

Presentation skills – Guidelines 1 – GENERAL TIPS

Talks or what are often called, more formally, oral presentations are an integral part of academic and professional life. Some people become anxious about having to give a talk, but there is nothing mysterious about being an effective speaker; talks involve the application of techniques that can be planned and rehearsed. This resource helps you to understand what tutors are looking for and how you might plan and deliver a talk at any stage in your academic and professional life.

The following advice is made up of four parts:

<p>1. Why give a talk?</p> <p>Speaking about what you know is a highly effective learning activity</p> <p>Talks are an integral part of academic life</p> <p>Presentation skills are highly valued by professions, businesses and organisations</p>	<p>2. Planning your talk</p> <p>Considering how your talk will be assessed</p> <p>Researching your topic, selecting ideas and supporting evidence, and shaping the talk into a coherent argument</p> <p>Thinking ahead about room layout and use of visual aids, and preparing accordingly</p> <p>Considering ways of formatting 'prompts' to help you through the talk</p> <p>Using visual aids</p> <p>Writing 'prompt notes'</p>	<p>3. Delivering your talk</p> <p>Using a checklist of tips for effective delivery</p> <p>Establishing clear beginnings and endings</p> <p>Preparing to invite and respond to questions</p>	<p>4. Reflecting on your experience</p> <p>Use a checklist to evaluate your own performance after you have given your talk</p> <p>Make notes about what you might do differently, if anything, next time</p>
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Presentation tips

Eye Contact: Using eye contact allows good speakers to engage with the audience. Make eye contact meaningful and try to vary your eye contact so you are not looking in an obvious pattern or staring at just one person.

Speaking: Can everyone in the room hear you? Clear, concise speech is a hallmark of an effective confident speaker. Choose words that are easy for you to say and practise your speech in a number of different-sized rooms. When the audience struggles to hear you they are more likely to become disinterested in what you are saying.

Pausing: Deliberate silence is an effective tool to engage listeners. It can be used to stress a point or to add impact. Avoid rushing your presentation and try not to fill silences with the word 'um'.

Gesturing: Gesturing allows you to enforce an intended message; however, if gesturing doesn't come naturally to you, do not do it.

Cue cards: Cue cards should be used as a reminder of the key points in your presentation. **Reading verbatim from cue cards does not help a speaker to engage with the audience. If you do plan on using cue cards, put only your key points on them.**

PowerPoint & transparencies: PowerPoint presentations or transparencies are useful as an added tool to convey your main points to the audience, and they can be an excellent prompt that replaces the need for cue cards. **However, as with cue cards, you should not read directly from your presentation.** Position yourself so you are mainly talking to the audience and not to the presentation. Other handy tips include:

- be highly selective in what you choose to show
- use visuals that complement your commentary
- don't pile lots of text onto your slides - only put up key points (the fewer words per slide the better)
- do not add too many visual or sound effects – this can be distracting for the audience
- make the text big enough for everyone in the room to see and give text good colour contrast from the background. This makes it easy for the audience to quickly take in the points you are trying to make
- dark backgrounds work better than light ones for PowerPoint slides. Plain backgrounds work best for transparencies.

Be familiar with the content of your presentation: Make sure you know, and understand, what you want to convey to the audience. **Practise your presentation, but do not try and learn it off by heart.**

Presenting visuals (charts or diagrams)

Make sure that you:

1. Describe to the judges what a slide is showing. For example, “What you see here is a chart showing inflation over the last two years”.
2. Interpret the visual for the audience. For example you might say, “As this chart clearly illustrates, inflation is projected to be in the one to three percent range”.

And remember ...

On the day try and relax and enjoy your presentation – the better you feel about your presentation the better you will come across to the audience!

Consider these aspects:

Stress Management

Props And Costumes

Understandability

Enthusiasm, Passion And Involvement

Persuasiveness

Contingency And Emergency Plans