



## Steps in Planning a Presentation

In general, there are seven steps in planning a presentation:

1. Choose your topic
2. Determine your purpose
3. Gather information
4. Develop an outline or write your speech
5. Select visual aids
6. Choose a title
7. Practice

Depending on the type of presentation you are doing, you may do some or all of these steps. Speeches do not require visual aids, so you would skip step 5. If you are giving an Impromptu Speech, your topic will be given to you and you will essentially just have to quickly map out the outline of your speech. With all types of presentations, however, time spent planning and practicing will benefit you greatly.

### Step 1: Choose Your Topic

Choosing a topic is the most important step in the presentation planning process. If you do not choose a subject you are interested in and will enjoy, you will likely not do a good job. Your personal curiosity about a topic can give you energy to complete all the steps required to reach the finished product, and the audience will be able to sense your enthusiasm when you give your talk.

The list of topics you can choose from is endless. You can select something that relates to your 4-H project area, but even that is not necessary. The only requirement is that you choose a new topic each year. Keep in mind that topics should be age-appropriate and in good taste. Advocacy of political or religious views is not recommended.

Choose a topic that fits your knowledge and skill level. If it's your first time giving a presentation, it is probably best if you pick a topic with which you are familiar. That way,

you can spend more time working on “how” you present instead of worrying about the content of “what” you present. You will feel more comfortable in front of an audience and will have an easier time answering questions. If you are an experienced presenter, challenge yourself. Explore a new area or try a different type of presentation. Use this as an opportunity to grow and learn.

The subject of your presentation doesn’t have to be controversial or earth-shattering. If you decide on an old tried-and-true topic, try presenting it in an original way. Or you can take an everyday topic and find new information to share about it.

The topic you select should be neither too broad nor too narrow. If your topic is too broad, you won’t have enough time to cover the subject adequately and your talk will end up being very superficial. On the other hand, if your topic is too narrow, you might not be able to find enough information to fill the required length of time. Focus on one principle theme or idea that has several supporting points or steps. As examples, “How to Cook” would be too broad of a topic while “How to Toss a Salad” may be too narrow. In between might be “How to Prepare and Toss a Salad.”

If you are going to give a demonstration, ask yourself if there will be enough action to hold the audience’s attention. For an illustrated talk, can you have enough visuals to maintain interest? In either case, if the answer is “no,” maybe you should consider doing a public speech instead.

Depending on where and why you will be giving your presentation, you may need to consider your audience when selecting your topic. It might not be appropriate to talk about how to butcher a steer at a garden club meeting or demonstrate making brownies to a dieter’s club. Think about how much your audience knows about the subject. Don’t choose a topic so technical or advanced that they can’t understand it. You will also need to consider the size of your audience, especially for demonstrations. How much will they be able to see of what you are doing?

If you are having trouble thinking of a topic, ask others for ideas. The final selection, however, should be yours. Just remember that subjects abound. Here are just a few ideas from a wide range of projects:

- How to make an apple pie
- Recommended equine vaccinations
- How to study for a test
- Giving fantastic birthday parties
- The Endangered Species Act
- Sheep tail-docking issues

## Step 2: Determine Your Purpose

Now that you have decided what your presentation will be about, you need to decide what type of presentation you will give. You will also need to decide whether to do it by yourself or with a teammate.

How do you decide which type of presentation to do? You need to choose the most effective method for your topic. Look at the information you have and how you plan to communicate it. Ask yourself what the purpose of your presentation is and what response you want from the audience.

Do you want to teach the audience how to do something? Will you show actual steps in a process? Will you have a finished product to show? A demonstration will probably be the best choice.

Do you want to inform your audience about something? Will you need visuals to explain your topic? Are there issues that will limit your ability to show all steps in a process (such as space, time, power requirements, etc.)? In these cases, an illustrated talk might work better.

Do you want to persuade the audience that one way is better than another? Do you want to get a reaction from the audience or urge them to take action on some issue. Then a public speech is the way to go.

## Step 3: Gather Information

Now it is time to do some research and gather information about your topic. This takes some time, so allow yourself at least a month for this step. You want to learn as much as possible about your subject. The more you know, the more confident you will feel when you are presenting and the easier it will be to answer questions. There is no substitute for being well-informed.

You can acquire information from several different sources. Sources can include:

- Books and/or magazines
- Extension publications and project books
- Experts/authorities on subject
- Your own experiences
- Teachers
- 4-H Leaders
- Other 4-H members
- Newspapers
- Reputable websites

Keep a list of all the sources you use. People like to know where your information came from, and you will need to cite your sources in your talk.

Information you gather needs to be current and accurate. Be sure you know the difference between fact and opinion. A fact is something that has been proven to be true. An opinion is something someone believes to be true but has not been proven. If you are using someone's opinion, try to find a second source to confirm it.

You will need to record the information you find. Making notecards is an efficient method for doing this. You can put different points or steps on different cards. This makes it very easy to rearrange them into a logical order. You can also take notes on a computer, collecting like information together. Some people cut apart rough drafts, rearrange the parts, and tape them back together in a logical order. Others cut and paste on the computer. Do what works best for you. The most important thing is to gather complete information and to know where your information comes from.

## Step 4: Outline or Write

There are many ways of preparing what you will actually say in your presentation. Some people only use outlines; some use an outline but write out their introduction and conclusion; others prefer to write out their entire talk. You will need to experiment to determine what works best for you.

Whichever method you use, begin with forming an outline. List the important points you want to make and arrange them in a logical order. Under each main heading, list the details you need to cover. Include any materials or visual aids you will need. Outlines for the different types of presentations may look like these:

### Demonstration

- I. Introduction
  - a. Opening/attention-getter
  - b. Introduce yourself
  - c. Preview of what you will demonstrate
- II. Body
  - a. Step 1 explain how to do each step and why you do it that way
  - b. Step 2
  - c. Step 3
  - d. Finished product
- III. Conclusion
  - a. summary of steps
  - b. catchy ending
  - c. cite sources

## Illustrated Talk and Speeches

- I. Introduction
  - a. Opening/Attention-getter
  - b. Introduce yourself
  - c. Preview of what you plan to tell them
- II. Body
  - a. Main point 1
    - Support
    - Supportvisual aids
  - b. Main point 2
    - Support
    - Support
  - c. Main point 3
    - Support
    - Support
- III. Conclusion
  - a. summary of steps
  - b. catchy ending
  - c. cite sources

Once you have an outline, you can begin work on planning your entire talk. Although it may sound odd, plan the body of your presentation first. Next write the conclusion and write the introduction last. You will find it easier to write an introduction if you know exactly what will be included, and you can tie everything together.

If you like to work from an outline, once it is complete you can begin talking through your presentation, trying various words and phrases. You might want to make notecards of major points or certain phrases you don't want to forget. You will need to go through your presentation many times until you can talk easily and everything flows together.

If you like to write out your entire presentation, work from your outline, and write more than you think you will need. It is better to have too much information as you can always cut out any excess later. When you are done writing, let it sit for a few days and then come back to edit it. When you are satisfied with what you have, start simplifying it onto notecards.

Use simple but colorful language. If you need to include complex or technical terms, be sure to explain them. Don't use slang. Include descriptive phrases that can help the audience visualize what you are saying. For example, instead of saying "100 yards," say "as long as a football field." Using transition words (next, finally, first, etc.) will greatly help the audience follow along and not get lost. (Avoid over-using the same transition word.)

Be sure when you are talking through your presentation that you think about more than just the words you are saying. In a demonstration, you need to plan how you will do the action required while you are talking. In an illustrated talk, you need to plan how and when visual aids will be used. In a speech, you must think about what gestures to use, how to vary your voice, and how you can use movement to emphasize points.

Practice your presentation using notecards, and keep working to cut down the number of notecards needed. If it helps, highlight important words or phrases so your eyes can find them quickly. Ideally, you will get to the point where you don't need any notecards at all. If you use notecards, be sure to number them to help keep them in proper order.

Don't memorize your entire presentation. You want to talk TO the audience, not AT the audience, sounding natural and not stilted. If you thoroughly know your material, you will not need to memorize. You will only need to learn the sequence of your talk. Not memorizing will allow you flexibility if something unexpected happens during your presentation, and you won't be lost if you accidentally forget a line. The only parts of your presentation you should probably memorize are the introduction and the conclusion. These are extremely important and you should know them well enough to never have to refer to notes during these times.

## **Step 5: Select your Visual Aids**

Visual aids come in many forms: actual objects, posters, videos, charts, slides, overhead transparencies, etc. If you are giving a demonstration or an illustrated talk, you must have at least one visual aid. Remember, no visual aids are allowed for speeches.

Visual aids are used to enhance your presentation. They can add sparkle and help keep the audience's interest. They are often useful in explaining complex ideas. They can help the audience learn faster, understand better, and remember longer. As the saying goes, a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Visual aids can make the difference between an excellent and a mediocre presentation, but you must select your visual aids carefully and make sure you choose the best type for the job you want it to do.

Make sure your visual aid has a purpose, that it is truly needed. A visual should add something to the presentation and not just be there for "looks."

You also want to make sure your visual aid is easy to use or show. You don't want to be fumbling with complicated objects or have items that are too small for the audience to see. Your visual aids should fit smoothly into your presentation and help the audience follow along.

Remember that visual aids should not overpower your presentation but rather simply reinforce what you are saying. Too many visual aids can be distracting. Beware of turning your presentation into an audio-visual show. While good visual aids are crucial, the emphasis still needs to be on you as the presenter.

(Be sure to read the section on “Preparing and Using Visual Aids.”)

## Step 6: Choose a Title

After you have your presentation all planned out, it’s time to think of a catchy title. The title is your first opportunity to capture the interest of the audience. It should make the audience want to hear your presentation and wonder what it is about. You want your title to suggest the topic without giving away the whole story.

Spend some time thinking about your title. Be creative and original. An effective title meets one or more of these criteria:

- It is short and to the point.
- It is descriptive.
- It is provocative.
- It is image-making.
- It is fun!

Here are some examples of turning bland titles into interesting titles.

Trail Riding Safety	Happy Trails!
Recipes for Bananas	Let’s Go Bananas!
Tortoises of the Galapagos Islands	Giants in a Small Land
Reintroduction of Wolves to Yellowstone	The Pack is Back
How to Give a Chicken a Bath	A Bubble Bath for Buddy

If you are giving a demonstration or an illustrated talk, make a title poster. A public speech may have a title but will not have a poster. You generally will not have a title for an impromptu speech.

## Step 7: Practice

No matter how much time you spend on all the other steps in planning a presentation, nothing takes the place of practicing. The more you practice, the more comfortable and confident you will be when giving your talk.

Practice does not mean memorizing. Instead, it means knowing your material so well that you can present it in your own words in a natural manner. You can begin practicing using notecards, but try to get to the point where you don't need them.

When you practice, you need to talk out loud, not just in your head. Get in the habit of using complete sentences. When giving your presentation, you don't want to trail off in the middle of a thought.

Practice the entire presentation at once. This will allow you to see if everything flows smoothly together, if you have enough information, and how long it takes. Try to anticipate questions that might be asked and practice answering them.

If you are giving a demonstration or illustrated talk, be sure you practice with all your visual aids. You need to be able to synchronize your actions with your words. Determine where you will place everything and what you will do with each item when you are done with it. Practicing with the actual visuals will ensure that you are able to use equipment or show items skillfully and that everything works properly.

If you can, practice in front of other people. Your family, friends, or 4-H leader are usually happy to listen. Ask them for feedback, and use their suggestions to improve. Try practicing in front of a mirror so you can see your facial expressions and gestures. Or have someone videotape you so you can evaluate yourself. It's also a good idea to practice in a variety of places so you feel comfortable in different settings.

Do a final practice shortly before you are scheduled to give your presentation. This way, everything will be fresh in your mind.

Even if you are giving an impromptu speech, it is important to practice. Mark Twain is credited with saying, "It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech." You may not have a topic and you won't have done the other preparation, but you can practice the technique. Have people give you topics at random and practice quickly determining your thesis and finding 2-3 supporting points. Then practice giving short speeches, making sure they have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

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This publication was written by Roberta Lundeberg, 4-H Program Coordinator. Contributing authors and reviewers: Elaine Schumpf, 4-H Specialist, Mona Easley, 4-H Program Coordinator, Roberta Newman, 4-H Presentations Judge, Tammy Skubinna, 4-H Youth Development Agent, & Mary Arnold, 4-H Youth Development Specialist.

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