

Formats and Variety

PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 29

Background Information: In *Professional Meeting Management*[®], fifth edition, Wanda Johnson discusses program design and development. In Chapter 19, Design and Development, she prepares meeting managers to be able to:

- State the elements used in program design
- Create a program planning timeline
- Explain where to use the different education and presentation formats
- Identify the role and responsibilities of a planning committee

PMM5 Postscript Use: This PMM5 PostScript[™] builds on the third outcome of the chapter. It more fully develops ideas for meeting managers to move away from “talking heads.” The importance of interaction and engagement of the audience are also addressed building upon many of the principles found in Chapter 18, Strategies to Embrace the Adult Learner. You can also refer to information contained in PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 24 Adult Learning Styles, PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 25 Adult Learning Principles and PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 27 Emotionally Charged Meetings. Finally, PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 32 introduces elements used effectively by keynote speakers. This PMM5 Postscript[™] also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Identify the benefits of utilizing interactive formats.
- Describe how alternative formats benefit the audience.
- List at minimum of six alternative formats.
- Explain how to maximize the value of audience participation in a meeting.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 19, Program Design and Development
Author: Wanda Johnson, CMP



Ban on the Talking Head

Johnson writes “Adults learn best through involvement and experience. Meetings that consist of expository (lecture) learning sessions led by individual and panels have difficulty holding participants’ attention.”

While lecture or the common term “talking heads” may be an appropriate presentation style for part of a meeting, most events benefit from having different formats included.

There are three reasons to introduce a range of formats in a meeting:

- Variety
- Engagement
- Emotional appeal

Each of these three reasons is more fully explained in an individual section.

Variety Appeals to a Breadth of Audiences

People acquire information in a variety ways and learning takes place in many ways. A meeting managers’ programs will be more successful if they provide a variety of inputs and appeal to multiple learning styles. Content should include visual, auditory and kinesthetic components to address the multiple ways people acquire information.

<u>Learning Style</u>	<u>Preference for information acquisition</u>
Visual/Verbal	Prefers to read information
Visual/Nonverbal	Uses graphics or diagrams to represent information
Auditory/Verbal	Prefers to listen to information
Tactile/Kinesthetic	Prefers physical hands-on experiences

Variety also helps people from becoming bored. The human brain can acquire information at 500 words per minute. Yet a person can only speak at 140 words per minute. When a presenter provides visuals, opportunities for the audience to write and opportunities for discussion, it helps participants fight off boredom.

Variety also enhances memory. The following chart displays recall rates (Ramsborg, 2001):

Method	Recall
Reading	10% recall
Hearing only	20% recall
Seeing only	30% recall
Seeing and Hearing	50% recall
Saying	70% recall
Saying and Doing	90% recall

Engagement

Attendees generally learn best when they are involved with other attendees and with the speaker — that's the “doing” referenced in the chart on the previous page. This ancient Chinese proverb sums up how important it is to involve your audience: “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.” People will remember more if a meeting presents them with opportunities to apply and integrate the information during the session.

Engagement values adults' vast reservoir of experience. Audiences want to feel valued for what they already know. When a meeting involves the audience, they have opportunities to add to the educational experience. Engagement expands the resources in the room to include presenters and every participant.

Engagement makes people more receptive. Intrinsic involvement is the recognition that the audience is a valuable part of the presentation. When the audience feels valued, they are more likely to be receptive. Set the expectation that all presenters and events will include interactive activities that involve audiences.

Speakers can promote engagement by increasing the amount of interaction in their presentation. Ask them to consider the balance between how much they are talking and how much the audience is talking. Presenters can immediately increase interaction by asking questions. When a speaker asks the audience for their comments, feedback and what they want to learn, they are immediately increasing interaction. They can also ask participants to ponder a question before they launch into important information. Always encourage the audience to ask questions.

Another method for creating interaction is to offer creative handouts. PowerPoint slides printed three to a page in the handout format is not particularly creative. To create interaction, request that speakers use handouts that require the audience to do something with them (take notes, fill in the blanks, write their own experiences, etc.). Speakers should not use handouts that spoon feed their entire presentation to the audience.

Another way to increase the level of interaction is to use activities. Presenters can create quick interactive activities conducted in pairs, small groups or even the entire group.

Speakers should set aside time for reflection. This is the final tip related to interaction. Reflection time allows the audience to stop, breathe, and consider how they will use the information presented. Running from session to session without time for reflection defeats most people's ability to plan on how they will apply the information.

Ideally allowing the audience time for reflection will occur not only at the end of the session (one of its logical placements) but also throughout your program. Periodically asking people to sort through what is being discussed and to identify the most relevant points to capture for their future efforts can help increase the amount of content transfer.

Speakers can encourage reflection with the use of a few well placed questions like:

- What was the most important (significant, crucial) thing you learned in today's presentation?
- What is the main application for you of the material we discussed today?

Allowing sufficient time for participants to “make sense” of the session content through group discussion, interactive exercises, case studies, and other engaging session formats is a smart strategy for all presenters.

More information on creative handouts is included in PMM5 Postscript™ Number 33 (Speak Up) and PMM5 Postscript™ Number 28 (Making Visual Aids more Visual). Explore the topic of reflection in PMM5 Postscript™ Number 30.

Emotional appeal

Getting people involved is also likely to create an emotional appeal. Emotion is a powerful tool for making a persuasive presentation. Dr. Clotaire Rapaille, psychologist, cultural anthropologist and marketing expert, states, “Without emotion there is not enough neural transmission to garner a strong memory.”

Emotions play an essential role in perception, learning and ultimately rational decision making. Harness the power of emotions in presentations by recognizing that emotions: Debates, controversial panels and case studies are examples of formats that typically can create an emotional appeal.

Even expository presentations (keynotes or lectures) can include an emotional appeal. Encourage the use of one to three of these elements to create an emotionally rich presentation:

Metaphors	Visual Imagery/ Visualization	Icons	Stories
Themes	Personalization	Drama	Symbols

Emotional connections will benefit meetings and the attendees. Creating emotionally rich formats:

- **Triggers Decisions** — Emotional memories help people make decisions. Emotions influence people’s attitudes and their next action.
- **Filters Information** — People rely on emotional memories for filtering new information. Emotion gives audiences another hook into the information.
- **Creates the Real and the Imagined Experiences** – Audience can feel sadness about a past action, or fear a future possibility, even though these events are not really occurring. This capacity allows presenters to call upon a person's emotional experience to persuade, inspire or motivate.
- **Creates a Call to Action** — Within the brain is the source for feelings of conviction that can change an idea into a belief. Presentations should create a force that lives beyond the meeting itself.

The title of PMM5 Postscript™ Number 27 is Emotionally Charged Meetings and may be cross-referenced for more on this topic

The Wide World of Alternative Formats

Johnson also provides a list of formats that can enhance educational delivery including (Johnson, 2006, pp. 277-278):

- Break-out session
- Case Study
- Colloquium
- Concurrent session
- Controversy panel
- Demonstration
- General Session
- Lecture
- Keynote/keynote address
- Questions and answers
- Opening address
- Oral presentation
- Panel presentation
- Poster session
- Plenary session
- Roundtable
- Simulated encounter
- Symposium
- Workshop

In addition, alternative formats include:

- **Buzz Groups** — small groups consisting of three to six people who discuss a specific topic for a short time period (generally 5-10 minutes) before sharing with the larger group.
- **World Café format** — small groups of people move from table to table, doodling and drawing, sharing and connecting ideas, and creating themes (Brown, 2005).
- **Open Space Technology** — participants create and manage their own agenda of working sessions around a central theme (Owen, 1997).
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning** — draw upon members' expertise. Give members an opportunity to share and learn from each other. Roundtable formats work well to allow Peer-to-Peer learning.
- **Mini-Lectures** — where the format is 10-15 minutes of lecture and 45 minutes of question and answers. This idea is great for forcing presenters to succinctly state the most important elements of their presentation quickly and simply.

The use of variety, audience interaction, new formats and emotional appeal creates memorable and dynamic programs.

The Untapped Resource

An untapped resource at any meeting is the knowledge and insights of participants. In addition to peer-to-peer learning, a meeting can allow the audience to capture that knowledge and insight. Do so by:

- Allowing sufficient break time between sessions for informal conversation about sessions and workshops.

- Encourage networking during the conference (not just at networking sessions) through the use of conversation nooks placed throughout the meeting, white boards or flip charts posted wherever people will mingle, or networking tools that hook up people based upon interests.
- Allow attendees to suggest topics — or allow sessions to occur organically during the conference. (The essence of the idea behind Open Space Technology.)
- Use technology to allow audience members to communicate with speakers — before and after a presentation and even during a presentation. Elliott Masie relates one of his experiences when he allowed people to text him messages during a keynote. He based the content of the keynote on the questions (Andelman, 2007). Audience response systems, polling, voting and kiosk questionnaires allow meeting managers and speakers to collect information from the audience.
- Adapt ideas like poster sessions used in medical and technical meetings for any meeting. For example, create a Best Practices Showcase allowing everyone to learn from peers by using a poster session to showcase best practices, great ideas, or other examples that can benefit the entire group. This type of session can be motivating to the creators of the poster and create some great suggestions for everyone.

Summary

Giving up control of the meeting experience does not come easily to any meeting manager or organization. Scripting, timing and often rehearsals are a valued process.

However, the underlying thrust behind alternative meeting formats is to create a two-way dialogue instead of a monologue. The richness of the audience's ideas, interests and experience cannot be tapped into unless they are engaged and participating in sessions.

Presenters benefit as they are able to target their material, interact with the audience and create time for application and reflection and . Participants benefit as they feel a part of the meeting and have opportunities to tailor the subjects to their specific interests.

Meetings large and small benefit from alternative formats. For the risk-adverse organization, they can adapt format alternatives as a technique into a more traditional lecture. The interaction in that way becomes a part of the larger presentation.

Introducing alternative formats means that planning content no longer occurs in a vacuum, or the responsibility of a few on a committee or even a task that must be accomplished years in advance. Interactive formats allow meetings to flow, move and have an organic quality that enriches the experiences of all, promotes better retention and learning, and results in "conversation" that is timely and relevant.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. What are the barriers for speakers to interject interaction into their presentations? How can a meeting manager exert influence over presenters?
2. Panel formats often lack controversy. How can a meeting manager ensure that a panel is not flat and reflects a diversity of opinion?

3. How can meeting managers encourage meeting audiences to form networks without explicitly directing their behavior?
4. What is your favorite format and why?
5. Explore one of the alternative formats listed on page (Buzz groups, World Café, Open Space Technology) and design a meeting using that format.

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