

# The Listener's Bill of Rights

## **Content: Listeners deserve a clear, concise presentation.**

A speaker has one shot to inform or persuade successfully. A speaker *must* be selective for a presentation to have a chance of being successful. Use humor and jargon only if you know your audience really well and even then with great caution.

## **Organization: Listeners deserve a roadmap of the presentation and lots of signposts throughout.**

Listeners, being human, have fairly short attention spans. If listeners get distracted, hungry, bored, confused – you name it – the speaker needs to make it easy for them to plug back in again by providing good transition both within and between points. Speakers can even reinforce the structure of a presentation visually as well as orally with the heading and agenda bars.

## **Visual aids: Listeners deserve the strategic use of well designed visual aids.**

Especially nowadays, visual aids are integral to the success of a presentation. They can keep listeners engaged and focused. But they can also be silly and distracting. Speakers need to keep their visuals clean and simple. Follow the 6 x 6 guideline as much as possible – no more than 6 bulleted items per slide, no more than 6 words per line.

If you're using PowerPoint, remember that just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you *should*. Use only a couple of colors and then only colors with good contrast; nix the clip art and cutesy stuff. And again, limit the text. Remember that *if a listener has to choose between focusing on you or on what's behind you, what's behind you will always win*.

## **Delivery: Listeners deserve a presentation that has been practiced out loud.**

Speakers really have the advantage over even writers in this area, but *only* if they rehearse out loud. Speakers can use tone, pace, gestures, and body language to convey their ideas. But it's just not enough to make note cards or to "say" your presentation in your head as you wait for the bus from main campus to Centennial. For one thing, you'll be a lot more comfortable if you've practiced. You'll also maintain better eye contact with us. When you practice out loud, you create "muscle memory" and will find it easier to express yourself articulately.

Build on your natural style. Don't worry about accents; just make sure you project so that we can hear you and so that you add energy to your voice. Be careful to avoid fillers and nervous pacing, scratching, and thumping. Again, if you're not worried about *what* you're going to say, you can free up part of your brain to focus on *how* you're going to say it.

Dress in a way that enhances your credibility and gives you confidence.

## **Feedback: Listeners deserve a speaker who is aware of their response to the presentation.**

For better or worse, feedback from listeners is both immediate and honest. A speaker need only look out at the audience to have the opportunity to change the outcome of a presentation.

Think about your audience's level of interest and expertise in your topic as you prepare your presentation, but don't stop there. As you speak, be sensitive to facial expressions and body language as well as to comments. *Never, ever* respond to a comment or answer a question in a way that makes someone feel bad, wrong, or stupid.

B Pittman