



## A GUIDE TO MAKING CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS TO SCHOOL AUDIENCES

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### GETTING READY

1. Children, teens, & young adults are very **visual** and easily bored. The ideal timeline for their attention span is about 20 minutes of lecture, followed by an activity, and then some additional lecture if necessary. Use hands-on activities to involve students.
2. This is a chance to use your **creative** side and brainstorm something that will potentially be new and interesting to students. Most children are very curious about the world around them. **Simplify** your presentation so they can follow you, and **practice** amply beforehand.
3. Besides your visuals, **3 dimensional objects** are essential in helping you **catch** your student's interest and getting them to "buy – in" to your presentation. A section of a structural shape, a large piece of limestone, or a bucket of water – "**3-D works best!**"
4. Communicate to the school beforehand any special **needs** you may have, such as **AV equipment** - projection screen, extension cord, audio-visual cart, etc.
5. **Get directions** to the school and parking information.
6. **Verify the number of students** in your audience, **grade/age**, and **academic level**.

### ARRIVAL AT SCHOOL

1. Arrive at least **30 minutes early**, especially if you have never been to the school before.
2. Always **check in** at the main office first, sign in and get your **visitor sticker**.
3. Ask for a **map** of the school campus if your location is not near the front office.
4. **Be prepared** (with your own hand truck if necessary) to hike across a parking lot in the rain, walk all the way to the very rear of the school's campus, and end up in a room that's either as cold as a fridge or as hot as an oven. So, dress light, bring a sweater, and have a coat and umbrella in your accoutrements.
5. Unless you have actually talked to the teacher in whose room you will be presenting, **assume they have nothing**; no board to write on, no extension cord for power, no sink, no chalk or eraser, no white board markers or eraser, etc. Try to be self-sufficient.
6. If you have **handouts that need to be duplicated**, most schools will do this for you. However, don't expect this to be done the day you arrive. Bring them to the school a week or so before your presentation to give staff time to send your request out.



### **ENTERING THE CLASSROOM AND GETTING READY**

1. You only get one chance to make a **good first impression**. The minute you enter the classroom be ready to **smile** and say something complimentary like "**wow, what a neat classroom,**" or "**hello, what a wonderful looking group of students.**" The very first thing students hear you say can set the stage for their perception of you, and their desire to give you their attention, or tune you out. If you are given time to pre-set up, then be equally prepared to **smile** and **say something complimentary** when they arrive and enter the room.
2. Write your name on the board or easel if available. If your last name is easily pronounced, then write **Mr. Smith**. If, however, your last name is difficult to pronounce or read, then just write your first name, e.g. **Ms. Sue**.
3. Always **stand** if possible, and try to make your presentation fun!
4. If possible, always have something to be **handed out** to the students. Unless it's a very large group, do not let teachers or other adults help to pass the materials out. Ask students directly to help you in accomplishing this task. This will help them to get involved and feel like they are part of the program. Always ask the student their first name, and then ask them by name for their help. For example:

**"Bill, would you please make sure everyone gets one of these brochures?"**

For **elementary grades**, try to make your handout include **something they can color**.

5. Begin by **summarizing** your purpose for being there, and explain the beginning, middle, and end of your presentation. **Speak loud and slowly**. For example:

"Students, today I am going to make a presentation to your class about how we measure rainfall.

First, we will learn about where rain comes from.

Second, we'll learn about the instrumentation used to measure rainfall.

Third we'll learn how to become a Meteorologist.

6. If necessary, **set clear limits and boundaries** immediately. If a class is noisy and unruly when you enter the room, what I have found that works best is:

**"Class, I have only one rule: Either I talk, or you talk.  
And if you are going to talk, then I'm out of here."**

This serves the dual function of putting the teacher on notice that you expect them to intervene if necessary and control their students. After all, they are responsible for their students and their behavior. They know their own students, and you don't.



### **MAKING YOUR PRESENTATION**

1. Use **eye contact**, your **voice**, and non-verbal **gestures** to communicate the material you came to cover.
2. If possible, **hold a 3-D object in your hands** as you talk.
3. Try to share a related event that happened to you when you were the same age as your students. Turn this into a story if possible. This can prevent what I call the **OLD FOGIE Syndrome**.
4. If possible, perform an **experiment** that demonstrates concepts you are trying to share. However, be sure the experiment is **fool proof**.
5. With elementary school students, ask only **close-ended** questions requiring one word or short answers. With Middle School and/or High School, feel free to use **open-ended** questions. Ask questions, and then **wait** for answers.
6. **Repeat student's questions** so all can hear and understand.
7. Understand the **Fear of Not Knowing** and the **Need to Be Right**. Try to never say "No" or "That's the Wrong Answer." Instead, try:

**That's a good answer, but not the one I am looking for. Or:**

**That's close, you're warm, think a little harder.**

Then give them a little hint. Keep it light, and try to make it fun.

8. Be careful how you ask your questions, you are not their teacher. Try:

**Just out of curiosity... if..., what do you think would happen?**

### **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT (HANDLING POTENTIAL PROBLEMS)**

1. Don't be intimidated by the students. Involve the teacher if problems arise.
2. Remember, if you are in a classroom setting, the **troublemakers** are typically sitting in the front row, right in front of you. Try to involve them if you dare, as you could have an impact on their lives. However, be on guard for misbehavior.
3. Especially in middle school and potentially in high school, be ready for **arrogant and challenging questions**. Typical questions I get from students include:

i. **How much money do you make?** Suggested Answer:  
Engineers, like Doctors and Lawyers, are paid very well.

ii. **What have you actually built?** Suggested Answer:  
Engineers don't actually build things, we design them.



4. Be prepared to handle verbal interruptions and inappropriate questions.  
What I have found that works is a **loud & stern**:

**"Is there anything else?"**

This counter question usually disarms the brain and catches them off guard.

5. For those students who feel they just have to tell you something, use:

**"Thank you, I really appreciate knowing that, Jill"**

6. For the funny yet intelligent:

**"Just between you and me, I knew that,  
but I appreciate you reminding me."**

**EMPHATHY:**  
**UNDERSTANDING SOME TYPICAL EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS  
AND LEARNING DISABILITIES**

1. **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: ADD or ADHD**

These students can have significant problems in 4 major areas:

**Inattention, Impulsivity, Hyperactivity, and Boredom**

Generally, ADHD is considered to be a neurologically based condition.

ADHD is not the result of bad parenting or obnoxious, willful defiance on the part of the student.

Example: Student I coached in Odyssey of the Mind, Perfect SAT 2400

2. **Dyslexia**

Dyslexia is generally considered to involve a language difficulty and manifests itself with students struggling to translate written symbols into speech, or spoken words into symbols. Consider a teacher's typical request:

**Take out a piece of paper and a pencil and number from one to ten.**

Maybe, the student heard and processed:

**Take out a piece of paper and a pencil and number from one to ten.**

or

**Take out a piece of paper and a pencil.**

or just

**Take out a piece of paper.**

Consider my own experience with a thermometer when I ask students:

**Just out of curiosity, why does the red liquid go up when it gets hot?  
As a hint, I'll tell you that the answer I'm looking for is not HEAT,  
and it's not PRESSURE.**

A typical Dyslexic answer: **PRESSURE**

**Common Misconceptions / Perceptions:**

He or she is the classroom clown.

Their concentration is poor.

He or she is lazy.

**Common Strengths of Dyslexic Individuals:**

**They typically have very good visual eye processing**

**They can be very imaginative and skillful with their hands**

**They are typically very practical and task completion oriented**

**The can have a fantastic verbalized imagination and long term memory**

**Summary of their Cognitive Problems:**

Poor phonological awareness

Poor information processing

Poor short-term auditory memory

Poor sequencing

**3. Broken and Dysfunctional Family Life**

They may fall asleep during your presentation

They may wet their pants

They may do their homework

They may talk to themselves

**My Advice: Stay cool, try to ignore it, and let the teacher handle it.  
Don't get hooked, focus and concentrate on your presentation.**



### **CLOSING YOUR PRESENTATION**

1. **Thank You:** Be sure to say thank you to the students you talk to. Thank them for allowing you to come into their classroom and share your presentation, thank them for their good behavior, thank them for passing out your handouts, and thank them for all their great questions.
2. **Give-Aways:** If you have any what I call "Give-Aways" from your marketing department, such as rulers, pencils, pads of paper, etc., save them for the end of the presentation to distribute as a way of showing your appreciation for being able to spend time with them.
3. **Have Fun:** Finally, remember that students will remember you for a lot of reasons, and that they want you to enjoy yourself too! So remember to tell them how much **fun you had** sharing with them. ☺

### **FINAL REMARKS**

1. If a student asks a question you can't answer, tell them you don't know but will be glad to find out for them. Then get back to the school with an answer at a later date.
2. If you leave something on loan for students to read and review, ask the teacher for a business card so you have someone to contact directly later to retrieve your property.
3. If a student shows serious interest in becoming an engineer, ask their teacher for a business card and channel information through the teacher to help guide the student.

### **Documentation:**

On-Line / Electronic Resources used in creating this document:

1. **Dyslexia, Some Hints for Teachers**, The Dyslexia Institute Center, not dated
2. **Helpful Hints for Teaching Large Classes**, Center for Teaching, Learning, and Faculty Development, Ferris State University, not dated.
3. **Substitute Teachers Handbook**, St. Johns County School District, St. Augustine Florida. Revised July 2002.
4. **What is "ADD or ADHD?"**, Dr. Crowan, The ADHD Information Library, ADD101.com, 2004

Printed Resources used in creating this document:

1. **Volunteer Guide, Teach-In 2006**, Orange & Seminole County Public Schools Foundations, 2006