



Develop Public Presentations

Historians are frequently asked to present a historical topic to a local organization or school. You may be asked to develop a presentation on a specific topic or in a specific format.

While a topic can be presented in more than one format, you should choose the type based on the audience and time.

Three basic presentation types:

◆ **Informational**

You present information on a specific subject of importance to the audience or entertain the audience with a topic that they can relate to.

Examples of this type include; the history of a local landmark, the story behind a famous person from the community, local legends, or a major farm in your town.

◆ **Interactive**

You invite the audience to recall points, answer questions, contribute information, or participate in some way during your presentation. This type may include a fun trivia quiz.

Examples of this type include; the histories of a business area of town where you ask them to recall other businesses located there or invite them to share memories from their childhood. A quiz might ask them to select from a list of 16 businesses the 4 that were once located on Main Street.

◆ **Instructional**

You present a topic that teaches the audience how to do a specific task or the steps in a process. This type of presentation lends itself well to handouts that the attendees can follow along with and make notes as you present each slide.

Examples of this type include; how to do oral interviews, instructions on the best preservation techniques for artifacts, how to scan documents and photographs.

Defining the Presentation

- ◆ Ask what they would like you to speak about
- ◆ Determine whether the date and time fits your schedule, and if not whether another date is available.
- ◆ Ask where the presentation will take place
- ◆ Ask who the audience is and for the approximate number of attendees
- ◆ Ask how much time is allocated for the presentation
- ◆ Determine what equipment they have available so you know what to take
- ◆ Ask if they have a microphone or a lectern, if you need one
- ◆ Ask about the lighting in the room. If it is a luncheon presentation without the ability to dim the room light, it may be difficult to use a PowerPoint or slides.

Before You Accept the Invitation to Present

Consider:

- ◆ Whether the requested day and time are open in your schedule and will give you enough time to prepare.
- ◆ Whether you are being asked to give an existing presentation. If not, whether you can use an existing presentation as the base for a new one.
- ◆ How much time it will take to prepare a completely new presentation which may include researching information and locating images?
- ◆ Asking for a date in the future if you have commitments that prevent you from accepting the date requested.
- ◆ The length of time they are giving you for the presentation and audience questions.
- ◆ Whether you will present to individuals with some form of dementia. This audience can be a challenge depending upon the information you present. Audiences with dementia can enjoy hearing about the past, particularly things in their past, but do not do as well with instructional or interactive presentations.
- ◆ What equipment is needed and what the venue has available for you to use. For example; a video projector, screen, tables, microphone, etc.

Developing the Presentation

After you determine the type of presentation; informational, interactive, or instructional, you need to decide the best format to use. For example you may choose to:

- ◆ **Tell a story with or without props or display items**
In this style, you may choose to use a lectern or dim the lights and sit on a stool under a spot light.
- ◆ **Talk about and pass around objects**
This style allows you to walk near or throughout the audience, even making one-on-one contact with audience members.
- ◆ **Read historical letters or a diary**
This style can present the story of an individual or family and can be done in costume as a living history presentation with subdued lighting or soft audio in the background. You can raise the lights briefly to show objects.
- ◆ **Deliver a PowerPoint presentation**
PP's are the most common type of presentation. They are colorful, have high visibility for large audiences, and can be used multiple times. If you are unfamiliar with using PowerPoint, ask someone to show you the basics or take an introductory class.

Structuring the Presentation

It is important to organize the information in your presentation so it is easy for the audience to follow or understand; for example:

- ◆ If the presentation subject is a chronology of events or explains how to do something, it should be presented in a logical, sequential format.

Examples might be a timeline of early settlers that came to the town or the steps for conducting an oral interview.

- ◆ If the presentation is about a group of similar items, people, or places, it can have either a random structure or be grouped into like categories.

For example: If the presentation is about Civil War veterans from your municipality, you could group them by the residents from your muni who enlisted there vs. those who moved to the municipality after the war vs. those who are buried in your muni.

- ◆ If the presentation talks about occupations in your muni, it could be organized by hamlet or area if appropriate, by occupation, or by time periods.

Note: Jumping around in an unstructured manner can be confusing and cause the audience to lose interest.

Timing the Presentation

You should develop your presentation to fit within the time specified. It is better to have more open time at the end for audience questions and comments than to not have enough time to complete the presentation. This is especially true for lunch time presentations at local clubs and organizations where attendees must leave to return to work.

Consider:

- ◆ Is it a brief lunch time presentation?
- ◆ Is it an evening presentation when daylight ends early and seniors may be attending? Keep in mind many seniors do not drive after dark.
- ◆ Is it a presentation that will generate lots of questions that you will need time to answer?
- ◆ Will you answer questions during the presentation or ask for them to be held until the end?

Note: After completing the first draft of your presentation, find a quiet room and time how long it takes for you to present the material. If it's running long or you plan to take audience questions during the presentation, now is the time to shorten it.

Some Important Do's and Don'ts

- ◆ Do consider using videos within your presentation, where appropriate
- ◆ Don't place paragraphs of text on your slides—use brief phrases only, then you fill in the remaining information verbally so the audience isn't reading ahead.
- ◆ Practice so you're not reading any part of your slides.
- ◆ Do use colorful graphics and break up sections with them.
- ◆ Use personal anecdotes as filler but be careful to avoid offending anyone.
- ◆ If you can, video yourself to see what unconscious repetitive movements or words you use. Then practice eliminating them.
- ◆ Don't worry about moments of silence. They can be a very effective way of letting the audience think about what you've just said.
- ◆ Don't rush through the material, pause to look at the audience.
- ◆ Notice the body language of your audience. Are they engaged, fidgeting, whispering, sleeping?
- ◆ Do modulate your voice to keep the audience listening.
- ◆ Do ask a question, if appropriate, to reengage everyone.

Presentation Fees

If you are asked to do a presentation by a community group, know ahead of time whether you plan to:

- ◆ Charge a nominal fee
- ◆ Charge for mileage
- ◆ Present at no charge
- ◆ Accept an honorarium.

Consider:

- ◆ The length of the presentation. Short presentations of 20-30 minutes at a lunch time meeting usually are given free of charge and you probably won't be offered an honorarium but you'll usually be invited to participate in lunch.
- ◆ How experienced are you at presentations? Some presenters don't charge until they have experience and are "in demand".
- ◆ Some presenters never charge.
- ◆ If you must travel 30 or more miles roundtrip, you may want to request mileage. Each year the IRS determines the mileage rate allowed. See: <https://www.irs.gov/uac/2017-standard-mileage-rates-for-business-and-medical-and-moving-announced>
- ◆ What are the rules about any fees you receive? Can you keep it for your office or personal use? Do you report it to the muni and have it added to your budget?

Note: If you receive an honorarium, send a thank you to the group.