

MODULE 2 - WRITING A SCRIPT, PART I

What you are going to do in this Module is to begin writing a script which you can use on future occasions when you are asked to give a presentation.

We are going to work on this together over the coming weeks. With each Module, you will be asked to improve this script using the tricks you have learned in that Module.

By the end of the course, you will have a script which you can trust.

Before we start, we would like to make one point. When you stand up in front of people to give a talk, don't try to read directly from a script. It is virtually impossible to do and it *is* impossible to do well. We'll discuss this further in Module 8 and tell you how you can work around this problem.

Unless you are a skilled and confident speaker, however, it is a good idea to write the script in the first place so that you can put your ideas in a logical order, know what points you want to highlight and when, and find out how best to say what you want to say. These important points are the ones you take with you when you give your talk. This preparation will make you more confident on the day and you will therefore deliver your speech in a more inspiring and competent manner.

So.... first of all, let's look at Introductions and Conclusions.

Introductions

The aim of an introduction is to grab the attention of your audience. Yes, they are sitting there in front of you, but that doesn't mean you have their attention. A proportion of them will still be taking off their jackets, unwrapping a piece of chewing gum, trying to put their umbrella under their chair. You may also have late arrivals shuffling into place. You need to say something sufficiently interesting to make them abandon these activities.

They are there to listen, they want to listen. All you have to do is to give them something interesting to listen to, and the audience is yours.

There are a number of tricks you can use and we will show you these below. Remember, though, that in your introduction, you have three aims:

- to capture your audience's attention
- to stimulate their interest in your therapy and what you are about to say
- to create a lead-in to the body of your talk.

That sounds difficult and complicated. It's not. It's easy. Let's look at some of the tricks which will enable you to do this.

Introductions – tricks of the trade

Use questions

There's no reason why your first sentence shouldn't be in the form of a question. As soon as someone is asked a question, part of their mind responds, searching for the answer. Thus, immediately, you have their attention.

Some useful questions for therapists to use in this way might be:

“Have you ever heard that alternative therapy is a waste of time and money?”

“Do you think all therapists are cranks?”

“Would you like to be in better health than you are now?”

Here are some other ideas which you might like to develop along those lines.

“Do you know someone who.....”

“Can you imagine.....”

“Are you.....”

“What would you say if.....”

“Have you ever thought.....”

These are very open questions which you can develop according to your own needs.

The good news technique

This is where you start your talk by announcing some good news. People like to listen to good news. One example of this might be:

“Tonight you have the opportunity to hear about [your therapy] from a practising therapist and to have your questions answered.”

Well, perhaps the actual news isn't earth-shattering, but the trick is to present it as if it really was news, and good news at that.

The way to formulate these statements is to put yourself in the position of an audience and decide what positive information they would like to carry away with them from your talk. Then announce that you are going to tell them this. You can turn almost anything into a “news” statement by using words such as:

“A new.....”

“Everyone is talking about

“As you might have heard recently in the media.....”

“I am here to tell you.....”

Don’t overdo it. You are not selling cars or double-glazing. You can make your “news” statement in measured tones without any expansive gestures. In fact, for a therapist, turning this into a hard sell approach would be counter-productive. Nevertheless, it is a good way to start your talk.

Saying something different

You might want to try to think of introducing your speech using mild shock techniques – and we emphasise the word “mild”. An example of this, if you are a hypnotherapist, might be to start your talk by saying, “I suppose you think that by the end of the evening I am going to have you all barking like dogs.” If you are a kinesiologist you might try something like, “I practice a therapy the name of which no-one here except myself can even pronounce.” It is just that little bit unconventional as a lead-in.

“Imagine...”

This is a wonderful word to use as the first word in your presentation.

“Imagine yourself living in a world where you need never become ill

The world is your oyster. This word not only grabs the audience’s attention but also requires them to participate by using their imagination. It has one other benefit. In order to “imagine”, they have to quieten down and stop shuffling.

Tell them what you are going to say

This is the technique you will see recommended in almost all books and manuals on public speaking. The whole technique is usually summed up as “Tell them what you are going to say, say it, then tell them what you have just said”.

It is always recommended because it works. It is not particularly inspiring but it is safe and is ideal for very nervous speakers for that reason. Thus, your introduction may go something like:

“Tonight I’m going to explain to you exactly what [your therapy] is, how it works and why it works.”

That is, after all, what they have come for.

Now, you may see other types of introductions recommended. From experience, we don't feel that these work particularly well. The ones most commonly quoted are:

Using quotations

A speaker might start his speech with a quotation by some famous figure. Our view is that this can sound either a little pretentious or rather hackneyed. Talks often start with quotations from Churchill or other equally famous figure. You will have heard that quotation before, probably many times. It is not, therefore, attention-grabbing. Another point against use of this technique is that members of the audience might subconsciously feel that they want to hear what you have to say, not what someone else has to say. Why do you have to borrow other people's words? Can't you say it yourself in plain English?

That brings us to the third reason why this can be a risky strategy. You have to connect with your audience on their own level. You must never be seen to be talking down to them. One of the strengths of therapists is that they are seen as approachable, unlike some other health care professionals. You are "of the people". If you start off with an obscure quotation by some eminent figure, you might be seen to be demonstrating that you are of a higher educational or class level because you are familiar with the work of people like that. Of course, this is not always true, but what you need to do throughout your talk is to use words and phrases which the audience themselves are likely to use (more of this in a later Module). The thing you need to do is to adhere to the plain English principal at all times.

Now, obviously, if you are speaking to a specialised audience then this simple rule may not apply, as the audience can reasonably be expected to have at least a basic knowledge of the subject matter and the appropriate terminology. No such assumption can be made with a general audience. Too many public speakers fail because they forget first principles. Instead of educating the audience, they go out to demonstrate how clever they are. Never, never forget that people come to learn about your subject. If, instead, they are subjected to an egotistical display by you, they will have learned all that they need to know about the speaker and will vote with their feet.

To round off this section – you will initially be speaking to a general audience. Keep your presentation clear and easy to understand.

Personal experience

The common response to this from many people in the audience will be, "So what?" Fine, you had a personal experience. However, you have not yet established any credibility with this audience, so you might be deluding yourself as to its benefits or indeed whether it happened at all. The fact that you underwent a particular personal experience has nothing to do with the individuals in your audience. They are interested in themselves, not in you. Personal experiences can be introduced later – in moderation – but *not in your introduction*.

The only time this type of introduction really works is where a personality who is well known in another field – and therefore will already have some credibility with the audience – relates a personal experience which shows that they too have shared some difficulty. The classic example is the famous author, Catherine Cookson, who made public the fact that she had suffered a nervous breakdown, depression and had, in fact, been hospitalised for it. Neither of the writers of this course were ever fortunate enough to hear Mrs Cookson speak, but if she had stood on a stage and, as her opening sentence, said, “I am a successful author, a wealthy woman, but I experienced a complete nervous breakdown,” I suspect that she would have had the attention and respect of the entire hall.

You do not have this degree of credibility or public interest. Even if you are a leader in your particular field, the general public will not identify with you in the same way as they identify with people who have become household names via the media. Thus, this technique is best left alone.

Stories

In a later Module we will tell you very firmly not to tell jokes. If the joke falls flat, so do you. It is the same with stories. If your delivery is wrong or the audience find the story uninteresting or irrelevant, or just misunderstand the point you are trying to make, you will lose them. This is a risk which is not worth taking.

Leading in to the body of your presentation

To recap, we said there were three points you should consider in your introduction, and these are:

- to capture your audience’s attention
- to stimulate their interest in your therapy and what you are about to say
- to create a lead-in to the body of your talk.

You have seen various ways in which you can capture the audience’s attention. You then need to make them interested in your therapy and the meat of what you are going to say. You can use some of the same techniques. “Are you still a little sceptical about alternative therapy? Now’s your chance to hear what it can achieve.” “The good news is that tonight you will have the chance to come to your own decision about [your therapy].” You could tell them what you are going to cover in your talk.

You don’t have to stick to phrases like these. You can say almost anything as long as you establish the fact that you are going to be saying interesting things about your named therapy while you are speaking.

Lastly, you need a phrase or sentence which leads you directly in to the body of your talk. This needn’t be startling or original.. What you need is a functional phrase which does its

job. It can be as simple as “.....which I will now explain to you.,” or “Let me start with....”

Other things to avoid

- Don't be negative:

If you want to apologise for not being the world's best public speaker, that's fine but *explain* it: don't grovel or appear afraid of the audience. Don't say things like, “you may not hear all you want to today.” That's negative. The positive way to put it would be to say, “There is much more I could tell you.” Your audience want to be told what is good about your therapy, not what is bad. That is what they have come to hear and you must deliver this.

- Don't talk down to your audience by assuming an air of superiority or using long pretentious words:
- Don't appear confused, frightened or unsure:

If you don't know something, say so.

If you make a mistake, don't try to cover it up with a flurry of words. The audience will spot it immediately. Say you've made a mistake. Go back in your speech to the last thing you said you were happy with, “Let me just recap for a moment to make sure everyone has understood...”, and then carry on, correcting your mistake as you go. Everyone makes mistakes and no-one in your audience is expecting a professional public speaker. Even TV newsreaders make mistakes. Who can forget the newsreader who referred to “Soddem Hussein”, when talking about Saddam Hussein. That wasn't a disaster, it was endearing and funny. The audience is more likely to sympathise with you than to walk out.

Other points to consider

Length

Keep your introduction short. If you take forever to get to the meat of your talk the audience will get bored.

Introducing yourself

This is an absolute must, no matter how you word your introduction. Don't assume the audience know who you are because your name is on the flyers: this is simply a matter of courtesy. Introducing yourself also has one major advantage as far as you are concerned: it gives you a chance to start speaking and to settle your nerves. This, at least, is something you know by heart – your name. It gives you those few seconds in which to get used to being there and to hearing the sound of your own voice. If only for this

reason, it is a good idea to say something about your qualifications. Don't make it too technical or mention colleges which the audience won't have heard of. Simply say that you are qualified, perhaps tell them the length of your training course or that you are also a member of a regulatory body. Just give the audience a few facts. It helps establish your credibility and gives you a breathing space before you tackle the body of your speech.

We can now move on to look at ways to conclude your presentation.

CONCLUSIONS

A good conclusion should let your audience know that you are reaching the end of your talk. It should be geared to this. You should never just let your talk peter out.

Having a definite conclusion has a benefit for you as well. Once you start your conclusion, you know you have only minutes left to go – relief is at hand! If you don't prepare a conclusion you are left standing on the stage floundering around for those final remarks. Why make yourself suffer in this way?

What is a conclusion?

A conclusion is a summing up. You can do all kinds of clever things with a conclusion but none of them will work or have any value unless you use your conclusion to sum up what you have said.

This can be done in one sentence. "I hope tonight I have given you a greater understanding of kinesiology by explaining what muscle testing is, how it works and how it can help you maintain and improve your health." Then you add a few more phrases just to wrap up the parcel in pretty paper but, basically, that will do the job.

Having said that, you can do even better.

Ways to improve your conclusion

- Keep it clear and simple:

Your audience has listened to you speak for half an hour, or however long it has been. There is only so much information they can absorb. Any message you want to get across now has to be spelt out in simple language. The message you want to get across is that you have given them information on your subject and you will be in the hall for a few minutes after the speech.

This is not the kind of advice you come across in books or workshops on giving presentations, but you are speaking for a purpose. You are speaking in order to increase your client base. The real aim of this whole exercise is to get people to come to you after your talk and ask for your business card – or even better, book a consultation there and then. This is a marketing exercise.

Don't, therefore, clutter up your conclusion with new ideas or complex sentences. Stick to the important points: I've told you about my therapy, thank you for listening to me, I will now take questions (if you do indeed decide to do so – see Module 6), and of course I would be happy to answer any individual questions at the end of this session.

- Sum up what you have said;

This can be very brief. Just remind the audience of the main points you covered in your speech.

- Leave the audience with a question or with an interest in the future of your therapy;

“Medical knowledge is changing so fast that if I were to come back and speak to you in six months time, there would be much more I could tell you.”

“I've only had half an hour in which to speak to you and there is so much more I would like to say.”

Again, this will attract people to you once you have stepped off the stage.

- Make the last sentence you speak memorable;

This is the most important sentence of your whole talk. Most nervous speakers worry about the body of their talk but wrongly so. Mistakes made there can be corrected. That last sentence is the one people will remember. If they don't remember the actual words, they will remember the impression it creates. This is one sentence you write down and learn by heart.

“Aromatherapy is the one-session answer to stress.”

“Either learn to manage your stress or buy a second bathroom cabinet specially for your medication.”

What you say need not be entirely accurate: what you are doing is creating an image with words. You are drawing a picture with words exactly as you might do with a pen. You can have fun with this one.

- If you are going to take questions from the floor, tell them so at this stage, and say what length of time you are allotting to this question and answer session:

Don't make it an open-ended question session or you might be there all night.

- Put some energy and conviction into the way you say your conclusion:

Even if you just say, “Thank you and good night,”, sound as if you really mean it.

What not to do when concluding a speech

There are a few things you should avoid, most of them obvious, but they are worth restating.

- Keep the conclusion short and snappy:

Don’t drag it out. Once people know the end is near they are waiting for it with anticipation, not because you were boring but because that is human nature.

- Don’t introduce new material:

See our comments above about people not being able to absorb new information when they are tired and attempting to assimilate new information .

- Don’t suddenly start talking more quickly because the end is near or because you are running out of time:

If you find you genuinely only have a few seconds in which to wind up, keep the pace of your voice the same but restrict yourself to one sentence, perhaps one of the ones we suggest above.

- Don’t introduce any apologies or doubts for who you are or what you have been speaking about:

“Ier.... know that some of you might not haveer..... agreed with everything I said.”

If you don’t have confidence in yourself, why should your audience have confidence in you. If you *must* touch on this issue, which we do not recommend, put it in a positive way. “Some of you may have come here with doubts. Some of you may still have points they would like to explore. I am sure that many more of you will now see the benefits of [my therapy].”

- Avoid, at all costs, two phrases:

The first is, “I have nothing more to say.” The second is, “Thank you for your time and attention.” The first is insulting and the second is hackneyed. “Thank you and good night,” is perfectly acceptable (and shorter!).

- Don’t stop and then start again:

If you’ve forgotten to say something, tough! If you stop and then start again you leave the audience not sure whether to applaud or not, which makes them feel silly.

For the type of presentation you will be giving and the type of audience you will be talking to, you can accept that all audiences applaud, even if they profoundly disagree with you, because they are polite people and came there voluntarily, so when you indicate that you are definitely stopping you are giving them notice that it is time to applaud. Don't confuse them.

You can see from the above that there are quite a few things to think about here when you write the introduction and conclusion to your speech. Concentrate on these for the moment. To put it another way, once you have got a good introduction and conclusion, these are two parts of your talk you never have to bother about again.

You will be working on this script in other Modules of this course...