



ENHANCING ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS: BARRIERS AND REMEDIES

Dr.R.Manjula

Assistant Professor of English

JNTUA College of Engineering, Anantapur, Andhrapradesh, 515002. India.

Abstract:

Presentation skills have been identified as one of the most important components of engineering education. Many Andhra Pradesh's engineering colleges have incorporated presentation skills into their curricula with the goal of enabling students' effective presentation skills. Despite the importance of presentation skills, a lack of emphasis on this area in the classroom has a negative impact on students' career success. Although students are technically excellent, they are deemed incompetent for jobs due to a lack of presentation skills. There are numerous factors that can contribute to students' presentation failures. The primary goal of this paper is to identify the major barriers associated with presentations and how to overcome them by employing effective presentation strategies.

Key words: audience, barriers, gestures, postures, preparation,

Introduction:

Globalization now necessitates a graduate with strong communication and presentation skills. With the entry of multinational corporations into India, there has been a significant shift in employment opportunities as well as the recruiting process. In the past, engineering graduates were solely concerned with academic knowledge. Academic knowledge is no longer sufficient in today's globalized world. Today's students need education beyond academic knowledge. (Schulz, B. 2008).

Although oral presentation skills are recognised as specific transferable skills, slight research has been conducted on the learning and teaching of these skills (Levasseur, Dean, & Pfaff, 2004). Presentation skills are important in every industry, whether you work in education, banking, business, politics, or agriculture. Students must be able to participate in academic events (seminars, conferences, workplaces). A good presentation can transform a person's life. It determines the scope of his or her professional advancement.

Presentation skills enable students to get their ideas and message across the audience clearly. Presentation skills help them build self-confidence and network with people all over the world. Through effective presentation, students can intellectually connect with their audience and share their ideas and points of view in meetings, seminars, workshops, and workplaces. In fact, preparing for a good presentation helps students develop their creativity and critical thinking skills.

A student who is making a good presentation must have the ability to deliver his/her presentation in an effective way. He needs to deliver it clearly, structurally within the given time span. It was discovered that both native and non-native speakers reported linguistic and psychological difficulties during oral presentations (Morita, 2000). Several barriers associated with the sender and receiver impede presentation. Here are some of the most common sender-oriented presentation barriers.

- a) **External barriers:** external conditions such as a lack of planning, background noise, inclement weather, network problems, and information overload, and so on.
- b) **Physiological barriers:** Physical disabilities such as a sickness, hearing problems, speech difficulties, and poor body language and voice quality, render presentations ineffective.
- c) **Psychological barriers:** Mental barriers such as stress, nervousness, anger, inferiority complex, tension, and fear that lead to presentation failure.
- d) **Semantic barriers:** Semantic barriers associated with language. Sometimes obstacles arise during the encoding and decoding of the message into ideas. Barriers such as a poor accent, a lack of vocabulary, slang, the use of unfamiliar words, and the heavy use of technical jargon and literary words render presentations ineffective.

- e) **Cultural barriers:** Occurs due to cultural differences. Lack of cultural awareness, unconscious bias toward one culture, and some categories of words, symbols, gestures, and colours that mean different things to people of different cultures.

A presenter must be aware of all these barriers and attempt to mitigate their impact by employing the following presentation strategies:

I. Define the purpose of your presentation:

The subject of your presentation must come from your objective. Presenters should understand the exact purpose of their presentation. In general, any presentation can have four purposes:

- To inform (to share the information)
- To persuade (to change attitudes, beliefs, and so on)
- To motivate (to encourage).
- To demonstrate (to explain how to do)

For students' presentations, the goal can be to inform the audience. Depending on the purpose, to inform, persuade, or motivate, the presenter can decide on the content and style of their presentation.

II. Select an appropriate topic:

The topic that you choose for your presentation can make a big difference to your audience. Before choosing the topic, the presenter needs to consider following different factors :

- The topic should match his or her knowledge level.
- Topic that is not too vast or too narrow.
- Each topic should focus on one principal theme.
- Topic that is relevant to the occasion.
- Topics that contain value for the audience
- Topic that is not controversial.

"To succeed in a presentation, you have to reach your audience with both head and heart" (Nick Morgan, 2003).

Audience analysis is an integral part of the presentation. To know the audience, the presenter should identify their interests, their knowledge of the topic, their cultural, linguistic background, and their expectations from your presentation.

III. Create a presentation structure:

A well-organized presentation has a significant impact on the audience. According to studies, structured information is retained 40% more accurately by the audience than unstructured information. Divide your message into three sections: introduction, body, and conclusion. Structure your presentation in a logical or chronological order, from known to unknown, from simple to complex. In order to illustrate abstract ideas, use diagrams. Charts, graphs and images. Examples will have huge impact on your audience understanding and retention. According to research, the audience remembers the first and last things you say, so make sure your opening sets the tone for the rest of your presentation. Your conclusion highlights the important points you made in the presentation's body. It is also important to study mode of delivery well in advance.

IV. Preparation leads to confidence:

Nothing has a greater impact on a speaker's mental attitude than the knowledge of complete preparation. Preparation is the cornerstone for a successful presentation. The more prepared you are, the more likely you will be to be confident and relaxed (Messmer, 2000). According to studies, rehearsal reduces anxiousness by 75% and error likelihood by 95%. Confidence, which is a result of preparation and practice, can overcome a speaker's uneasiness. Fear and anxiety are two of the most significant impediments in public speaking. When a presenter is well-prepared, his or her focus is on the audience rather than on his or her inner fears. Preparation is an essential component of confidence. Practice and rehearse all aspects of your presentation, both verbal and nonverbal, until it becomes natural and spontaneous. Set a time limit for your presentation and practice it. Practice in front of friends, family, and coworkers, and solicit feedback from them. Practice your presentation on the scale of rating yourself in the following areas:

- ❖ Eye contact
- ❖ Facial expressions
- ❖ Postures & Gestures
- ❖ The voice's pitch
- ❖ pronunciation

V. Body language reveals your attitude:

Presentation happens at two levels: the words you say and the body language you show. Gestures, postures, eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, proximity, attire, and appearance are essential components of nonverbal communication. According to Albert Mehrabian (1969), nonverbal factors (gesture, posture, facial emotions, clothes, and appearance) account for 55% of our communication, whereas voice accounts for 38% and words account for 7%. Your smile or frown has a big impact on your audience, even if you don't say anything. A smile denotes friendship or warmth. Eye contact conveys assurance and trustworthiness. The audience senses a lack of confidence, attention, shyness, and approachability when the presenter fails to maintain eye contact. Establish eye contact with audience to make your speech more powerful and engaging.

Hand movements, according to the study, strengthen the speaker's message and make the presentation more interesting. Use gestures to make important points, but make sure they are well-timed and culturally appropriate. A poor posture such as hunching and rounded shoulders says a lot about your anxiety while giving a presentation. Maintain proper posture throughout your presentation. A smile makes the audience feel at ease.

Your facial expressions can convey happiness, anxiety, surprise, grief, disgust, and boredom without the use of a single word. In your presentation, be attentive to your facial expressions. Your facial expressions should reflect both your enthusiasm for the topic and your concern for the audience. Body movements have a significant impact on the effectiveness of a presentation. Use your bodily movements to channel your nervous energy. Create the first impression and capture your audience's attention within the first five minutes. Your physical appearance sends a strong visual statement to the audience. Pay attention to attire and grooming. Professional attire enhances your presentation. Use your space and feel confidence inside and outside. It is crucial to work on your body language when rehearsing your presentation.

VI. Use your voice effectively:

Vocalization is an extremely effective strategy for effective presentation. A monotone voice, no matter how interesting the subject, is a sure way to dull the audience. A confident tone of voice communicates a strong sense of self-assurance. Develop self-assurance in your voice. According to research, the tone of the speaker's voice is twice as important as the message's content. According to quantified communications, an Austin, Texas-based Communications Analytics Company, a study of 120 executive speeches found that the speaker's voice quality accounted for 23 percent of listeners while the message substance accounted for only 11 percent. The importance of voice in determining presentation effectiveness cannot be overstated. When the listener hears the tone of voice, they instinctively identify it with the speaker's personality. When making a certain point, use quiet and pauses effectively.

VII. The role of feedback and self-evaluation:

Feedback and self-evaluation are critical components in teaching presentation skills. Reviewing video recordings of students' presentations might be used for self-evaluation. Participants are invited to go through their own recordings and evaluate their own performance using a self-assessment checklist. Feedback can help students improve their presenting skills (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Hamilton, 2012), students' feedback is limited when they only reflect on their presentation rather than watch a video of their actual presentation (Murphy & Barry, 2016). Feedback might be given orally or in writing. It might be formal or informal, but it should equip participants with general improvement strategies. Feedback is quite beneficial in terms of boosting pupils' performance. Students are unlikely to notice and correct problems on their own if they do not receive individual feedback. It is important that feedback should be balanced, impartial, and explicit, as it reinforces current strengths and corrective faults.

The following table shows the evaluation criteria used to assess the quality of oral presentations rated from 1(low) to 4(four).

Name of the Evaluator

Date

Name of the Presenter

Topic

		1	2	3	4
1	Was the presenter knowledgeable about the topic				
2	Was the topic relevant to the occasion				
3	Did the presenter greet the audience				
4	Did the presenter exhibit confidence				
5	were audio visual aids effective				
6	Did the presenter maintain eye contact during presentation?				
7	Did the presenter build rapport with the audience?				
8	Did the presenter project voice effectively				
9	was Body language appropriate				
10	Did the presenter speak spontaneously				

Suggestion for presentation improvement:

Conclusion:

Effective presentation skills are necessary for engineering graduates since every student is required to deliver a presentation at some point of time. Whether it is a progress report, a seminar, a research or project presentation, they need to share their findings with potential peers in academic setting. A good presentation is more than just talking or reading from a script. It's an art form. It is the art of delivering complex ideas in simple manner. It is well-planned structured conversation between the speaker and the audience. Whether it is Project proposal, conference, workshop presentation the target is the same: The audience. The audience play crucial role in every presentation. Hence connect with audience. Respect your audience, their values, and their cultural peculiarities. Adapt your discourse to their level of comprehension and interest. Many great presentations appear to be effortless, but the reality is that they are the result of extensive preparation. Well prepared presentation avoids stress and anxiety. The style of delivery is an important feature of a great presentation, but students neglect it in favor of focusing solely on the information. According to the study, nonverbal communication accounts for 90% of all communication. Body language plays significant role in delivering a presentation. Body language has the power to make or break your presentation. Gestures, postures, facial expressions transmit the speaker's feelings and intentions to the audience. During the presentation, positive body language helps break down the barriers of unfamiliarity and anxiety. Presentation abilities are taught and learned through constant practice and feedback and assessment. Teachers, in fact, should play the role of a monitor, facilitator and evaluator in helping students to develop their presentation abilities. Storytelling, public speaking should be encouraged to such an extent that it should become natural skill.

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