

Emotional or Intellectual Appeal?

Good presentations are either intellectual (information focused) or emotional (experience-focused.) A good presentation can contain both approaches but one approach will predominate.

A well-constructed emotional presentation causes the listener to imagine herself taking precisely the action you would like her to take.

You must point the movie camera of language at a scene in her life. (“You plunk down the phone and clench your fist in triumph. ‘Yes, yes, yes,’ you whisper fiercely. You got the client. Out of 5 competing firms, they chose you. You get up from your desk and go out into the hall. You know exactly who to tell first.”)

When the decision to be made is not an emotional one, however, your presentation must instead appeal to the intellect.

One model for an intellectual presentation is to structure it the same way a trial lawyer makes an opening statement to the jury: Make your claims, then prove them in the body of your talk. A trial lawyer might typically say, “My client is innocent of all charges, and if I do my job well and present the evidence fairly, I feel confident that you will agree with me and vote to acquit.” That’s getting to the point.

Unfortunately, most people structure their presentations the way scientists report the results of research. They open with the purpose of the experiment, move on to the methodologies and the findings, and only at the end do they begin to hint at the recommendations

based on the findings. This is the worst possible way to structure a presentation.

Scientists want to scrutinize methodologies in order to determine the credibility of the findings.

Those of us in business are generally not so committed. We want to know what the expert recommends and why she recommends it. As these typical scientific presentations drone on, we poor listeners think, “Get to the point. Blurt it out. Tell us plainly what we should do and why.” When we don’t get the point, we stop listening.

A good intellectual presentation begins by delivering a punch line directly to a felt need of the audience. Then it quickly substantiates any claims made during the opening statement. Today’s listeners prefer you prove what you say.

When appealing to the intellect, take the lawyer’s approach, not the scientists’. Make your claims up front (claims that address the felt needs of your listeners.) Then, get busy proving them.

Please let us know if we can help.



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