MY MEETING NOTES

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**Online Training Programme
ON
'Effective Presentation Skills'
Training and Education Centre, ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Pune,
Maharashtra, India
14-16 December 2021**

Dr Devesh Thakur participated in the online training on 'Effective Presentation Skills' organised by ICAR-IVRI, Pune. What he learnt from the training is discussed in this meeting note.

CONTEXT

In India's national agricultural education system, presentation skills have low priority. For example, students in the veterinary sciences undergraduate programme (which lasts five-and-a-half years) do not undergo training on how to improve their presentation skills. Students' confidence is often diminished as a result of poor presentation capabilities. One of the reasons students are unable to communicate with teachers in the classroom is because of this. Furthermore, due to a lack of such abilities, speakers experience a huge amount of stress and discomfort during the preparation and delivery of presentations. Additionally, many post-graduate students and researchers give talks that contain far too many details, slides, and ambiguous images. As a result, we end up wasting much time collectively listening to poor presentations from different individuals.

Keeping this in mind the Training and Education Centre, ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute organized a training event on 'Effective Presentation Skills' from 14 to 16 December 2021.The three-day training updated knowledge of participants on planning, content preparation, slide design, delivery, and also on how to handle questions during presentations. It also helped participants to overcome the usual anxiety and fear of presentation and public speaking. It was a paid soft skill training workshop wherein 34 participants participated via online mode. Trainees consisted of undergraduate students, post-graduate students, doctoral students, assistant professors, and associate professors from different disciplines hailing from 16 states of India.

Dr Kiran Bhilengoonkar addressing trainees at the inaugural session of the training workshop.

DESIGN OF VIRTUAL TRAINING

The three-day training programme had two daily sessions of two hours each – one in the forenoon (10AM-12 PM) and the other in the afternoon (3-5 PM). Dr Amol Bhalerao (Course Coordinator) and Dr Sangharatna Bahire (Course Co-coordinator) planned this training workshop to address the presentation skill requirements of young researchers in the agricultural sector. Dr Bhalerao was the resource person for all eight sessions of the training workshop, which included the following subjects: planning a presentation, content and design, breathing and body language, the art of introducing yourself, delivering a presentation, strategies to captivate the audience, tips for delivering thesis seminar/conference presentations, management of stage fear, dealing with audience questions, etc.

KEY EXCERPTS FROM THE SESSIONS

Planning a Presentation

A good presentation should be like a good book. An eloquent presenter, like a good book, should stir curiosity, arouse interest, provide new knowledge and understanding about the topic. It is important to do audience analysis by exploring the varied needs and expectations of the audience. A good presentation should be delivered keeping in mind the different learning styles of the varied audience. While listening to a presentation, the audience's aim is to soak up information. This can happen only if there is extensive learning and communication styles. Broadly, people can be categorized into three types based on their learning preferences, preferred communication styles, and usage of nonverbal languages (Box 1). People come under the categories of visuals, aural and kinesics. So it is important that we use pictures, videos, and appropriate nonverbal language in our presentations.

> **Box 1. Different types of learners and their influence on presentations**
> (i)   *Visual learners:* They learn mostly through their eyes; so the better pictures concept works for them. They learn better by observing things, watching pictures and demonstrations. They take notes and think in terms of visualization. Visual learners are distracted by physical movements such as people moving about while making presentations. They are often quiet, may not talk extensively, and are impatient when they need to listen continuously for a lengthy period.
> (ii)   *Aural learners*: Aurals like to hear and discuss to fully understand a concept. They like hearing themselves and others talk. They like listening but can't wait to talk. For them, background noise or music can be very distracting.
> (iii)   *Kinesics learners*: They will try out everything by themselves to understand the concept better. They cannot sit calmly for long in a presentation. Pictures may be less important but gestures are more useful for them. They often look inattentive in presentations and do not seem to listen well. While speaking, they use more gestures.

Content and Design for a Presentation

The structure of a presentation should follow the 5 Ps approach, and the SMART criteria (see Box 2). For better presentations, san-serif fonts are suggested to be the best. Verdana, Tahoma, Georgia, Corbel and Calibri are the commonly used san-serif fonts for presentation. Serif fonts are useful, especially for printing maintaining uniformity of font including title fonts across all slides is important; one must avoid long sentences, long words and jargon unknown to listeners. Instead of passive voice use active voice in sentences. Next, avoid bright white backgrounds especially if presentation is on LED screens as they can cause retinal burnout. These practices – various font styles, vocabulary and proper use of fonts – can help to improve the design of a presentation.

> **Box 2. Structure of a Presentation – the 5 P approach & SMART Criteria**
> **5-P approach**
> 1. *Preface*: The introduction part where the speaker talks about the topic.
> 2. *Position:* The part where the speaker talks about the current situation, e.g., often topics beginning with dairy farming in India, start with the current state of livestock production in the country.
> 3. *Problem:* This part talks about the complication/problem in the situation that we need to overcome. For example, after stating the current dairy situation, we discuss the gap in the existing scenario in terms of productivity gap or information gap among livestock owners.
> 4. *Plan:* In this part the speaker talks about solutions, i.e., what are we going to do about the problem. So, to overcome the productivity or information gap, the delivery of livestock advisory services needs to be improved.
> 5. *Postscript:* This includes conclusions and implementations. Our postscript should be short. We should summarize or highlight the main points or emphasize what the audience should have learned.
>
> **SMART Criteria**
> - *Simple*: A presentation should have simple use of words/sentences.
> - *Measurable*: Presentations have many purposes, such as to inform, to persuade or to take action. Whatever be the goal of a presentation it should be measurable.
> - *Achievable*: The purpose of a presentation should be kept so as to make it achievable.
> - *Realistic*: One should have realistic expectations from his/her presentation.
> - *Time*: It should be finished on time.

Breathing and Body Language

Glossophobia, the fear of public speaking, is a common phobia and affects up to 75% of the population. Sweating, increased heart rate, dry mouth, difficulty in breathing, nausea, and headache

are common physical symptoms. The release of neurochemical adrenaline in the body creates such symptoms in the body. This adrenaline surge can be managed by incorporating deep breathing exercises. Regular practice of such deep breathing exercises can help manage anxiety brought on by public speaking. Similarly, proper body language, such as upright body stance, eye movement, poised walk, and appropriate gestures can help make presentations more effective.

A training workshop session.

The Art of Introducing Yourself

The power of a good introduction is immense, and introductions in personal and professional domains are often the beginning of something great. It is the social currency of our society and has tremendous impact, but strangely it is a topic that rarely gets its deserved attention. So the participants were divided into virtual groups where they were made to introduce themselves to others in the group (Box 3: Sample introduction). While introducing oneself, you should avoid a lengthy introduction and use a conversational tone. The best introductions need careful preparation.

This can be achieved gradually by adopting the following tips:
Write down your self-introduction; re-write and update it regularly; don't send a CV to introduce yourself (one page will suffice); make an interesting introduction of yourself; people should remember your name; ensure that you are properly introduced by someone, if not then correct it; make direct eye contact with people and pay attention to your body language.; Stand straight but in a relaxed - not stiff - way; avoid folding your arms or holding your body in a defensive position; keep your introduction in context (don't refer to your job position when you meet a parent at the playground); practice humility and keep initial conversations positive. You don't want people to remember you as a complainer, criticizer, or arrogant person; also make sure you're dressed and groomed well.

Box 3:Useful Phrases for Introducing Yourself
- Before I continue, let me introduce myself. My name is…..
- My name is …………..and I am responsible for …...
- For those of you who don't know me, my name is ………..
- This morning I'd like to discuss…. /report on …../present …..

Sample Introduction Speech
Good morning, everyone.
My name is Devesh Thakur, and I work as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Veterinary & AH Extension Education. I am committed towards making a positive difference in society by serving students and the farming community. I'm looking forward to talking about my upcoming project with all of you.

Delivering a Presentation

"Everything depends on the manner in which one communicates, not the matter," states an old saying. A good delivery includes using a conversational tone, stressing key words, altering pitch, speaking rate, and inserting appropriate pauses. The audience's attention should be drawn in right from the beginning of the presentation. This can be accomplished by beginning with an anecdote in a conversational tone, informing them what you're about to say, presenting a story or a narrative, making a strong controversial statement, then clarifying it, utilising suitable quotes, or even by showing a visual or video (show a 30 second video). The conclusion of your discussion should include a vivid summary of your views, a call to action, or a poetical quotation.

Questioning the message
1. What does my audience already know about this subject?
2. How can I tap into the interest of listeners?
3. What are the 3-5 key points I want my audience to remember?
4. How can I make my message stick so as to enhance retention?

Questioning the visuals
1. How can images support my core message?
2. Are my images simple and of high quality?
3. Is the written text unnecessary for my oral presentation?
4. What can I do to minimize distractions and clutter in my slides?

Question the delivery
1. Have I rehearsed enough?
2. Do I have transitions built-in at appropriate points?
3. How can I integrate pauses so as to maintain learner attention?
4. What types of expressive behaviour can I use in my behaviour?
5. Where can I incorporate active learning techniques into my presentation (role play, puzzle)?

Strategies to Captivate an Audience

Many scientific presentations are overburdened with facts and points. As the mind cannot recall so many things at once, such a conversation might become tedious. As a result, the audience's focus is drawn away from the presentation. The persuasive model of Aristotle and Cicero's De Oratore-5 Cannons of Rhetoric (Box 4), are effective strategies for a speaker to keep listeners' attention for longer periods.

Box 4. Models to captivate an audience

Aristotle's Persuasion Model: This model suggests that a good presentation should have three elements i.e., Ethos, Logos and Pathos to make it more captivating.

- Ethos- Credibility of the Speaker. This can be established by being knowledgeable about a subject and using credible external sources of information in a presentation.
- Logos- Logic should be there behind conclusions drawn by a speaker. This normally refers to facts, statistics used in the presentation.
- Pathos- Emotional appeal, that is the ability to create a connection between the speaker and his/her audience. This can be included by adding narratives, anecdotes and stories in the presentation.

Ciero: De Oratore-5 Cannons of Rhetoric:

These five canons of rhetoric are a classical approach to understanding effective communication. They are: invention (what to say), arrangement (structure of content), style (language choices), memory (learn the presentation), and delivery (use of more than just words).

- Invention- refinement of argument, find ways to persuade.
- Arrangement- structure of coherent argument.

- Style- process of determining how to present an argument, words, selection and technique so as to have the greatest impact on an audience.
- Memory- process of learning and memorizing the speech.
- Delivery- process of making effective use of voice.

Other ways in which one can hold the interest of an audience from beginning till the end of a presentation are by:
- Asking thought-provoking questions;
- Sharing powerful/memorable stories;
- Making a point of staying animated;
- Providing valuable content;
- Keeping content fresh;
- Extending your usual vocal range;
- Experimenting with voice;
- Maintaining eye contact with all sections of the audience.

Presentations for Conferences/Thesis Seminar

KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) formulae and signposts phrases are known to make the presentations more effective and impactful in conferences and seminars.

While using the KISS formula, short sentences make effective presentations. *Example:* "The function of this department is the collection of accounts" (which is lengthy), instead simply say "The department collects accounts". Similarly, keeping the language simple and clear, and avoiding jargon makes the explanation easier on the whole.

Example:

• Good: "We are at the threshold of a crisis which threatens to destabilize the status quo and users in the dawn of a new era of change."

• Better: "We have a crisis at hand. This threatens to destabilize the status quo and usher in a new era."

Signpost phrases help listeners to overview and learn the progress of delivery in a presentation (Table 1).

Table 1: Signpost phrases

Section of Presentation	Signpost Language
I. Signpost for Overview (outline of presentation)	The subject/topic of my talk is ... I'm going to talk about ... My topic today is… My talk is concerned with ... I have divided the presentation into three main parts: X, Y & Z In my presentation, I will focus on three major issues My talk will focus on three areas Firstly, I'll give you an overview of… Secondly, I'll highlight Finally, we'll discuss briefly And lastly, I'll offer some solutions.
II. Signpost to stress a main point	I would like to emphasize/stress/highlight the following points I would like to draw your attention to Let me point out that

		I'd like to focus your attention on
		I think you'll be surprised to see that
		What's really important here is
		Let's look more closely at
		I would like you to concentrate on this
		It is important to notice that
III.	Signposts during end of a presentation	This is the general picture for…..
		Let's summarise the main issues…….
		Before we move on, let's recap the main issues…..
		This brings us to the end of the first point
		That's all I want to say about

Dealing with Questions from the Audience

During presentations, responding to the questions posed and dealing with it tactically demands certain tips like:

1. Listen carefully through the question;
2. Decide whether you want to answer the question;
3. If you decide you do, repeat, and if necessary, rephrase the question;
4. Answer the question and only the question;
5. Check that the answer was acceptable;
6. Hinting well in advance about the questions;
7. Admitting that you don't know the answer;
8. Throwing difficult questions out to the audience;
9. Asking for clarification-reformulation for a difficult question;
10. Expecting probable questions in a presentation.

Usually one can expect the following probable questions during presentations, such as What are the alternatives? What steps can we take? What could go wrong? How long does it take? How much does it cost? Who will be responsible? etc.

Dr Hema Tripathi, the Chief Guest, interacting with the participants during the valedictory session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE TRAINING

1. Prepare your presentation based on visual, aural, and kinaesthetic types of learners.
2. Use deep breathing exercises to manage the anxiety of public speaking.
3. Use san-serif fonts for presentations and serif fonts for printing.
4. Question your message, visuals, and delivery to improve your presentation.
5. Use signpost phrases to clarify your speech during presentations.
6. Apply KISS formulae in your presentations.
7. Prepare your presentation based on the audience.
8. Expect probable questions at a presentation.

CONCLUSION

As listeners, we often go through dull, irrelevant, or confusing presentations. It happens because most presenters are oblivious to the fact that effective presentations do not happen by chance, but rather they need much practice and effort. Presentations and public speaking help practically every aspect of our life and add to our overall success. They are part of classroom lectures, student thesis presentations, conference presentations, and even talking to farmers about the latest agricultural production practices. Though some people are naturally good at speaking, most of us can learn these skills. The objective of the training workshop was to make participants become aware and learn these skills. The ability to articulate effectively is a major skill. It's time for educators, researchers, and extension personnel in the national agricultural education system to prioritize presentation and public speaking, in both theory and practice.

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