

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPEAKERS

Jahangir A. Khan

Dear Colleagues :

While suffering through endless meetings and symposia I have always wondered why organisers do not provide 'Instructions to Speakers'. The audience is at your mercy. Nevertheless, you may benefit from these suggestions :

— FORMULATE YOUR OBJECTIVE :

Put down, in one or two sentences, what you most want your audience to remember, and then, when you prepare your talk, make sure that message comes through to achieve this, some repetition may be more effective than an abundance of findings and figures.

— WRITE FOR LISTENING, NOT FOR READING :

If you have to read from a manuscript, write for listening. Make short sentences, You need time to breathe. There is nothing wrong violating grammatical rules if this makes for easy flowing communication.

A complete sentence may sound formal and stiff, an incomplete one lively You may have prepared a manuscript for reading. This will not do. Write one for listening. Do not expect your paper to be equally forceful whether spoken or read.

— PROGRAMME YOUR PRESENTATION :

No matter who sits in your audience, essentially you are trying to teach something. Consequently, your presentation must evolve in logical, comprehensive steps. Illustrations must be timed properly. Maintain some tension in your audience.

As you unfold the results of your research, provide enough repetition to make up for fleeting attention spans. Anticipate questions and answer them as you go on. Ideally, there should be no questions when you have finished. Just ask yourself, each time before you add a slide or a sentence to your manuscript, if this will really aid you in reaching your objective.

— MAKE YOUR SLIDES FIT THE PRESENTATION :

Sides should be easy to read. They should contain essential information only : a slide is over loaded if your audience cannot read or interpret all of the text, curves and figures. If there is a text to read, allow time for this and keep quite yourself.

— CONSIDER THE TIME OF DAY YOUR PRESENTATION IS SCHEDULED :

If you are the first speaker in the morning allow enough time to get the pro-

jector in working order and test lights and microphones. Count on a smaller but interested audience.

The later in the day you are speaking the more appropriate it may become to tie your presentation into what has already been said. Be prepared to omit or abbreviate sections of your talk so as to avoid duplication. Read the abstracts of previous papers carefully.

Attend all lectures before your own presentation. If you are to speak at the end of the morning or afternoon session, the programme will be likely be late. Utmost brevity will be appreciated.

— DO NOT EXCEED THE TIME ALLOWED :

To exceed your time is a sure way to make your audience hostile. An uncomfortable scene evolves. You are speaking faster and faster, while the chairman paces up and down nervously, and slide are flashing by on the screen. If you rely on reading your manuscript, remember that a paper of 10-minutes presentation should be easily readable in seven minutes. Besides, nobody has ever been blamed for not using up of his time.

— SPEAK TO EXPRESS NOT TO IMPRESS :

Outstanding presentation which draw enthusiastic applause are usually made by someone who speaks slowly and deliberately and who does not read from manuscript. If you read you will probably do it fast and your voice will sound flat.

A "thought manuscript" — for instance, a small pile of cards with key orders sentences may be the answer to your problem. Face your audience. If you have to turn to the screen and there is no appropriately positioned microphone, speak up. Practice your pronunciation. Do not try to impress your audience by quoting the names of other authors. Those who know the pertinent papers do not need to be reminded; those who do not, have no use for your quotation either, because no full reference is given. References are for printing.

— HAVE A 'DRY RUN' :

After all preparations are completed have a dry run, preferably in front of friendly audience. There you can test whether your presentation is properly programmed and whether you will be able to stay within your time limits. Helpful criticism maybe forthcoming and you may learn some of the questions to anticipate. Once you get to the meeting, check the microphone, the pointer, the lights on the podium, and possible signal buttons for the projectionist. Make sure you have your manuscript or notes, and the projectionist has your slides.

Then sit down in front until your turn comes and relax. You will give a fine talk.