



# The Importance of Checklists

by

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Go the extra mile to make sure your speech or presentation is a grand slam. I make checklists for every presentation, seminar, or workshop I give. Since any one of a host of problems can sabotage your presentation, it is important that you do not let the little things fall by the wayside. .

In my career as a public speaker, I have spoken at many conventions and conferences and witnessed presenters panic because they forgot their visual aids, can't find their handouts, or didn't get the name of the individual coordinating the meeting or the new location of the hotel or meeting center when it was changed at the last minute.

These are mistakes that can frazzle your nerves. To prevent this from happening to you, I will be providing some checklist examples you can use so this does not happen to you.

## Pre Speech Checklist

Use this checklist when you are planning to give a speech to an association or organization.

**Actual date and time of your speech** Make sure the date and time of your speech is the same as when you sent the information to the meeting planner along with your precustom survey. Over the years I have experienced several occasions when the date and time have changed, especially when I wasn't the only speaker on the program. However, even if you are the only speaker on the program, contact your meeting planner to make sure the date and time are accurate.

## Short Story (Real Story)

Let me share a story of when a presenter didn't confirm the date and time. My colleague was scheduled to speak to a large group at an association meeting in June. He did not call or contact the organizer after the date was scheduled. The day before the scheduled presentation, he flew to the city where he was speaking. When he arrived at the hotel he asked if anyone else from the association had registered yet. When the hotel checked the reservation list, they told him they had no record of that association being scheduled to be at that hotel.

Naturally he was confused, and after several phone calls to members of the association he quickly learned that he had made a huge mistake. Yes, he was at the correct hotel on the correct date, but he had arrived a year early! Keep in mind, many associations schedule their meetings two or three years in advance, and it is not unusual for them to book speakers for the events at the same time. When he was contracted in March, my colleague had written down the date of the speech for the upcoming June. Since he thought the presentation was only a few months away and he was never contacted again by the association, he assumed that everything was all set. Boy, did he get a very expensive surprise!

This story illustrates the necessity of confirming all dates, times, and locations. Once again, never assume anything when you are planning a speech or presentation.

1. **Prepare Enough Copies of Your Handouts** - Confirm the number of people attending your session. Either bring extra copies with you or make arrangements with the hotel or convention center to have copies ready when you arrive. If you chose the latter route, send copies of your materials to the appropriate person at least a week prior to the event. Include a cover letter asking the hotel to hold the materials for you for the particular date.

Call to follow up that the package arrived, and get the name of the contact person. Always put yourself in the audience's mind. I have attended seminar where there were not enough handouts. I felt cheated, and it did not leave a good first impression with me.

When I am the speaker, I call the day before to confirm the number of attendees and add a few extra copies just in case additional people decided to show up. Walk-ins can account for 30% or more of your attendance. I always take that factor into account and bring 30-50 percent more copies. Also, there will be times when your session runs concurrently with other sessions and participants may want handouts even though they cannot attend your presentation. To accommodate them, leave extra copies at the back of the room.

## Making a Packing List

2. **Make a list of everything you need to bring with you for your presentation!** I advise doing this least at least three days before the speaking engagement. Check each item off the list as you pack it. In doing this, you know everything is packed and ready to go and you won't panic on the day of the presentation.

Bring a copy of the checklist with you. When you unpack you can check that everything made it into the box. If you are driving yourself to the presentation, load the materials into your car the day before. If you are flying to the location, have the materials shipped to the location at least one week ahead of time, so in event the boxes are misplaced or lost, there is time to track the shipment. Always send a tracking slip with the shipment and keep a copy for your records.

Very important! If you are sending materials to a hotel, call the hotel and ask where shipments are stored and with whom you should speak to confirm the arrival. Call one more time - on the day or evening before your presentation, call your contact person, meeting planner, or hotel staff member to confirm that there have been no changes, such as room location or starting time of your presentation. It is not unusual for times and locations to change at the last minute. For example, I was hired as a speaker for an association meeting where the number of people who registered was higher than originally expected and the location had changed to accommodate a larger group.

When you arrive at the hotel, double-check one more time. Also, the number of attendees had increased beyond the 30-50 percent you anticipate, have additional copies made of your materials. (NOTE: Be sure to bring a copy of the master with you for this purpose). If the hotel can't make the copies, ask if there is a local copy center nearby so you can arrange to have more copies made in plenty of time.

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