

Catch Their Attention: Tips for Giving Presentations

Lectures are a traditional method of relaying information to students in all disciplines. While new technologies (such as the audience response system) have made it easier to engage learners in a presentation, there are also some basic skills to keeping the students interested in the session. Given the personal and professional demands medical students often face, it's no wonder their attention can shift from an instructor's presentation to a weekend vacation or their daughter's daycare. Needless to say, most presenters are in a tug of war with the demands that are placed on his or her students.

While movies, pictures and visual effects may hold the attention of some students, the connection a speaker makes with the class goes much further. How is a connection made?

Eye contact

A good speaker never reads her presentation. It's important to come prepared to give the speech while making good eye contact with each student. Remember to look directly into their eyes. If you look at their foreheads in an attempt to make the experience less intimidating, you'll leave the audience wondering if they have part of their lunch on their face. Keep it simple and remember that you speak to individuals every day; public speaking is no more than having a conversation.

Vocal inflection

Tone and pitch are essential to keeping the audience connected to the presentation. Changes in inflection are automatic cues to the students that something important is being emphasized. Good speakers write inflections into their speeches. Think about places in your speech that would allow such entries.

Dramatic pause

Similar to vocal inflections, well-timed dramatic pauses send a cue to the students to tune in. While most speakers are uncomfortable with silence, the pause has a number of benefits. A well-placed pause:

- Sends a verbal cue to the listener that something important is coming.
- Breaks up the tone of voice, allowing the ear to recognize new vocal pitch.
- Causes the audience to think that the speaker really has his thoughts together.
- Will always feel longer to the speaker. You will be more aware of its length than your listeners will, as they are focused not on the pause, but on your next words.

Would you like to assess your presentation skills? Faculty Development offers recording services (either one-on-one or during a classroom session) to provide feedback to our faculty. Contact [Andrea Berry](mailto:alberry@mail.ucf.edu) to schedule a session.