



# Youth

*in action*  
March 2000 NUMBER 13



## **Making the Most of Your Presentation**

### **What Is a Presentation?**

A presentation is a way of communicating information to an audience. Presentations have many purposes and can take many forms. A presentation can be a speech, a panel discussion, a debate, a skit, a display, a demonstration, or even a dramatic or musical performance. It may be creative, or it may be as simple as reading a textbook out loud. It may include dance, music, drama, or role-playing. It may be designed to stimulate talk about an important issue, educate people on a topic, or mobilize action in a community.

Presentations may do these things by explaining opposing or conflicting points of view, providing persuasive arguments for a position, or describing the benefits of implementing a proposed action. A presentation may take place at a school assembly or before a meeting of a town council, civic federation, service club, or any other group—or even at a national, State, or local conference.

### **How Do Presentations Prevent or Reduce Crime?**

No matter how it's designed or what its purpose, a presentation provides a

powerful opportunity to make a focused case for your point of view. It's also a great chance to communicate information in a way that allows your audience to understand an issue fully and best decide what action, if any, to take. By telling your audience about particular crime prevention techniques or subjects, you equip them with the tools to lead safer lives. A speech mobilizing teenagers and adults in your community to take action on a crime-related problem, for example, may be the starting point for getting rid of the problem or reducing crime. A presentation that gets people to discuss a problem may give the community—or at least your audience—an idea for correcting the problem.

### **from the administrator**

Presentations provide a powerful platform for getting your message across to those who need to hear it. In this Bulletin, you will find step-by-step techniques and proven methods of planning and conducting an effective presentation that will capture your audience's interest and motivate them to help implement your plan of action. I hope you will use this information to create presentations that help prevent crime in your community.

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## What Does It Take To Plan a Presentation?

To begin planning a presentation, you need to consider many things:

- ◆ Why are you making the presentation? Are you trying to inform your audience, persuade them to see your point of view, or motivate them to get involved?
- ◆ What information do you want to communicate?
- ◆ Who is your audience?
- ◆ How long will you have to make the presentation?
- ◆ Will you need to hand out supplemental materials or use audiovisual aids?
- ◆ What specific methods of reinforcing your message (transparencies, panels, role-playing) would be helpful?
- ◆ What outcomes do you want to see?
- ◆ What special needs, concerns, or situations are relevant?

The following six steps will help you focus your answers to these questions and begin planning your presentation.

### Step 1: Consider the Outcome You Want

The specific outcome that you want from your presentation is a critical consideration when planning. For example, assume that you've been given 15 minutes during a town council meeting to make the case for a teen lounge at the new youth center. Your task is to persuade the council that an extra \$9,000 in construction costs and an added \$5,000 per year in staffing costs are worthwhile investments.

Your presentation in this example might include descriptions of what's wrong with the places where youth are now hanging out and how there are no acceptable alternatives. You might want

to show the audience a petition signed by youth at schools in the community supporting your position or distribute copies of news articles showing that a teen lounge in a nearby town has reduced loitering, crime, or vandalism. You might even invite some of the youth who would use the lounge to speak at your presentation. All of your presentation's content and organization should support the result you want: approval of funds for the lounge.

### Step 2: Address Special Concerns

When planning your presentation, it is very important to focus on special concerns. In the example above, special concerns might include council members' worries that teens wouldn't actually use the lounge, fears that furniture and equipment would be damaged, concern that too many youth "hanging around" would scare off younger children, or a sense that the \$9,000 cost would be too high.

Your presentation should address these concerns. Note, for instance, that youth could coach and mentor younger children and use the lounge for rest breaks and that teens could put any "profits" from soda and snack machines into a furniture fund. Also mention that more than 300 teens in just 1 week had signed petitions asking for the lounge, indicating their strong support.

### Step 3: Develop a Presentation Outline

In order to help organize your presentation, it is important to construct a presentation outline. First, identify your topic and explain why it is important. Next, outline causes and effects of the problem you are discussing and introduce solutions to the problem. Finally, outline your conclusion, which should tie everything together. You may want to repeat three main points of your presentation in your conclusion or consider ending with a story that the audience will remember.

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## Step 4: Be Familiar With the Physical Setting

An important part of planning is knowing exactly where you will be delivering your presentation and how the setting will affect your presentation.

- ◆ Will you be in a classroom or an auditorium?
- ◆ Will you be standing at a podium onstage or walking up and down an aisle on the same level as your audience?
- ◆ Will the audience be sitting at tables or desks or on the floor?
- ◆ Are you allowed to rearrange the desks and chairs in the room?
- ◆ What equipment is available onsite, and what will you need to bring with you?
- ◆ If you use a prop or display a diagram, chart, transparency, or other visual aid, will everyone be able to see it clearly?
- ◆ If you show a video clip, will everyone be able to see and hear it well?

On the day of your presentation, arrive early to check that all necessary furniture and equipment are in place. You also may want to consider visiting the presentation site in advance if you haven't seen or used it before. Find out if you could use the space to rehearse your presentation.

## Step 5: Understand Timing and Other Requirements

Know the actual length of your presentation, and make sure that it is acceptable to the people who invited you. How long does a presentation for this audience usually last? Has any specific length or format been more productive or successful than others with this audience? Answering these questions will let you plan your presentation to best meet your audience's needs. Also find out whether the maximum time for your presentation includes a question-and-answer session or if more time should be added to your total presentation time for questions. How will questions from the

audience be handled? Will a moderator help you field questions, or do you need to call on audience members yourself?

## Step 6: Present Information in a Focused, Concise Way

An adult's attention wanders after about 12 minutes; a child's attention span is even shorter. The key to an engaging presentation, therefore, is focusing on a single objective (or a relatively small set of objectives) and making sure that every statement in your presentation relates to your objective. Organize your facts, use logic, and draw conclusions to support and clarify your objective. Varying how you present information and actively involving the audience are two excellent ways of driving home information without being repetitive or boring. Examples will enliven the presentation and help keep your audience focused.

## What Does It Take To Make Your Presentation Effective?

### Know Your Subject Matter

Be thoroughly familiar with your subject matter. Nothing is more persuasive than a knowledgeable speaker. Learn as much as you can about the subject, and, if you can, back up your knowledge with facts and statistics. This not only sends the message that you know what you're talking about but shows that you took the time to prepare. Whatever your knowledge level, don't make a presentation unless you're highly confident of your ability to explain the key points of the topic. Your audience will be impressed if you know your subject matter and distressed if you don't.

Don't worry about being able to answer every possible question. As long as you have a solid understanding of the points in your presentation, you will be able to handle questions effectively. If you don't know an answer to a question, be honest and say so. When responding to questions outside

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your area of expertise or beyond the scope of your presentation, it is important that you know where to steer audience members to find answers. Keep informed of current developments.

### **Know Your Audience**

Get some key facts about your audience before you plan your presentation.

- ◆ How many people will be there?
- ◆ How old are they?
- ◆ Do the audience members have special concerns that you should be aware of?
- ◆ Have you been asked to speak in response to a particular incident or issue?
- ◆ Is your presentation part of a series?
- ◆ How much does the audience already know about your topic?
- ◆ Will certain kinds of activities be more successful than others with this group?

A common challenge for speakers, whether they are experienced or not, is an audience that is unresponsive or unruly. Some days, even the best speaker is disrupted or discouraged by a negative audience. Be prepared for an inattentive or difficult audience by planning several activities that can be added to your presentation at the last minute, if necessary, to quiet down an audience or recapture its attention. For example, ask for a show of hands as you conduct a poll of how many people agree with a certain viewpoint, have had a particular experience, or would like to learn a certain skill.

### **Manage the Direction of the Presentation**

While giving a presentation, be sensitive to how well your audience is responding. Here are some tips for effectively managing the direction of your presentation:

- ◆ Ask audience members whether they understand your main points.

- ◆ Allow enough time for questions. Build time into your schedule for the audience to ask questions and for you to answer those questions. Also allow time to address any followup questions.
- ◆ Answer questions at key intervals, not just at the end. By doing so, you will be able to provide added information and clarify any misunderstandings as you go.
- ◆ Encourage your audience to share experiences. Sometimes the best examples will come from members of your audience. However, if you open up a dialog with the audience, be prepared for the possibility that someone will share a story that does not support your presentation.
- ◆ Address all members of the audience. Make each person in your audience feel important.
- ◆ Build a sense of trust and show respect for questions. Explain that questions are welcome, and answer all questions—even the most basic—completely and politely. This will make your audience members more comfortable and receptive. They will trust you and give you their honest opinions on the topic.
- ◆ Show good manners. Thank your audience for their time and attention. Extend a special thanks to those who invited you and to anyone else who helped make the presentation a success.
- ◆ Be a good listener. If you're sitting on a platform with other speakers, be as respectful and attentive to them as you expect them to be to you. Likewise, if you return to the audience after your presentation, give the remaining speakers and programs your complete attention.

### **Encourage Participation**

The more audience members actively participate in your presentation, the more information they will retain. Active participants are also more attentive. Here are some ways to keep your audience involved and engaged:

- ◆ Introduce case histories/personal stories. Your audience will enjoy stories of specific

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- efforts being made in your subject area. If possible, focus on the real people involved.
- ◆ Have a debate. Having two or more people explain—or even question each other about—the opposing sides of an issue is an excellent way to highlight different viewpoints and engage your audience.
  - ◆ Give demonstrations. Actually showing activities or procedures described in your presentation will clarify and reinforce them.
  - ◆ Use appropriate visual or audiovisual aids to reinforce information. Presenting material through a visual representation is an effective way to clarify or illustrate a concept. Some people learn better when they see information than when they hear it. For example, displaying a prepared transparency—or writing out or drawing information on a blank transparency while you speak—may help your audience focus on key points. You also can emphasize information by pointing to it, circling it, or making comments directly on a transparency while you talk. Transparencies are especially useful when you want your audience to understand important numbers or see information displayed as a chart or diagram. Videotapes (or short video clips) are another great way to reinforce material and capture your audience’s interest.
  - ◆ Play games or give “quizzes.” Giving the audience a quiz or playing a game with them is effective—especially when the audience receives a copy of the quiz or game to look at and use while the game is being played or the quiz is being given. Explain all game rules, and “grade” the quizzes.
  - ◆ Have a panel discussion. Having a panel of experts or others interested in your topic present their views or describe aspects of the topic before, during, or after your presentation can build and maintain energy. Panels allow your audience to appreciate a variety of different perspectives.
  - ◆ Do some role-playing. Having volunteers from the audience act out a situation or issue being discussed can help everyone feel engaged and may provide some comic relief. It also allows the audience to better understand the situation or issue.
  - ◆ Perform a skit. Having presenters or audience members perform a short sketch relating to your message will make it come alive. After the skit, take a few minutes to explain and expand on what the skit illustrated.
  - ◆ Use examples. Using examples that drive home your point is an excellent way to strengthen and enliven your presentation. Examples should be short, clear, and relevant, and they should not offend or confuse the audience. Real life examples—whether from your own life or from newspaper, TV, or magazine reports—are generally more effective than those made up solely to illustrate a point. In using examples, be careful not to violate any confidences or privileges. For instance, don’t use a friend’s family problem as an example if everyone in the audience knows your friend or if your friend asked you not to discuss the problem.
  - ◆ Reinforce your point. Make the same point several different ways, and end the presentation with a review. Ask audience members what they’ve learned from your presentation and how that information applies to their lives. Also, ask the audience to recall the presentation’s most important points while you or the audience members write down these points.

## **What Are Some of the Challenges of Making a Presentation?**

### **Capturing Audience Interest**

Becoming a good presenter takes practice and hard work. One important skill is keeping your presentation fresh. Another is to know how to always present with energy. No two audiences are alike, so having an audience participate in

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a presentation will always be a little different and fun. When planning a presentation, you will need to design effective, interactive ways to capture audience interest. Keeping your voice natural but varied in tone is sometimes a challenge; even trained speakers find it hard to maintain freshness and enthusiasm when repeating a presentation or speaking in front of an audience for an extended period of time.

One way to keep a performance fresh is to revisit your objectives before every presentation, making sure that they match the needs of your audience. If you regard a repeat performance as just the same old job, then that's exactly how your audience will see it. Each time you deliver a presentation, tell yourself that this is an entirely new audience—with entirely new reactions and questions. One thing is for sure, though—if you present with energy, your audience will respond positively.

### **Building Public Speaking Skills**

If you're new to public speaking, strongly consider enrolling in a communications course at your high school, at a community college, or with an independent group such as Toastmasters International®, the American Institute of Parliamentarians, or a similar organization. High school or college debate coaches and speech teachers may also be able to give you pointers or provide a list of community resources relating to public speaking. In addition, read books on public speaking, contact the National Forensic League listed in the “Resources” section, or check online for sites such as the National Catholic Forensic League's Web site ([www.ncfl.org](http://www.ncfl.org)).

When working on your public speaking skills, understand that your audience's failure to pay attention may be a sign that your presentation needs work. Examine its organization and delivery. Get feedback and reactions from adults and youth who are willing to be candid and who

can offer constructive criticism. The best public speakers learn from such audience feedback and can even adjust plans midpresentation when things aren't going well. An ability to shift gears quickly, however, comes only through trial and error and hard-won experience.

### **What Are Some of the Rewards?**

A presentation allows you to reach a large audience. For example, almost 400 youth participated in the Violence Institute of New Jersey's Youth Summit on Violence in May 1999 to discuss violence-related topics and present their recommendations to Federal and State policymakers. P.O.W.E.R. (Peer Outreach Workers Educating Risk-Takers), a group of high school student actor-activists, created a skit for the summit to help the audience visualize how discrimination, drugs and alcohol, and family and relationship problems may affect youth's behavior.

Presentations can also help your case when you are advocating a particular action or issue. When audience members thank you, tell you how much they learned, or say that they were stimulated or energized by your presentation, you will feel a great sense of accomplishment.

### **How Can Presentations Be Evaluated?**

Evaluating your presentation can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what to evaluate and how to do so. The purpose of any evaluation is “to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

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The best way to start evaluating is to ask audiences to fill out a brief questionnaire; this will help you improve your work. Also, ask yourself and whoever requested the presentation about its effectiveness. What was or was not effective? What should be changed or deleted? Find out whether audience members adopted your ideas or discussed them favorably after your presentation.

When evaluating your presentation, you will probably want to show that it does one or all of the following:

- ◆ Provides information about your topic in an organized manner.
- ◆ Educates the community about the issues covered in your presentation.
- ◆ Addresses special concerns that audience members may have about your suggestions.

- ◆ Allows your audience to understand an issue and decide what action, if any, to take.

In evaluating your presentation, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◆ Reduces crime or fear of crime in your community.
- ◆ Is cost effective.
- ◆ Has a lasting impact.
- ◆ Attracts support and resources.
- ◆ Makes people feel safe and more positive about being members of your school or community.

Learning to evaluate what you do is a skill you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your presentation and—You're making a difference!



## Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at [www.usdoj.gov/kidspage](http://www.usdoj.gov/kidspage). This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

### American Institute of Parliamentarians

P.O. Box 2173  
Wilmington, DE 19899  
302-762-1811  
302-762-2170 (fax)  
Internet: [www.aipparlipro.org](http://www.aipparlipro.org)

### Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
800-638-8736  
301-519-5212 (fax)  
Internet: [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)

### National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20006-3817  
202-466-6272  
Internet: [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)

### National Forensic League

125 Watson Street  
P.O. Box 38  
Ripon, WI 54971  
920-748-6206  
920-748-9478 (fax)  
Internet: [debate.uvm.edu/nfl.html](http://debate.uvm.edu/nfl.html)

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## Youth in Action Bulletin

**NCJ 178997**

### Teens, Crime, and the Community Program

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20006-3817  
202-466-6272  
202-296-1356 (fax)  
Internet: [www.nationaltcc.org](http://www.nationaltcc.org)

### Toastmasters International

P.O. Box 9052  
Mission Viejo, CA 92690  
714-858-8255  
Internet: [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)

This Bulletin was produced by the National Crime Prevention Council as part of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign under a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The National Crime Prevention Council is a nonprofit organization that conducts demonstration and youth-based programs, produces publications and training materials on a variety of subjects,

and manages the day-to-day activities of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

*The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.*

*The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*