

## 9.4 PRESENTATION

Writing a good report, as we have emphasised in the previous section, is vital. In real life, time is often short, many different interests are competing for attention and there may be a reluctance to read reports (especially if they are lengthy). An alternative way to report your modelling conclusions to management and staff is to give a verbal presentation.

The precise arrangement will vary according to circumstances but, generally speaking, a time and place will be devoted to a verbal presentation of your findings in front of an audience (usually a small group). If you try to do this without adequate preparation, it will almost certainly be a disaster.

### Preparation

You will normally have worked as a group of people on your modelling project and it is very likely that the presentation will involve all members of the group. Quite clearly this means it will be necessary

- (a) to plan,
- (b) to prepare and
- (c) to rehearse your presentation.

For the *plan*, you need to consider the following questions. How much time will you have for the presentation? How much material should you try to present in that time (and *not* how much you can get through but how much the audience can take in)? In what order should you present the material? How should you share out the time between the members of your group? What are the most important points that you wish to make in your presentation? What will be the most effective way of making these points? What technical aids will be available to you for the presentation?

For the *preparation*, you need to keep in mind the order in which you will go through the material and where the 'natural breaks' will occur when one speaker hands over to the next member of your group. The most popular mechanical aid is the overhead projector (OHP). The material that you wish to present should be prepared on transparent sheets beforehand. *Do not* write or do mathematical calculations during the presentation itself. Try to arrange your material so that it comes naturally in sections of one transparent sheet at a time. *Do not* put too much information on one sheet and remember that your material should be legible and clearly visible from the back of the demonstration room. Data and drawings should be made *large* and clear. A superb drawing, if it is too small, is a waste of time. Use different coloured inks if you have them. As a rough guide, seven distinct pieces of information on one sheet should be the upper limit. Plan what you are going to say in advance and coordinate your speech with your OHP slides. Remember that your audience will be looking at the screen at the same time as listening to

what you are saying. For the *rehearsal*, when you have got all the material ready, try to get the help of an impartial observer willing to sit and listen. *Time* your presentation carefully.

### Giving the presentation

Have your material ready with all your OHP slides numbered and in correct sequence. Be punctual and arrive neatly dressed (impressions matter). Ideally the OHP equipment, etc., should already be set up with chairs arranged for both your audience and the members of your group (arranged at the front, facing the audience). If necessary, check up on the arrangements beforehand and make sure there will be no last-minute hitches such as being unable to get the OHP to work! A very useful idea is to supplement the OHP with a board on which is pinned a large piece of paper 'sign-posting' your presentation. This should show the headings for the various sections and a useful device is to have a movable 'arrow' which can be moved down the sheet as the presentation progresses. The audience will then be fully in the picture at all times, knowing where they are and what is to come next.

The *introduction* is a very important part of your presentation. This is where you make your opening impact and you must capture your audience's attention and interest. If you get this wrong, the rest of the presentation may flop. The responsibility of doing the introduction should be given to the most able member of your group. He or she will have the responsibility of setting the style for the whole presentation. One of the opening remarks should be to introduce all the members of the group by name, possibly indicating their particular roles in the presentation.

The *hand-over* from one speaker to the next is very difficult to do well and should be practised in the rehearsals. It should be smooth and efficient; otherwise the continuity of the presentation may be destroyed and the audience's concentration may wander. Some phrase such as 'I now hand you over to my colleague X who will...' should be used.

While *speaking*, do *not* read from notes if at all possible. This is guaranteed to put off the audience. Try to memorise what you are going to say. If you need notes, make them very brief and put them on cards rather than on a sheet of paper. If you are at all nervous, your hand may start to shake and this will be amplified if you are holding a large piece of paper! Look at the audience, make eye contact and look for responses. A nod or a smile shows that you are getting through. If they appear puzzled, slow down or repeat what you have just said or offer to answer any questions. Do not just carry on like a steamroller.

Try to avoid mannerisms; these are due to nervousness and can be controlled. Take care not to obscure the audience's view of the OHP screen. Do not turn round to look at it yourself; if you need to, read it off the machine itself. Speak clearly without rushing and never give the impression that you cannot wait to finish and sit down again.

Be prepared to answer questions from the audience at any moment. Answer politely even if you think it is a stupid question. If you do not know the answer, do not panic and do not try to avoid the question or fudge the issue! Say clearly that you do not know the answer and offer to look into it.

The *closing statement* is also very important and should be thought out carefully at the planning stage. Try to finish on a positive constructive note. At all costs, avoid finishing by trailing off into an embarrassing silence. It is a good idea for the first speaker to come on again for the finish, this rounds the presentation off nicely.