a problem than individuals typically find on their own.[v] Try this in your class: Write down as many speech topics that might work for speaking assignments in your class. Then, brainstorm for topics with several classmates. You'll find that the group will produce more topics and a greater variety of ideas than you were able to come up with by yourself.

Not every situation calls for group work, however. Communicating in groups takes time, so if time is limited, groups frequently are not effective. Second, simple problems with simple solutions don't require groups. You don't need a committee to find the best prices on a new laptop. Third, if group members possess limited knowledge or expertise, then groups can actually do more harm than good. Pooling ignorance won't help solve a problem or make for a good presentation.

Organizing a Small Group

Teamwork creates the glue that holds individuals together in small groups, fostering a sense of cooperation and camaraderie among group members.[vi] Organizing your group to work as a team means more than just setting up online and face-to-face meetings. You want to develop an effective structure that encourages individuals to participate meaningfully. Productive groups develop ways of interacting that center on accomplishing the task or achieving the group's goals.[vii] For example, if you're working in presentation groups, you want to encourage group members to thoroughly research their topics and complete their assigned parts of the presentation on time. You also want to explicitly recognize the contributions of all group members and show respect for each person's viewpoint.[viii] Five key approaches to small group work will help your group develop into a team: define roles and outcomes,

implement effective communication, recognize contributions, use reflective thinking, and commit to combating social loafing.

DEFINE ROLES AND OUTCOMES

Group member roles develop in the group's interactions or groups may also assign roles. For example, if one group member tends to take extensive notes in group meetings, then the group might assign that person the role of recorder or secretary. Discussing who's doing what and group members' expectations for what they should do help the group identify any neglected areas or tasks.

      Group members fulfill three types of roles: task, maintenance and self-centered (Table 16.1).[ix] **Task roles** include activities that help the group accomplish specific assignments, such as seeking information and evaluating the group's conclusions. In planning for a group speech, an *information giver* might bring in newspaper or magazine articles on the group's topic. An *information seeker* asks others in the group for their ideas and the evidence they've gathered. As group members research their topics, the information seeker might suggest they tell the group about specific supporting materials they've found. The *opinion seeker* finds out others' views on the subject under discussion. When a presentation group is brainstorming for topic ideas, for instance, the opinion seeker encourages everyone to contribute their thoughts. The *contributor* offers ideas and solutions to the group's problem or subject under discussion. When brainstorming for speech topics, for instance, the contributor suggests topics the group might talk about. The *recorder* then writes down the

task roles
behaviors that focus on getting the job done and completing the group's charge or objective

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group's ideas as members brainstorm for possible topics. The *director* keeps the group focused on the task at hand, as with reminding group members of what they need to accomplish during a particular meeting.

TABLE 16.1   Examples of Group Member Roles

Task Roles
1. ***Information giver:*** Provides relevant and timely information to the group.
2. ***Information seeker:*** Asks others for their ideas and evidence they've gathered.
3. ***Opinion seeker:*** Asks others for their views on the topic.
4. ***Contributor:*** Gives ideas and solutions to the group's problem or discussion topic.
5. ***Recorder:*** Takes minutes at group meetings; archives online discussions.
6. ***Director:*** Keeps the group focused on its tasks and objectives during discussions and other activities.

Maintenance Roles
1. ***Encourager:*** Praises others' contributions to the groups
2. ***Harmonizer:*** Resolves conflict among group members and facilitates productive relationships.
3. ***Process observer:*** Monitors how group members are working together and evaluates the group's procedures.
4. ***Gatekeeper:*** Equalizes group members' contributions to discussions so no one is left out and no one dominates.

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Self-centered Roles

1. *Isolate:* Refuses to participate in and contribute to the group.
2. *Joker:* Uses humor inappropriately, telling jokes and stories that do not contribute to the group's task or group member relationships.
3. *Dominator:* Controls the group, exerting her/his will, and ignores others' desires and interests.
4. *Blocker:* Refuses to cooperate with others and seeks to impede the group's progress.
5. *Stagehog:* More interested in promoting her/his own interests and achievements than helping the group accomplish its objectives.

Maintenance roles help group members cooperate and get along with each other, such as mediating disagreements and supporting others. If you're working on a group presentation, you might fulfill the *encourager* role by praising group members' ideas for using presentational media in a unique way. In the case of a conflict over how the group structures its presentation, you might take on the *harmonizer* role by getting the two sides to compromise. The *process observer* focuses on how group members work together and the effectiveness of group procedures. For example, if group members are interrupting and talking over each other, the process observer may suggest rules for turn-taking so meetings are more orderly. The *gatekeeper* works to include everyone in the discussion and keep any one person from dominating the group. This role is especially important in the group's beginning to ensure everyone feels comfortable contributing to the group.

Self-centered roles detract from the group's work, such as always promoting your own ideas or not listening to others. You'll want to avoid these roles as they'll prevent your group from

maintenance roles behaviors that focus on developing positive interpersonal relationships among group members

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accomplishing its goals in a productive way. For example, if your presentation group is choosing a topic and you fulfill the *isolate* role by not participating, you're depriving the group of important ideas you may have. Similarly, fulfilling the *joker* role by always joking around and telling irrelevant stories interferes with the group's discussion. The *dominator* role involves controlling the group and ignoring others' needs. When someone dominates, the group misses out on important contributions others in the group might make. *Blockers* refuse to cooperate and try to hinder the group's progress. When group members consistently disagree with any suggested plan of action, that person is blocking the group from achieving its goals. *Stagehogs* are more interested in promoting themselves than promoting the group. These group members talk about their own accomplishments rather than focusing on the group's objectives.

IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Active listening is central to effective communication in groups.[x] As we discuss in Chapter 3, we usually focus on speaking in the communication process, but listening to others provides the foundation for productive group work. Effective communication takes planning and energy. Agendas help structure meetings, and minutes remind group members of what they discussed. Effective communication also means that group members must gather useful and credible information to make sound decisions.

What are some specific ways you can promote effective communication in your group? First, *make the group a top priority*, avoiding self-promotion and too much concern with your own interests. Show other group members that you're *dedicated to completing the group's tasks*. Arriving on time and prepared for meetings demonstrates that you're committed to the group. Second, *share information* and ideas with the group. Groups in which members share information enjoy higher levels of participation and agreement.[xi] So, if you find a reference that you think might help out one of the other group members with her or his speech, email it to the person. Don't hoard information. It's bad for you and bad for the group.

Third, collaborate rather than compete. *Collaboration* means that group members share resources, ideas, and information, and develop solutions and decisions everyone supports.[xii] If

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discussion centers on just two alternatives that divide the group, work to identify a third path that meets the group's objectives. Sharing information and collaboration go hand-in-hand—groups that promote collaboration are more likely to share information within the group.[xiii] Fourth, *help other group members* when they need it. Don't do all their work for them, but pitch in when someone else could use a little assistance. When others provide you with feedback, *respond constructively*. Group presentations offer a distinct advantage in that you have an audience for practicing your part. Carefully consider your team members' comments on your speech, and thank them for their evaluations. Finally, support the group's decisions. Complaining about your group's decision after the fact hinders the group from moving forward. Express your views *before* the final decision, offering solid evidence and reasoning to support your perspective.

TRACKING THE EVOLVING ART

The Old-Fashioned Telephone

In our infatuation with new technology, we sometimes forget that more traditional forms of communication may be the quickest and most efficient way to get the information we need. The old-fashioned telephone, or the modern cell phone, provides a useful tool for coordinating your group. Often a quick phone call—rather than exchanging several email messages over the course of a few days—will answer a question or identify a meeting time. Particularly when you need information right away, the telephone is usually your best bet.

ACKNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTIONS

Letting group members know how they're doing encourages them to interact cooperatively and work toward the group's goal.[xiv] Rewarding group members through recognizing their work motivates them to get actively involved, rather than remain on the sidelines. Do a "reality check" periodically to be sure group members understand their assignments and how they'll be evaluated. Not everyone will contribute to the group in the same way, but each person has her or his part to add to the group's success.

USE REFLECTIVE THINKING

A problem-solving system such as Standard Agenda focuses attention on carefully researching your topic and evaluating the decisions your group makes. The Standard Agenda facilitates step-by-step discussion of a topic: (1) identifying the problem or task, (2) gathering information about the problem, (3) deciding on criteria for evaluating the solution, (4) brainstorming for solutions, (5) evaluating the solutions based on the criteria, and (6) implementing the solution. Group members must complete their discussion of one step before moving on to the next. Applying a problem-solving approach such as Standard Agenda facilitates reasoned discussion, cooperation, and effective communication.[xv] In Figure 16.1 we demonstrate how a group might use Standard Agenda to choose a topic for a presentation.

FIGURE 16.1 Applying Standard Agenda to Choosing a Presentation Topic

1. Identifying the Problem
In a public speaking class, the assignment your instructor asks you to complete will influence what problem you need to solve. Phrase the problem as a question. In choosing a topic for a group presentation, we'd ask:

What speech topic would most interest our audience and us?

2. Gathering Information

In this step, collect as much information as possible about the problem you face. In our choosing a topic for a group presentation example, you'd write down all the information about the assignment, such as when the presentation is due, the length of the presentation and any other requirements, like this:

- o *general purpose is to inform*
- o *due in three weeks*
- o *each person must speak for 6-8 minutes*
- o *must include introduction and conclusion for group*
- o *need transitions between speakers*
- o *all speakers must use presentational media*

3. Establishing Criteria

Here you want to determine how you'll evaluate your solutions to the problem. To choose a speech topic, identify what criteria the topic must meet to be a good one. Here are some criteria to consider:

- o *all group members must be interested in the topic*
- o *topic must interest our audience*
- o *topic must be appropriate for the general purpose*
- o *we must be able to easily divide the topic into a subtopic for each group member*
- o *information on the topic and subtopics must be available*
- o *each person must have enough information to give a 6-8 minute speech*
- o *topic amenable to presentational media*

4. Brainstorming for Solutions

Generate and record as many ideas related to the problem (Step 1) as group members can think of. Be creative here; don't evaluate yet! Here are some ideas our students have come up with in the past:

- o *origins of various holidays*
- o *educational travel*
- o *little-known campus services*
- o *ways to fight poverty*
- o *different forms of alternative energy*
- o *new advances in technology*
- o *fun ways to stay fit*
- o *volunteer opportunities*

5. Evaluating and Choosing Solutions

Compare each idea you came up with in Step 4 with the criteria you developed in Step 3. Rate each idea based on how well it meets your criteria and choose the best one; in the example, the topic for a group presentation. Let's take the *origins of various holidays* and compare it with the criteria.

- o Are all group members interested in the topic?
  Yes.
- o Will our audience be interested?
  Probably; most people celebrate popular holidays but may not know the history of those holidays.
- o Does the topic fit with the general purpose to inform?
  Yes.
- o Can we easily subdivide the topic?
  Yes; there are plenty of holidays to research.
- o Is there sufficient information available?
  Yes; a quick check of library databases indicates we should be able to find enough supporting materials.
- o Is there enough information for each group member to speaker 6-8 minutes? *Yes.*

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- o Does the topic lend itself to integrating presentational media?
  Yes, holidays are usually associated with specific images.
- o Overall rating:
  Excellent—this would be a good topic choice for our group. Our only concern is audience interest. Using an Audience Research Questionnaire would help us more precisely identify our audience's knowledge and interest levels.

You'd review each topic this way and then compare your evaluations to determine which topic earned the highest rating.

6. Implementing the Solution

Now that you've decided on the best solution to your problem, you need to take action on it. In the example, you'd begin the implementation process by researching the topic that received the highest rating.

COMBAT SOCIAL LOAFING

Most students—and most people—dread the thought of working in groups. Why? Because often in groups, not everyone does their fair share of the work. There's a technical term for this—*social loafing*, when group members don't do the work they're capable of, leaving everyone else to complete the group's work.[xvi] Student groups for class projects are particularly susceptible to social loafing for several reasons. First, students often have few options for rewarding those who do the work and punishing those who don't. Second, in most classes, students can't "fire" those who don't do their fair share. Third, nearly all classroom grading from elementary school on up centers on individual evaluations. Students often don't know what's expected of them when working in a group. Without clear guidelines, they're not sure what to do.

No matter what you do, some people in a group will contribute more than others. You can reduce the amount of social loafing that occurs, however, by applying a few concrete strategies. First,

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make sure there are just enough people in the group to accomplish the task. If there are too many, then social loafing will be easy. If there aren't enough, then group members will feel overwhelmed. Second, assign individuals specific tasks and make them accountable for completing those tasks. For example, to prepare for one of your meetings, ask everyone in the group to bring in at least two articles related to your topic. You can also assign tasks such as taking meeting minutes, developing agendas, reminding members of upcoming meetings, and other activities essential to organizing the group. Third, recognize group members for a job well done and apply sanctions for failing to perform. Sometimes rewarding and punishing others can be difficult, but if individuals aren't accountable, then social loafing is more likely to happen. You have to meet social loafing head on! Encourage group members to make the group's goals *their* goals. You're all in this together, and you need everyone's help to get the job done right.

Leading a Small Group

Effective small groups require leadership. First, let's distinguish between a leader and leadership. Group leaders influence others through communication. Someone may emerge as a group's leader or the group may elect a *designated leader*—a person that members choose to be their leader. **Leadership**, on the other hand, is the process of influencing others to help the group achieve its goals and objectives.[xvii] Our idea of leadership broadens when we focus on leadership and not simply on leaders. Leadership is a group concept. When we think of leadership as behaviors that group members exhibit based on what needs to happen, then leadership is *distributed*. From a distributed approach, group members step up to complete tasks and maintain positive relationships among group members when the

leadership
the process of influencing others to assist the group in achieving its objectives and goals

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need arises. Rather than one person in the group taking responsibility for facilitating tasks and maintaining good relationships, *all group members share in fulfilling leadership functions*. Groups may be able to function without leaders, but they can't accomplish anything without competent leadership.

Leadership involves three key areas: administrative duties, leading discussion, and facilitating teamwork. We discuss each one below.

ATTENDING TO ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

Administrative tasks include two functions, planning meetings and keeping group records. To plan meetings, you'll define the meeting's purpose, determine when the meeting will start and stop, make all the necessary physical arrangements, and notify group members of the time, place, and reason for the meeting. Keeping good group records may seem tedious, but you'll be surprised at how quickly group members get off track without *agendas*, *minutes*, and *reports*. Agendas guide the group's discussion. Minutes remind group members of past actions and decisions. Group members often complete reports on their individual tasks, with the group producing a final report. These probably seem like boring tasks, but without them, group meetings usually prove pointless and frustrating. Most important, if group members can't think of a good reason to meet, then don't.

LEADING DISCUSSION

All group members should contribute to leading discussion. Whether online or face-to-face, effective group communication depends on keeping discussion on track. Leading discussion may appear simple, but keeping group members focused often proves difficult. You can help move the group's discussion forward by:

- Briefly stating the meeting's purpose.
- Focusing discussion on the group's goal.
- Assisting the group in covering all agenda items.

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- Giving all group members an equal opportunity to participate.
- Listening carefully to each group member's ideas, information, suggestions, and opinions.
- Disagreeing about issues, not people.

Don't confuse leading discussion with dominating the group's interactions. In addition, brief socializing and off-topic discussion occur in every group and can lead to creative and interesting ideas. When such activities interfere with the group's task, however, discussion-focused leadership behaviors should kick in respectfully.

FACILITATING TEAMWORK

Finally, effective leadership requires facilitating teamwork.[xviii] Both what you say and what you do should reflect a "we" or "us" orientation.[xix] For example, when presenting a speech as a group, use "us" and "we" rather than "I" and "you." Also, creating a logo or name that represents the personality or spirit of the group can bring its members together. For example, students at the University of California, Santa Cruz, chose the slimy but endearing Banana Slug, a common sight in the surrounding mountains, for its school mascot when the university opened in 1965. A university chancellor later tried to change the mascot in order to "improve the school's image." But students met the challenge with fierce resistance, and after a five-year struggle, prevailed in their choice. The Banana Slug truly symbolizes the students' sense of identity and team spirit.[xx]

Confronting **hidden agendas** also promotes teamwork. Hidden agendas refer to individual members' unstated goals that

hidden agendas
unstated individual goals that interfere with the group's goals

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conflict with the group's goals. For example, a group member may suggest that the group choose music as the topic for a presentation in their speech class, even when other group members aren't interested in the subject. The group member may continue to advocate for the topic, not because it's appropriate, but because she or he could use the information for an assignment in another class. Finally, facilitating teamwork requires that group members share in the group's rewards. If the instructor singles out one or two group members for praise, others' contributions should be noted too. Athletes often use this strategy when they're interviewed about a winning performance, making statements such as, "It's my team that gets the credit, not me" and "No one person makes this team; we all work together to win."

Types of Small Group Presentations

Group presentations may be given in several formats, including oral reports, panel discussions, round table discussions, symposiums, and forums. In addition, your group may present via a mediated channel.

ORAL REPORT

Working in groups doesn't always mean presenting in groups. When groups present **oral reports**, just one representative from the group gives the entire report. This often happens with work teams in organizations. Various members of the organization develop the report, such as on a new product, and then one of the group members presents the findings to management or upper administration. Effective oral reports clearly recognize the contributions of all group members. The speaker should use pronouns such as "we" and "us" to indicate the group, rather than the individual, produced the report. In addition, specific

oral report
one member of a group presents the group's findings

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references to group members or units in the organization that wrote the report acknowledges everyone's contributions. The speaker must be fully versed in all aspects of the report, asking group members for clarification where needed.

The oral report format provides consistency and smooth transitions between presentation sections. Oral reports avoid the inherent disruptions associated with each team member taking her or his speaking turn. Audience members need only adjust to one person's speaking style. An oral report's strengths can lead to its weaknesses, however. The team relies on one spokesperson, who may or may not accurately represent the perspectives of all group members. Also, the speaker might not be familiar with all aspects of the report, so may have difficulty answering questions after the formal presentation.

PANEL DISCUSSION

You've likely viewed **panel discussions** on weekend TV talk shows. A moderator or facilitator asks questions to direct the group's interaction, which occurs in front of an audience. Group members are experts on the topics under discussion and know beforehand the general subjects that will be covered. The moderator usually provides an introduction, giving an overview of the topic and the discussion's purpose. Then the moderator may state each person's credentials or ask panelists to introduce themselves.

panel discussion
A moderator asks questions of experts on topics in front of an audience

Although panel discussions are not rehearsed, they are not entirely impromptu either. Discussants often have notes and may refer to them during the discussion. Some questions may be unexpected, and their responses spontaneous. Still, participants prepare carefully and don't simply "wing it" when the discussion starts. One example of a panel discussion occurs during Career Day sponsored by the Communication Studies Department at San José State University every spring. To give

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students first-hand information about what they can do with a degree in communication, the department invites five or six alumni to talk about their careers in communication-related professions. A faculty member serves as the discussion facilitator. After the formal presentation, audience members—mostly communication majors and minors—then ask the panelists questions.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Unlike panel discussions, **round table** discussions do not have audiences—only the group members are present. All group members participate in a round table discussion, which may or may not have a leader or facilitator. Because speakers are experts about the topic under discussion, responses are impromptu. Nonetheless, speakers arrive prepared, knowing the discussion topic and often the other participants too.

round table discussion expert participants discuss a topic in an impromptu format without an audience present

     The setting for a round table discussion is generally informal, with speakers sitting in a circle to facilitate dialogue and engaged participation. Either the facilitator or person who organized the discussion provides an overview or introduction that includes the discussion's purpose, procedures for discussion, and time limit. Similarly, the facilitator or organizer presents a brief closing, summarizing the main themes to come out of the discussion and what will be done with the information. Additionally, the discussion is either recorded or someone is assigned to take notes so the information generated by participants may be used at a later date.

     Round table discussions provide a venue for individuals to exchange information and ideas about a particular topic. All participants are encouraged to participate to maximize the opportunity to consider different points of view on the same subject. Roundtable discussions often are convened to generate new ideas and innovative approaches to a problem. For example, the *Akron Beacon Journal* brought together local experts to discuss promoting entrepreneurship, small business growth and start ups in northeast Ohio. The product of that discussion was a list of recommendations given to local leaders.[xxi]

Exchanging Ideas Around the Table

Participating in a round table discussion may seem intimidating at first—no rehearsed speech that you'll give to an audience. But this format provides a great way for you to exchange ideas with others and learn about perspectives and topics you may not know much about. And with their impromptu—yet prepared—format, round table discussions give you an opportunity to practice "thinking on your feet." Consider organizing some round table discussions on your campus that focus on local, regional, national, and global topics of interest to you and other students. Getting people together for discussions helps improve speaking skills and allows for the free flow of new ideas and information.

SYMPOSIUM

If you're giving a group presentation in your public speaking class, you're probably using a symposium format. In a **symposium**, the group chooses a topic, then divides it into different areas. Each group member then presents a speech on her or his subtopic. For example, your group might choose music, and then identify jazz, hip hop, country, classical, and rock as the subtopics. Speakers usually follow the same organizational pattern to provide continuity among the speeches. In the music example, each speaker might discuss the music genre's history, identify two or three key artists or groups, and provide a few examples.

symposium
each group member presents a speech about a part of a larger topic

The majority of group interaction occurs in the early stages of the symposium's development; thoroughly planning the format in advance is essential for an effective symposium. Although speakers

will not give identical speeches, some consistency in attire, delivery style, use of presentational media, and content will give the symposium coherence. For example, if speakers were discussing national parks in the U.S., you wouldn't want one speaker using overhead transparencies, another digital slides, the third speaker a flipchart, and the fourth no presentational media at all. These differences suggest a lack of coordination that will distract the audience and hurt the group's credibility. Group members must discuss before the presentation whether or not to use a podium, the formality of their attire, the presentational media they will use, and the common way they will structure their speeches.

Once the groundwork for the symposium is complete, group members work independently preparing their individual speeches. In the later stages of speech preparation, group members come together to practice and make any necessary adjustments to assure a well-organized symposium.

FORUM

Following an oral report, panel discussion, or symposium, audience members often want to ask questions. The question-and-answer session after the formal group presentation is a **forum**. As with individual speeches, group members must practice effective listening skills, and answer audience questions as thoroughly and honestly as possible. Coordinating group members' responses can prove challenging in forums. Before the presentation, decide which group members will handle which question areas. Group members should choose someone who will facilitate the forum. The obvious choice after a panel discussion is the moderator. For oral reports, the group may choose the presenter, or ask another member of the group to fulfill the facilitator role. In symposiums, any member of the group may lead the question-and-answer session.

forum
the question-and-answer session after a group's formal presentation

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VIDEO AND NET CONFERENCING

Although many small group presentations occur in a face-to-face setting, more and more organizations today turn to new communication technologies for group interactions and presentations. You may find yourself presenting in any one of the group formats discussed previously—oral report, panel discussion, round table discussion, symposium, and forum—via new communications media. Video and net conferencing allow group and audience members in different physical locations to meet and interact. With **videoconferencing,** participants at multiple locations communicate in real time using television and high-speed computer technology.[xxii] Participants can both hear and see each other. Because the equipment is expensive, videoconferencing mainly occurs in corporate and university settings. Unlike traditional videoconferencing, **net conferencing** requires fairly inexpensive hardware and software. You can set up a net conference with a home computer, web cam or video camera, broadband internet connection, and software such as Microsoft NetMeeting or iSpQ VideoChat. In addition to communicating orally and visually, net conferencing allows participants to share applications, use whiteboards, and exchange files.

Videoconferencing takes careful planning, high quality equipment, and technical competence for a productive experience. Net conferencing also requires good planning, but the equipment is fairly simple to use. Both allow for the easy integration of multimedia materials such as video clips and audio files into your presentations.

videoconferencing
using television and high-speed computer technology, individuals at multiple physical locations interact in real time orally and visually

net conferencing
individuals at multiple locations using personal computers to communicate orally and visually in real time via the internet

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Before the Presentation
Before the presentation, check that all equipment in all locations functions properly. Test microphones for audibility and cameras for visibility. Carefully plan the presentation's format so all group members know their responsibilities during the presentation. Identify a few practice times for group members to meet and go through the presentation, giving each other constructive feedback. You may want to record your practice sessions and note areas for improvement.

On the Day of the Presentation
On the day you present, arrive or set up early and complete a final check of the equipment. Dress appropriately—no bright or white clothing or jewelry that will glare in the camera's eye. Blue is a very camera friendly color. Have all your notes and your visual and audio materials ready. You don't want the camera to capture you fumbling around before you speak.

During the Presentation
Once the presentation begins, be mindful of what you are doing and saying at all times. Video is unforgiving, picking up sounds and movements we don't ordinarily notice. Avoid any extraneous noises, such as tapping a pencil or unzipping a backpack. When you are not speaking, devote all your attention to whoever is speaking and appear genuinely interested in that person. For a videoconference, use the mute button on your microphone to keep background noises to a minimum, particularly when the videoconference involves many people or several physical sites.

When it's your turn to talk, speak clearly and crisply. Balance a dynamic delivery with the constraints of video—excessive movement clutters the screen audience members view and distract from your ideas. Too much moving about can also detract from the picture's technical quality. Monitoring your body movement is especially important in a net conference because the camera doesn't follow you around. In addition, with net conferencing, slow connection speeds often cause video problems. If necessary, switching to audio-only mode will at least allow you to continue speaking and complete your presentation.

Watch your time limit and stick to it so that everyone has a chance to speak. If the presentation includes a question-and-answer session, assign a facilitator beforehand. Explain the session's format as you begin and announce how much time the group will allot for questions.

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After the Presentation

Once the presentation has ended, thank everyone for their participation. For a video conference, take all your notes and any visual materials with you. Leave the room cleaner than you found it. Schedule a meeting for your group to review and discuss the presentation, where you will identify what went well and what didn't go as you'd planned.

TRACKING THE EVOLVING ART

Practicing for Mediated Presentations with Webcams

With their low cost and simple set up, web cameras make practicing for your mediated group presentations easier, especially when group members can't meet face-to-face. Using a webcam, group members record their own speeches and then email them to each other for feedback and to check that the presentations fit together. Also, capturing a few of your own speech rehearsals allows you to observe your performance from an audience's perspective and get used to using a webcam. Don't be too critical of your own or others' performances, though. When we view a webcam recording to critique the speaker, we notice many more little things than we do in the moment of participating in a video or net conference. In addition, identify the speaker's strengths as well as weaknesses so you give constructive feedback, for yourself as well as others.

Guidelines for Participating in a Group Presentation

In participating in group presentations, we focus on their "groupness" or the way they fit together into a cohesive whole. Group presentations emphasize group rather than individual effort. So in addition to what we usually aim to accomplish when giving an individual oral presentation—well researched, audience centered, engaging language, appropriate presentational media, and the like—we aim to demonstrate that the presentation is truly a group endeavor. That is, the effectiveness of the group's presentation will depend in part on how well the group prepares, coordinates individual presentations, listens actively, makes clear references to the group, and stays focused on achieving the group's goal.

PREPARING AS A GROUP

Preparation as a group provides the foundation for a coherent group presentation. Even in a panel discussion, where presenters do not practice together, group members keep the others in mind as they prepare for the presentation. Similarly, participants in a round table discussion typically develop notes for their presentations within the context of what other presenters will say. Symposiums, however, require the most preparation as a group. Although group members each talk about their own subtopic, those subtopics must come together and form a coherent whole in the presentation. For example, a group chooses the topic unusual team sports, with kabaddi, badminton, canoe polo, curling, and korfball as the subtopics. Before beginning in-depth research, group members must agree on the main points they'll cover in their speeches. They might, for instance, all talk about the sport's general description, history, and what makes it especially unique or interesting. The group would want to avoid one person only discussing history, another covering only how the game is played, and a third focusing on why the audience should learn how to the play game. This advanced preparation as a group becomes evident in the group's presentation, with speakers following a similar format, smooth transitions between speakers, and no repetition of identical material. In a video or net conference, presenters should have a clear idea of speaking order, cues to move from one speaker to the next, a plan to handle any technical problems, and continuity of camera shots. The presentation should look and sound like a cohesive whole, rather than individual presentations simply occurring together.

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COORDINATING INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

How well group members coordinate their presentations with each other is a second area of concern. For example, in a forum, group members should decide in advance who is responsible for questions in specific topic areas. This avoids the problem of either several group members responding at the same time to a question, or blank looks and no one responding. With panel discussions, the moderator or facilitator assumes primary responsibility for the smooth flow of discussion. Still, listeners expect group members to avoid interrupting or talking over each other. Symposiums provide multiple points for evaluating how well the group members coordinate their presentations. For example, each speaker should provide a smooth transition to the next speaker. And although presentational media need not be identical, some standardization gives the audience an impression of continuity and prior planning.[xxiii] Finally, regardless of the group presentation type, an effective opening overview and closing summary give the presentation a sense of cohesion.[xxiv]

LISTENING ACTIVELY

Active listening plays a key role in the success of any group presentation and is a third area of concern that contributes to a group presentation's overall effectiveness. No matter what the setting, group members should display active listening skills, such as giving the speaker their complete attention, nodding, looking at the speaker, taking brief notes, and appearing interested in what the speaker has to say. Group members should not be working on their own presentations, talking or whispering with each other, or engaging in any other activities that detract from the group's presentation. Careful listening is especially important in round table and panel discussions where participants likely do not know exactly what others will say. Appropriately responding to other speakers requires close attention to the discussion. In addition, round table and panel discussions typically include speakers with different—and opposing—viewpoints, making critical listening essential. In these types of group presentations, we expect participants to carefully examine speakers' ideas and supporting evidence.

MAKING CLEAR REFERENCES TO THE GROUP

Listening to group members as they present helps speakers refer to what their co-presenters have said. These clear references to the group are a fourth important area for evaluation and provide another mechanism for linking together the separate parts of a group presentation. In a symposium, a speaker might say, "As Sheila remarked in her presentation . . ." or "Similar to what Drew found . . . " These comments help demonstrate how the different pieces of the presentation fit together. In an oral report, where just one person gives the presentation, the speaker might refer to specific aspects of the project individual group members worked on. These brief acknowledgements personalize the report and indicate the ways different members of the group contributed to the project. Another important way to reference the group is to use the pronouns "we," "our" and "us." Responding to a question during a forum, the speaker might say, "In our research, we found . . ." or "It surprised us when . . ." In making clear references to the group, audiences should learn about both individual contributions and group efforts in the presentation.

STAYING FOCUSED ON ACHIEVING THE GROUP'S OVERALL GOAL

The final area of concern for speakers participating in group presentations is the degree to which the group stays focused on achieving its overall goal. For an oral report, where one person presents the group's findings, the speaker must give a balanced view of all members' perspectives and adequately cover the report's sections. Participants in a panel discussion should all have an equal opportunity to speak and respond appropriately to the moderator's questions. Round table discussions rely on a free flow of information among speakers that produces possible solutions to problems. Symposiums are designed to either inform or persuade audience members. Forums should allow for full audience participation. Evaluation of the group's goal attainment determines the group's ultimate success—Did group members achieve what they set out to do?

SPEECH BUDDY VIDEO LINK

Reviewing Group Presentations

Janine introduces video clips from several group presentations and highlights moments that indicate how well individual group members and the groups as a whole achieved the goals of speaking in a group.

ACTIVITY LINK

As a Group

This activity first asks you to evaluate a sample group presentation and identify ways it might be improved, and then to plan how you will apply what you've learned about group presentations to any group presentations you may participate in.

Summary

Group work and group presentations are common in classroom and work settings. Effectively organizing your group provides the basis for a productive group experience. Developing constructive norms in four key areas fosters teamwork in small groups: defined roles and outcomes, effective communication, acknowledged contributions, and reflective thinking. Defined task and maintenance roles clarify the group's expectations for each group member. Groups want to avoid self-centered roles that detract from the group's ability to function effectively. Effective communication among group members requires making the group a top priority, sharing information, collaborating rather than competing, helping each other, providing constructive feedback, and supporting group decisions. Acknowledging each person's contributions to the group makes individuals feel included. Reflective thinking processes such as Standard Agenda encourages group members to thoroughly consider all available information before making a decision. Strive for twin goals in all your group experiences—accomplishing the group's

assignment *and* creating positive feelings toward each other along the way and when the group's work is done.

Social loafing presents the greatest challenge to effectively working in groups. When some group members avoid doing their fair share of the workload, everyone in the group suffers. Although individual contributions toward the group's goal will always vary, you can take steps to reduce social loafing. Make sure you have just the right number of people to reach the group's objective. Assign individual group members specific tasks and make people accountable for getting their work done. Finally, reward group members for completing their tasks and apply sanctions for lack of follow through.

Although we often think of leadership as residing in one person, leadership functions are often distributed among all group members. Group leadership includes administrative tasks, leading discussion, and facilitating teamwork. Planning meetings and keeping group records make up the administrative tasks. Effectively managing a group's discussion requires keeping the group focused on the meeting's purpose, making sure all group members have the opportunity to participate, and listening to everyone's ideas. Facilitating teamwork emphasizes a "we" orientation to group work.

Groups may give several types of presentations, including an oral report, panel discussion, roundtable discussion, symposium, and forum. In addition, groups may present via video or net conferencing. For an oral report, one person in the group presents the entire report. Panel discussions involve a moderator asking questions of experts about a topic in front of an audience. Round table discussions also include expert speakers, but the focus is on the exchange of ideas among participants, so an audience is not present. Symposiums are the most-common form of classroom group presentations. Speakers each choose a subtopic within the group's topic and present individual speeches to an audience. Forums are question-and-answer sessions. They may stand alone, but more often occur directly after an oral report, panel discussion, or symposium. Finally, today's communication technology impacts both how group members work together and how they conduct their presentations. Whatever the format—oral report, panel discussion, roundtable discussion, symposium, or forum—video and net conferencing allow group members at various physical locations to interact and present their information.

We expect more from speakers in group presentations than we do with individual speeches. In addition of all the qualities that go into effective public speaking, group presentations must form a

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unified whole. We speakers participating in a group presentation must focus on five areas of concern: preparing as a group, coordinating each individual presentation, listening actively, making clear references to the group, and staying focused on achieving the group's overall goal. Preparation as a group should be evident in the presentation's structure and content. An effective overview, smooth transitions and a closing summary help coordinate the group's presentation. Active listening allows speakers to comment on what others have said and avoid unnecessary repetition of materials. Clear references to the group, such as using "we" and referring to other participants' points, help knit together the presentation. The degree to which the group achieved its goal is the final area of evaluation.

Critical Challenges

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

The questions below can also be found among the book's online resources for this chapter, where you have the option of emailing your responses to your instructor, if required.

1. Reflect on one or two of your recent group experiences. What roles did you fulfill in the group? How did your roles contribute to the group achieving its goal? Did you exhibit any self-centered roles? How might you be a better group member in future group situations?
2. In this chapter we suggest that small groups use distributed leadership, where everyone in the group fulfills leadership functions. To what extent have you experienced this in previous group work? How practical is the distributed approach to leadership? How can you encourage this approach in your small groups for your public speaking class?
3. *Forum* in Latin means *marketplace* and a *place of public discussion*. As a speaker, how can you encourage audience members to offer differing views during your group's question-and-answer session? What do you need to avoid that might deter the audience from speaking out?

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