You don't need to be a professional speaker to make a professional, informative presentation, be it to an audience of 10 or 100. You just need to prepare smartly. Do so and you'll know what to say and how to say it. Better yet, you'll win over your audience. Here are some pointers.

**Identify your audience**
As a businessperson, you may be called upon to speak to different groups. Each, in turn, has its own subgroups. Customers, for example, consist of new, repeat and prospective customers. Professional organizations include Rotaries, Chambers of Commerce and the like. Identify your audience as narrowly as possible. It will narrow the scope of your presentation, making your job that much easier.

**Find common ground**
As a presenter, you have a goal. You want to build your business, raise your profile, become a community leader, etc. Your audience meanwhile has its expectations. Where your goal and their expectations overlap is where you'll find the raw material for your speech.

**Free flow**
Jot down everything your presentation could or should cover. Broad brushstrokes are fine; you'll fill in the details later. Next, pick and choose among your key points. Ask yourself: "Which can I toss yet still make my point?" Limit yourself to no more three. The fewer the points, the greater their impact.

**Streamline**
Gather essential information, e.g., facts and stats, anecdotes, future plans, etc. Fight the temptation to include everything. Toss the least important material so your speech won't get bogged down in details.

**Order your thoughts**
Now that you have your "ingredients list," put your information in a logical order, paying special attention to transitions. Your key points should be delivered smoothly rather than stiffly.

**Begin writing**
As you craft your speech, heed good writing (and speaking) principles. Use the active voice and anecdotes and analogies where possible, to personalize and enliven your presentation. Avoid jargon, redundancy and long-windedness. Limit the use of statistics, quotations and other material your audience would find difficult to retain.

**Make a dry run**
Rehearse your speech to identify passages that sound choppy or wordy. Memorize as much of it as possible or put key points on note cards. Keep your speech to 20 minutes or less, unless you are giving a seminar or doing an interactive workshop.

**Get ready**
Scope out the physical environment if possible. You can then visualize yourself and your audience, be they in a ballroom, boardroom or auditorium. Go through your check-off sheet: Sound system and Power Point working? Chairs properly arranged? Lights turned low? Anticipate surprises and you won't have any.

**Make a positive first impression**
This impression begins with a smile and good eye contact as you walk onstage. Together they reveal warmth, confidence and authority, and thereby create a bond between you and your audience. Take your time before jumping into your material. Share an anecdote, a pertinent quote or a simple thank-you for having an opportunity to speak. Once you've warmed up, you're ready to begin.
Lead the way
As the speaker, you are also the navigator. Your audience will follow your lead, so tell its members where you are going and why. In other words, identify your key points at the outset, discuss them in the body of your speech, and restate them in your conclusion. If possible, give your audience a call to action, e.g., to purchase your product, write government officials, etc.

Rate yourself
Although you likely will have a gut sense of how well you did, you should try to analyze your performance. Did the audience seem to enjoy itself? Were your points clearly stated? Did you stay within the time limit? Did you maintain good eye contact? As uncomfortable as it may be, you also should review written evaluations. These comments will give you concrete information on how to improve your performance.

Know that you really will improve with time. Practice may not make perfect, but it can get you pretty close.

Beth Mende Conny is the founder of ArtofSchmooze.com and the author of more than four dozen books and collections, including her latest books, The Confident Schmoozer and What to Say When Talking to Yourself. She is based in the Washington, D.C., area, where she conducts workshops and training sessions for corporations, associations and community organizations. She can be contacted at Beth@ArtofSchmooze.com.

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