

Introduction

As professionals, superintendents communicate with diverse audiences and speak at various functions. Whether it's an informal budget report to your employer or the green committee, a program presented at a chapter meeting or GCSAA student chapter group, or a formal presentation to a community organization, public speaking is an important professional skill.

Like any other professional skills, these skills are learned and perfected through experience and practice -- not many people are born gifted public speakers.

Speaking to group can be a valuable experience. The energy received from a captive audience is invigorating. The payoffs for superintendents who present to an audience are numerous, including increased self confidence, better overall communication skills and the opportunity to improve your professional image, as well as advance the profession.

“Developing strong presentation skills is an excellent way for a golf course superintendent to improve their professional image. Speaking in front of a group, no matter what size, is a rewarding experience and allows others the opportunity to learn the important role superintendents play on courses.”

*Bruce Williams, CGCS
Los Angeles Country Club, California*

Ways superintendents can improve their speaking skills

- Observe good speakers and model their techniques.
- Strengthen your vocabulary by reading good literature.
- Read a variety of periodicals (news, science) to keep abreast of current events.
- Use the dictionary and thesaurus.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Practice writing to help organize your thoughts.
- Rehearse in front of a practice audience or a video recorder.
- Speak at every available opportunity.

Preparing to Speak

It cannot be said enough – preparation is the key to a quality presentation. Taking the time to adequately research the topic and the audience, plan logistics and rehearse the presentation are ways to reduce anxiety before a presentation.

I. Knowing your audience

When preparing for a specific audience, consider these factors:

- Knowledge level – How much does the audience already know? For example, if you are asked to speak to high school students, you may want to inquire about the school's golf team and how many students have studied biology and plant sciences.
- Special interests – What information will really hook the audience? Inquire about previous speakers and topics the group has enjoyed.
- Attention span – Most adults have a maximum attention span of 20 minutes, additionally most store no more than seven items in short term memory.
- How ready is the audience to listen? Will other speakers on the agenda precede you? Does your speech follow a meal?
- Appropriate visual aids – What will capture their attention? Is the group used to receiving detailed handouts?
- Questions they may want answered – What would you want to know if you were in their shoes?

Information about an audience can be obtained in a variety of ways. When you receive a request to speak, ask the person scheduling the engagement some simple questions about the audience.

Another way to gain information about an audience is to ask for a profile of the members of the organization. For example, if you are asked to present to the city commissioners, you may want to know the occupation of its members, how many play golf, how supportive of parks and recreational projects the commissioners have been in the past and other relevant information.

Some speakers schedule time at the beginning of their presentation to poll the audience to gain a sense of the composition and interests of the group. This technique immediately captures the attention and engages the audience.

II. Outlining the presentation

Preparing an outline creates a road map for the presentation. Outlines should be complete enough to help if you get lost during a presentation, but not so detailed that you read from them. Outlines create the framework for handouts and/or visual aids. The outline's main points essentially become the information used as major headings of agendas and presentations. Once the outline is complete, you can take the information and transform it into a visual presentation or handouts.

The first step is to write the key statements of the introduction. You may wish to write out more of the introduction than other parts of the presentation. If nerves kick in during the early part of the presentation, you can read the introduction, concentrate on relaxing and then begin the presentation without the use of the outline.

Write the introductory sentence for each main point. Be sure to highlight key points and detail key statistics and other supportive information needed to effectively make the point.

The conclusion is another part of the outline that should be detailed. You want to ensure the audience is left with a good impression, and writing out a large portion of the conclusion can keep you from losing the listeners at a key time.

III. Organizing the presentation

A. Introduction – *Tell them what you are going to tell them*

The introduction is the first impression the audience will have of your presentation. It should be designed to accomplish the following:

- Grab the audience’s attention – do something creative that directs the audience to the topic.
- Tell the audience what they will get from the presentation.
- Establish you as a credible source for the information you are going to present.
- Provide a roadmap outlining the major points you want the audience to take away from the presentation.

There are numerous ways to capture an audience’s attention. First, it’s important to create an introduction appropriate for the audience. This allows you to form a link or bond to the audience’s interest or background.

B. Ways to introduce your topic:

1. **Relate an anecdote.** Tell a short story relating to your topic. This may be a good time to tell a fun, short story about an incident at your facility. Additionally, you could encourage stories from your audience.
2. **Ask a question.** Audience members focus their listening when being asked questions. An example of a question for a presentation on bunker etiquette may be: “Have you ever ended up in a bunker and wondered how your ball consistently seems to find the spot with the deepest hole?” Be sure not to ask yes/no questions.
3. **Humor.** Humor may help relax you and the audience. Jokes should be practiced for the best effect.
4. **Make a startling statement.** A shocking statement for a presentation on environmental management may include: “Each year more than 1,200 golf balls are retrieved from our course’s water areas.”

5. **Audience census.** Use your opening moments as a way to poll the audience to get more comfortable with the group and gain an understanding of their interests.
6. **Relate a personal situation.** This tactic positions the speaker as sincere.

Once you have the audience's attention, it's important to let them know the purpose of your presentation. This lets the audience know what's in it for them.

The introduction also is the time to qualify yourself as a credible source for the presentation. This doesn't mean you have to give them a complete rundown of your résumé, but you should let them know you are a trained professional in this area. A credibility statement would convey:

“As a trained and licensed professional golf course superintendent, it is my responsibility to manage pesticides in a safe and efficient manner on the golf course to safeguard our community.”

The final part of the introduction should provide a roadmap of your presentation the listener can follow, highlighting the main points. For example:

“Today, I am going to discuss the various environmental and regulatory issues golf courses must comply with including chemical storage, application procedures and safety and management practices.”

Body – Tell them

The body of a presentation is your opportunity to present information and accomplish the presentation's purpose. This part of the presentation makes up the majority of the speaker's presentation, generally 70 to 80 percent.

The body should be organized to include three to five main points for most presentations. There are several ways to organize the main points including:

- **Chronological** – placing items in the order they occurred.
- **Most to least importance** (or vice versa) – discuss the most important point, then move to the next most important, and so on.
- **Cause and effect** – explain the reason and background and the resulting outcome.
- **Compare/contrast** – put side by side the points and/or distinguish between points made.
- **Deductive/inductive** – start with the big picture trends or events, moving the main points to a local level, and vice versa.

Each main point should be substantiated with supporting data. Remember, a key to effective presentations is to always consider the audience. Be sure to utilize an appropriate level of detail when presenting your main points, keeping the audience's knowledge and interest levels in mind.

Do your homework

The presentation's purpose and audience will determine the type of material best suited to support main points.

Examples of supporting material include:

- Examples – can make a point more clear and help the audience relate to the topic.
- Definitions – necessary to educate the audience or clarify a point.
- Stories – help clarify a point and gets the audience involved.
- Statistics – excellent to use when clarifying a budgetary or technical point.
- Quotations – helps solidify the point you are trying to make.
- Relay information gained from interviews with “experts.”
- Original research such as an informal poll.

Supporting material can be obtained from a variety of sources, including your own golf course operations reports, USGA articles, seminar handouts, textbooks, university research abstracts and reports, topic-related Web sites, GCSAA's *Golf Course Management* and *Leader Board* publications.

When using information from outside sources, it is important to properly credit the source. For example, when explaining the effect of golfing traffic on the turf at a green committee meeting and utilizing information from a USGA article, proper attribution consists of:

“According to an article appearing in the October 2004 USGA Green Section report, fall and winter golfing traffic can have a profound effect on the turf's health.”

Conclusion – *Tell them what you told them*

Conclusions are broken into two parts – the **review** and the **closer**.

The **review** consists of a summary of the main points of the presentation. It is important to keep the summary short and only highlight these points and not repeat all the material already presented. Also, be sure not to introduce any new information in this part of the presentation.

The **closer** simply consists of the final words you want the audience to remember. You may reiterate the introductory statement you made to capture the audience's attention, predict the future or call the audience to act on a proposition you made in the presentation.

Transitions

To ensure the presentation flows smoothly, carefully select the transitions you'll use between the introduction, main points and conclusion. Transitions are the words and phrases that join a presentation's parts and help both the audience and speaker keep track of the presentation and what direction it is headed.

Sample transition phrases:

- First, second, third – “My first point will illustrate the importance of ...”
- Next – “The next point ...”
- Then – “We then move to ...”
- Moreover – “Moreover, we found ...”
- Moving on – “Moving on to the next point ...”
- Furthermore – “Furthermore, I would like to illustrate how the profession has advanced ...”
- After – “After the disease has been treated ...”
- Not to mention – “Not to mention the treatment needed ...”
- Also – “Also, the role of the superintendent has evolved ...”
- Initially – “Initially we were known as ...”

Make time for questions and answers

Answering questions is an integral part of most presentations. When planning the presentation, ensure you allot time for a question and answer session. For many speakers, the natural time for questions and answers is at the end of the presentation. Some presentations can be structured to solicit interactive dialogue throughout to engage the audience.

A defined question and answer period can cement your credibility as a quality presenter and expert. If an audience asks questions, you know they were engaged in the subject matter presented.

When a question is asked, first repeat the question. This ensures all audience members hear the question and reassures the questioner you accurately understood the question. If you don't understand the question, ask for clarification. Repeating also helps you understand the question and provides the time necessary to formulate an answer. Answer the question honestly. Be as complete as possible in the answer and provide the questioner with additional sources they can utilize to find more information.

It's not important to know the answer to every question. It is important, however, to convey yourself in a professional manner whether or not you know the answer.

Responses to not knowing the answer to a question:

- Acknowledge the question is valid, but you do not know the specific answer. *“That’s a great question and a perspective I hadn’t considered. Can you tell us more about your position on this issue?”*
- Provide a general answer, if possible, and tell the questioner you will need to gather more information. Take the person’s name and contact information and follow through with the answer.
- Open the question to the audience for an answer. This may help stimulate good group discussion.
- Defer to someone you know is an expert and in the audience. Introduce the expert and ask them for their response.

Dealing with stage fright

In reality, a little stage fright actually is good for a presentation and normal for most speakers. The nervousness can boost energy into a presentation and make a presenter more exciting.

Methods golf course superintendents use to ease natural anxiety and calm nerves before presentations:

- I handle it like I would a normal day at work. I arrive early, organize myself, have my coffee, do a little reading and get started. *Stephen Tibbels, CGCS*
- I try not to go over my talk within one hour of the presentation. I visit with people or try to get focused on the previous speaker. *Gary Sayre, CGCS*
- Take deep breaths and properly use pauses. *Steven Neuliep, CGCS*
- Relax with proper breathing techniques and meet the audience. *Bruce Williams, CGCS*
- I give myself a pep talk before each presentation. I repeat to myself, “Act enthusiastic and you will be enthusiastic. Now go out there and do your best.” *Jim Harris, CGCS*
- I try to get involved in a conversation with the attendees, host or moderator. I try to avoid any last minute review, which seems to create more stress. *Bob Costa, CGCS*
- Get to know some of the people to whom you will be speaking. *Robert Chalifour, CGCS*
- It’s an attitude that requires confidence. Confidence is gained by being knowledgeable and prepared. *Timothy O’Neil, CGCS*
- The best way to handle nerves is to make sure you know and are comfortable with your topic. Remember, you are the expert. *John Miller, CGCS*

Visual Aids

Visual aids should be designed to help clarify and enhance points you are trying to make during a presentation. The payoffs for effectively designed visual aids are numerous.

Visual aids improve presentations by:

- Centering the attention of your listeners.
- Adding interest to what you say.
- Making your ideas easier to understand.
- Emphasizing your information and ideas.
- Helping your listeners to remember your talk.

Most people are visual learners and remember points more clearly if they can see an effective, quality picture or visual aid.

When preparing visual aids, make sure you know where you will be presenting. Imagine showing up at a meeting with a reel of slides and discovering the event was going to be held outside on the patio of a clubhouse! Check lighting, glare and screen sizes to ensure that your carefully prepared visual aids can be seen by everyone in the audience.

It's important to address the audience and not the visual aid. Practicing with the visual aids prior to the presentation is the best way to overcome this habit. As a general rule-of-thumb, you should be comfortable using any visual aids before they are added to a presentation.

Keeping track of the information you want to present with each slide, chart, poster or hands-on display can be difficult. To make it easier to remember the information that goes with each slide or overhead, make a separate note card for each to make certain information is presented at the proper time.

Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words. The same counsel applies to visual aids that become pictures in the audience's mind. When utilizing visual aids, think about the picture you want to create then, develop visual aids to help obtain that goal.

A variety of visual aids, with different uses and advantages, are used during presentations. No matter what type of visual aid is used, they should meet the following criteria:

1. Simple.
2. Correct spelling and grammar.
3. Neatly prepared.
4. Lettering large enough to see from the back of a room.
5. Easy-to-read typestyle or font.
6. Limited number of key points.

Posters and Hands-on Displays	Overheads
<p>Charts and posters should be used with a small audience. Be sure the information can be read from any part of the room.</p> <p>If adding information to the chart or poster during the presentation, use contrasting colored markers.</p> <p>Use printed, simple lettering. Try to make letters two to three inches tall, using a combination of upper and lower case letters.</p> <p>Write in headlines and bullet points. Limit the number of words.</p> <p>Hands-on displays, such as a grass specimen, should be displayed so the entire audience can view it. Or package in a durable container so that the specimen can be passed around.</p>	<p>Know how to use the overhead machine provided. Adjust the machine's focus.</p> <p>Practice how to place and remove overheads in an orderly manner. Consider placing overheads in pre-packaged frames or separate with colored paper so they won't stick together.</p> <p>Before the presentation, go to the back of the room to ensure the overheads can be read easily.</p> <p>If writing on the overheads during the presentation, print clearly and use a contrasting color.</p>
Videos	Slides
<p>Preview the video before using it in a presentation to review its appropriateness, sound level and appeal to the audience.</p> <p>Know how to start and stop the video equipment without interrupting the presentation.</p> <p>Before showing a video, explain to the audience what they will see and suggest they watch for specific points.</p> <p>Dim lighting for optimum visibility, but allow enough light so the audience can take notes.</p> <p>Be sure the tape is queued at the correct location on the video.</p>	<p>Know how to use the slide machine provided or borrow a machine that you can practice with beforehand and keep during the presentation.</p> <p>Check the slide show beforehand to ensure all slides are properly placed in the reel – right side up in the correct order with no blank spots.</p> <p>Use an ending slide to remind you the end of the presentation has been reached. This can include a slide that simply asks for questions.</p>

Computer/PowerPoint

This is a relatively new format of visual aid, but has proven to be very effective when used correctly. Computer-based presentations, commonly created using PowerPoint, have several advantages, including:

1. Easy to change information.
2. Simple to transport via laptop or disk.
3. Inexpensive to produce.

Recommendations when creating PowerPoint or other computer-based presentations

- Dark backgrounds with white or yellow text are generally seen best by audiences.
- Type size should not be smaller than 28 pt.
- No more than seven lines per slide.
- No more than seven words per line.
- Don't put everything on the slide -- use key words and graphics to illustrate the point. The audience's attention should be focused on the speaker, not the presentation.
- Give slide handouts. Audiences have come to expect them, but don't forget about the previous point. If you've put everything you're saying on the slides and the audience has the handouts, they can take them and run.
- *Transition* (the movement from slide to slide) and *effect* (the movement from bullet point to bullet point on an individual slide), if used, should be used consistently. Don't vary the type of *transition* and *effect* (unless it is a special slide and will compliment that slide/point well).
- The best effect choices are those that come from the right of the screen or the bottom of the screen. Those that come from left or top have potential to distract the audience or temporarily cover existing text on the screen.
- Animation should only be used for effect if it compliments the slide and the point being made.
- The size of photos as graphic inserts can be quite large and should be edited for maximum compression to avoid waiting for a large file to load.
- Don't forget to spell check.

Handouts are easily created using this feature of the program.

Handouts

Handouts provide an excellent way for audience members to utilize your information after the presentation.

If you choose to use handouts, they should be clearly copied and properly assembled. Before the presentation, have a handout distribution plan in place so there is minimal disruption to your presentation. Your distribution plan can be to have handouts placed on audience chairs before the presentation - or available at the door. Whichever format you use, make sure you have practiced how you will utilize the handouts.

Tips on creating handouts:

- When using handouts, don't reproduce the entire presentation.
- Use a consistent style when preparing the handout. Keep type styles simple and use the same format for headings and subpoints through the document.
- Provide main points and allow room for notes.
- Organize your handouts to follow your presentation.
- Make sure handouts are readable and utilize correct spelling.

- Include your resource list so the audience can further investigate the topic.
- Include your contact information so audience members can follow up with additional questions.

Delivering the presentation

Preparation is 90 percent of the project, but there is still the aspect of getting up in front of an audience and presenting the information. In addition to what you say, audiences will remember how the information was presented. Eye contact, voice modulation and body language are matters a speaker also must consider during the presentation.

Eye contact

Establishing and maintaining eye contact with an audience can convey various messages, including speaker credibility, comfort level and genuine interest in subject matter and audience.

Speakers must tread carefully to maintain effective eye contact. Shifty eyes can send the message of a less than credible speaker, while spending too much time looking into a particular area can make another part of the audience feel left out of the presentation.

One way to moderate the time you spend making eye contact with various audience sections is to split the audience into four quadrants. Spend 10 to 12 seconds making eye contact with audience members in a particular quadrant before moving to the next.

Voice modulation and enunciation

Voice modulation and enunciation (clearly saying words) play an important part in presenting information. Have you ever had a monotone teacher or squeaky professor? What about a person you can't understand because they mumble?

It's important to speak in a conversational tone. This makes you and the audience more comfortable.

To modulate and project your voice, try the following:

- Breathe. Take deep breaths and pause at appropriate places in the presentation. Be sure you don't run out of breath at the end of sentences.
- Breathe from your diaphragm. This provides adequate airflow to the vocal cords and prevents a "squeaky" voice.
- Be aware of your habits when speaking. Does your voice go up a pitch at the end of sentences? Do you have a tendency to trail off and get quiet at the end of a paragraph?
- Record your practice sessions with a tape recorder or video recorder. This lets you hear your own voice. You likely will be very critical at first, but after a few times you begin to pick up ways you can improve your voice modulation.

To help you better enunciate your words, practice the following:

- When practicing the presentation, over-enunciate your words. This will help your enunciation be clearer when you are nervous.
- Practice tongue twisters, saying them clearly.
- Sharpen your “t” and “n” sounds. These commonly are letters we leave off the end of words. Make sure you sharpen these sounds.

It’s also important to speak in a tone that all audience members can hear. If you have a loud voice, be sure to adjust for the room where the presentation occurs. In contrast, if you have a soft voice, speak louder or ask for a sound system to help you project.

Body language

Without saying a single word, the audience forms an initial impression of speakers. Body language is often called the silent speaker because movements and actions reveal much about oneself.

A dynamic presenter is one who has open and positive body language. You can present a positive image by stepping from behind the podium to speak and moving along the front of the speaking area. It’s also important to keep your face toward the audience at all times. This simple gesture can show your audience you are excited about speaking to the group.

The most obvious and simple way to view your body language is by taping practice sessions with a video recorder. During the viewing of the session you can learn of any nervous habits you did not know you had such as twirling your fingers or rolling and unrolling your notes.

To improve your body language, make a conscious effort to gesture above the waist. Gestures should be appropriate to the point you are trying get across in the presentation. You also can make a note on your outline when to incorporate a particular gesture.

Practice and proper preparation are the best ways to set forth a positive image with your body language.