

Plan and Prepare to Maximise Audience Motivation

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Lynda Russell-Whitaker explores how to appeal to different learning styles when presenting

Depending on who your audience is (and whether you will know this prior to your presentation) you might want to think about how to be inclusive in the presentation that you're giving, for a number of reasons, but for the purpose of this article, in order to maximise their motivation. If their boss has told them to attend, the motivation at the beginning of your presentation may only be extrinsic.

One way to be inclusive with your audience is to consider how individuals learn or absorb information. A popular way of thinking about differences - and in turn being inclusive - among audience members is to use the VARK learning styles inventory. VARK was first developed in 1987 by Neil Fleming, and measures four perceptual preferences: Visual; Aural/auditory; Read/write; Kinaesthetic.

As explained on their website, 'VARK tells you something about yourself [and others] that you may or may not know. [...] It is a short, simple inventory that has been well-received because its dimensions are intuitively understood and its applications are practical. It help[s] people understand each other and assists them to learn more effectively in many situations.'¹

Two thirds of us fall into the category of 'multimodal' (also referred to as 'Type Two' by VARK). That means that, up to a point, we can adapt or change our learning styles according to either our preferences or the apparent preference of the person delivering the presentation. The chart below demonstrates the percentages of people who have a single perceptual preference, and those who have more. Of the 35% of people who are unimodal, 4% have visual preferences, 8% aural, 9% prefer reading and writing, and 14% are kinaesthetic.

The more your awareness is raised of people's preferences, the more you can cater to your audience members. Whether or not you as the presenter have, say, a strong visual preference, you still need to consider how each individual might prefer to receive,

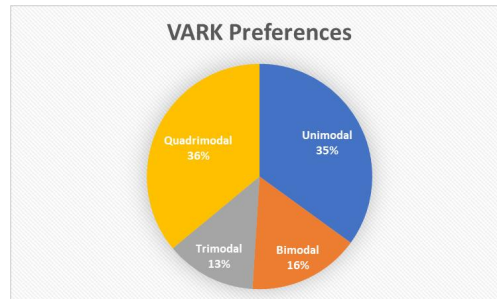


Chart created using data from VARK: www.vark-learn.com.

process and absorb the information you present to them. This provides you with an opportunity when giving a presentation to use a variety of means and media.

It is therefore helpful to prepare and plan your content for any speaking event with this in mind as, among other benefits, using the VARK principles has the potential to maximise the motivation of your audience. Following the VARK system, you might want to consider using a mix of resources, such as:

- **Visual:** video clips; charts, diagrams and illustrations
- **Aural/Auditory:** podcast extracts
- **Read/write:** written handouts
- **Kinaesthetic:** demonstrations/practicals; discussions between you and your audience (and perhaps between themselves).

Using these resources and activities could help to keep an audience more engaged in your topic. Some people are strongly kinaesthetic. This means that if you can't get them moving about, you need to show them videos and photos, or do demonstrations, rather than just showing illustrations and diagrams. Such content can be aimed at the more visually motivated among us.

For those with a strong read/write preference, written handouts are very helpful. You could also provide a recording of your talk, as any members who are dyslexic, or whose native tongue isn't English, might have an auditory preference or adapt, if they are multi-modal.

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts





Plan and Prepare to Maximise Audience Motivation contd.

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- our Q&A Methodology.

If you're a regular *SpeakUp!* reader you will know about research scientists and professors, Petty and Cacioppo, and their findings with regards to ability and motivation in their Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (see Des's article).²

It is a system they developed in 1980, which addresses an audience's response to any act of persuasion, which commonly included using a presentation. Also referred to as 'The Two Routes to Persuasion', Petty and Cacioppo made a distinction between the 'Central' and 'Peripheral' routes (see table below), asserting that in the absence of *both* a high level of motivation to learn *and* high ability or knowledge in the subject matter, the presenter must employ the peripheral route.

CENTRAL ROUTE	PERIPHERAL ROUTE
The APPEAL to LOGIC i.e. strength of argument	The APPEAL to EMOTIONS e.g. impactful speaking style and vocal attractiveness
Requires BOTH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to elaborate • Motivation to elaborate to succeed 	Is chosen if EITHER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to elaborate • Motivation to elaborate are absent
(The APPEAL to ETHOS A prerequisite for either route to work)	

Two Routes to Persuasion

Yes, facts and figures are important, as is a strong argument. But too often, we forget the other elements that are also crucial to persuading your audience. These elements comprise what they call the '*peripheral route*': how we come across, whether vocally or the way we look; our facial expressions; and our eye contact with members of the audience. All of these are factors that play a key part in how much an audience is engaged with, and persuaded by, our subject, as well as how much information they will recall and, hopefully, accurately retell.

By considering an individual's learning preferences you can further enhance both their ability and their motivation to process the information you are presenting to them. Then consider the variety of formats available to you.

It's also worth paying attention to your choice of language style. Those of us who say 'I see what you mean' are likely to have a strong visual preference, whilst someone who says 'I hear what you're saying' might be more auditory.

Here are a couple of ideas on how you might prepare to make your presentations more inclusive:

Get to know your own learning preferences:

Record yourself and listen for clues about your VARK preference. This is useful in many ways, not least to make sure that you don't favour only your own preference when preparing and delivering a pitch or presentation of any kind (to colleagues or externally).

Research your audience as much as you are able:

What are their professions? What outside interests do they have? A keen sportsperson *may* have some strong kinaesthetic tendencies and preferences, while musicians *may* be more auditory.

Your presentation can surely be improved by considering these suggestions, and it should make the experience more enjoyable and effective for all, in terms of engagement, memory and presentation.

1. VARK: A Guide to Learning Preferences. www.varlearn.com.
2. Petty, R. E. and J. T. Cacioppo (1986), *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag.



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