Adapting After the Speech

Inquire: Now What?

Overview

After a presentation has wrapped up, what do you do? Do you move on to the next one? Put it out of mind and celebrate? This lesson will answer these questions. You will learn how to adapt your speech after your speech. First, we will cover how to survey your audience and how to use polls to gather feedback. Next, you will learn how to reevaluate your presentation based on what you think went well and what didn’t. Then, you will learn about the self-reflection process. Finally, you will learn how to follow up with the members of your audience so that they walk away feeling good about your presentation.

Big Question: What do you do once a presentation is done?

Watch: Adapting? Afterwards? Why?

After you finish a presentation and the audience is done applauding your excellent work, it can be tricky to figure out what comes next. Many people think that after they present, they are done. However, you will often have to make that presentation again, make a similar presentation, or present to the same audience in the future. So, it is important to take a moment and evaluate your performance. Adaptation after a speech is often overlooked by presenters, but it’s an important skill to learn. It might seem strange to call it adaptation since you have completed the presentation, but the things you learn from yourself and from your audience can help you make any future presentation better as you go. This lesson focuses on how to learn from audience feedback, primarily by using audience surveys. These surveys are extremely useful to get honest feedback from a large number of people, assuming you ask the right questions. It’s important to know what kind of poll to use to ask the right questions. This lesson will help you learn about a survey style called a Likert scale. You will also learn how to evaluate yourself, asking yourself the same questions you ask the audience. Once you have received all of this feedback, it’s important to self-reflect and find ways to use the information you have received. Lastly, this lesson will cover what to do in the moments immediately after a presentation, making yourself available to the audience so that you can clarify confusion, answer questions, and provide additional resources.

Have you ever given a presentation that you thought went extremely well? How did it feel? How did you find out if the audience agreed with you? These questions are great starting places to learn the importance of post-presentation adaptation.
Read: After a Speech

Overview

After a presentation, you might think you’re done, but that’s not always the case! If you have presentation content that you will present multiple times, or if you will present different content to the same audience multiple times, there are things you should consider after a presentation. Even if you’re planning a future presentation, these things are important to learn: how to survey an audience, reevaluate your presentation, self-reflect, and finally, offer follow-up information.

Survey Your Audience

**Polls** are a form of feedback that you can use by asking audience members specific questions. One of the most commonly used approaches is a Likert scale. **Likert scales** are polls that ask people to answer questions on a scale of one to five. One is the most unfavorable response and five is the most favorable response. For example, a speaker might give an audience member a poll that says, “On a scale of one to five, one being very untrue and five being very true, rate the following: ‘I did not find this presentation informative.’” The poll would include several questions designed to find out how the audience evaluates the presentation. Polling is a strong method for surveying an audience, in part because it is anonymous. Rather than asking each individual these questions, you can provide them to a whole audience and get multiple responses. Because the answers are anonymous, individuals may be more honest in their responses than they might be in a face-to-face setting. When designing a poll, be sure to ask targeted questions that will measure areas in which you want to improve. If you are confident in your introduction and conclusion, but not as confident with the other parts of the speech, ask questions about those other parts. The feedback you receive will then help you to improve those specific areas of the presentation.

Reevaluate Your Presentation

Once you have feedback from the audience, it’s important to assess your own performance. What worked well? What didn’t? What can you do differently? It’s important to ask yourself these questions and answer them honestly. It’s also important to consider why you think something worked well. Don’t simply identify your attention getter as good; think about why it was good and how you might make other attention getters good in the future. Be as specific as possible when answering these questions so that what you learn is as useful as possible. One of the best ways to assess your performance is to record yourself live during the presentation. When you watch it later, imagine that you’re watching someone else speak, and give an honest evaluation. Fill out your own survey, if you have one. Respond honestly to what you see, and come up with concrete, actionable steps to address issues you notice.

Self-Reflection

**Self-reflection** is the process of examining your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs to identify things you can improve. There are several ways you can improve self-reflection. First, be honest with yourself. Self-reflection is an exercise for you only, so an honest appraisal is essential if you truly want to better yourself. Second, ask for help, if you need it. Sometimes it’s hard to be honest with yourself about bad habits. Ask someone you trust to help you with the process. They can point out things that need work or hold you accountable when you identify what you want to work on. Finally, give yourself grace. You’re not perfect, but no one is. Inevitably, you will find areas for improvement, but so does everyone else. Understand that you are not, and cannot be, perfect. It’s good to know that continuous self-improvement is part of being successful.
Offer Follow-Up Information

After a speech, remember that not everything is about you! Sometimes members of your audience will want to talk to you because they are confused about parts of your presentation. When this happens, you should answer whatever questions they have, either in-person or via email. You can avoid potential confusion by giving your audience additional information by way of a handout or access to additional resources used to develop the presentation. The more helpful you can be to audience members, the better it reflects on you as a speaker. Be available after a speech so that you are approachable and can engage with them. Just because you have finished the presentation doesn’t mean you’re done. Be ready to continue the conversation afterward as people think through the information you presented to them.

Reflect Poll: Self-Improvement

What techniques have you used to improve your presentations in the past?

- Recordings
- Self-reflection
- Audience surveys

Expand: Using Surveys to Improve

Overview

Surveys and polls can be an effective way to get feedback and improve as a speaker. However, you will only be able to learn as much as your survey allows. That sounds obvious, but if you have good survey questions, you can really learn a lot to improve! This section will teach you how to write survey questions that will let you learn the most from your audience.

Writing Survey Questions

Before you can write good survey questions, you need to figure out what parts of your presentation need feedback the most. During your preparation, identify areas that you want to improve and work on. Then, it’s important to write those down. These are the basis for the questions you want to ask your audience. Once you have audience feedback, you can see if your pre-presentation work paid off and if you did well on the parts of the presentation you wanted to improve.

First, decide what kind of poll you will use. As discussed in the prior section, Likert scales are a great way to receive accurate feedback from your audience. So, we will write Likert scale style questions in this section.

When writing questions, make sure they address the specific areas on which you want feedback. You may want to have multiple questions for each area, like your hook, your recommendations, and how you relate to the audience. Pick one section, and begin writing questions. For example, once you’ve decided you want the hook to be brief, entertaining, funny, and interesting, you can write questions. Establish your scale with a sentence like this: “On a scale of one to five, one being very untrue and five being very true, rate the following.” In this example, we have the audience rate a statement as true or untrue. So, we should provide statements that elicit “true” or “untrue” responses. Statements like, “The hook was brief,” or “I thought the beginning of the speech was funny,” are appropriate. Statements like, “The hook needed improvement,” do not work as they are too open ended. If a person thought it was true, the answer does
not give you anything to work on. Keep your questions closed-ended, specific, and on topic. If you can do those three things, you will have effective questions that give you plenty of feedback to improve on for the future!

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
An article explaining the importance of self-reflection and providing some tips for the process
- Link to resource: https://hbr.org/2017/03/why-you-should-make-time-for-self-reflection-even-if-you-hate-doing-it

An article explaining steps for self-reflection after a presentation

An article explaining what you should do immediately following a presentation to follow up with your audience
- Link to resource: https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/182726

Lesson Glossary

**Polls**: a form of feedback that involves recording audience members’ opinions by asking them specific questions

**Likert scales**: polls that ask people to answer questions on a scale of one to five, with one being the most unfavorable response and five being the most favorable response

**Self-reflection**: the process of looking at your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs to identify things you can improve

Check Your Knowledge

1. After a presentation, you should make yourself available for questions.
   a. True
   b. False
2. Surveys are a great benefit because they are anonymous.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Recording your presentation is a great way to self-reflect on a presentation.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:
1. A  2. A  3. A
Citations

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