

5.01 Presentation skills

The material of your presentation should be concise and to the point. Try and think about why the presentation is important for the audience - how will it help them? what will it teach them?

In addition to the obvious things like content and visual aids, the following are just as important as the audience will be subconsciously taking them in:

- **Your voice** - *how* you say it is as important as *what* you say
- **Body language** - a subject in its own right and something about which much has been written and said. In essence, your body movements express what your attitudes and thoughts really are.
- **Appearance** - first impressions influence the audience's attitudes to you. Dress appropriately for the occasion.

As with most personal skills **oral communication does not improve simply by listening to others or reading guides**. So as always, practice is essential, both to improve your skills generally and also to make the best of each individual presentation you make.

Preparation

Prepare the structure of the talk carefully and logically, just as you would for a written report. What are:

- the objectives of the talk?
- the main points you want to make?

Make a list of these two things as your starting point .

Write out the presentation in rough, just like a first draft of a written report. Review the draft. You will find things that are irrelevant or superfluous - delete them. Check the story is consistent and flows smoothly. **Remember** - if you had to look something up or check something because you didn't understand it or it was new ... think about your audience and make sure you have explained it to them.

Never read from a script. Every time you look at notes you lose eye contact with your audience. This does not look good.

It is also unwise to have the talk written out in detail as a prompt sheet - the chances are you will not locate the thing you want to say amongst all the other text. You should know most of what you want to say - if you don't then you should not be giving the talk! You can prepare **cue cards** which have key words and phrases (and possibly sketches) on them. You could attach them

together (for example, by using a hole-punch and string) in case you drop them. Another method is to look at the screen quickly before you continue talking.

But .. it is best to memorise your content so you can engage more effectively with the audience.

Rehearse your presentation - to yourself at first and then in front of some colleagues. The initial rehearsal should consider how the words and slides go together. You can try filming yourself using your phone to see how the presentation looks and sounds.

Making the presentation

Greet the audience (for example, 'Good morning, ladies and gentlemen'), and tell them who you are. Good presentations then follow this formula:

- tell the audience what you are going to tell them,
- then tell them,
- at the end tell them what you have told them.

Keep to the time allowed. If you can, keep it short. It's better to under-run than over-run.

Stick to the plan for the presentation, don't be tempted to digress - you will eat up time and could end up in a dead-end with no escape!

Unless explicitly told not to, leave time for discussion - 5 minutes is sufficient to allow clarification of points.

At the end of your presentation ask if there are any questions - avoid being terse when you do this as the audience may find it intimidating (ie it may come across *as any questions? - if there are, it shows you were not paying attention*). If questions are slow in coming, you can start things off by asking a question of the audience - so have one prepared.

Delivery

Speak clearly. Don't shout or whisper - judge the acoustics of the room.

Don't rush, or talk deliberately slowly. Be natural - although not conversational (however, this can depend on the audience - you have to decide how formal you need to be)

Deliberately pause at key points - this has the effect of emphasising the importance of a particular point you are making.

Avoid jokes - can be disastrous unless you are a natural expert and/or know your audience well

To make the presentation interesting, change your delivery, but not too obviously, eg:

- speed
- pitch of voice

Use your hands to emphasise points but don't indulge in too much hand waving. People can, over time, develop irritating habits. Ask colleagues occasionally what they think of your style.

Look at the audience as much as possible, but don't fix on an individual - it can be intimidating. Pitch your presentation towards the back of the audience, especially in larger rooms and keep looking around the room at different people.

Don't face the display screen behind you and talk to it.

Other annoying habits include:

- Standing in a position where you obscure the screen. In fact, positively check for anyone in the audience who may be disadvantaged and try to accommodate them.
- Moving about too much. Pacing up and down can unnerve the audience, although some animation is desirable.

Keep an eye on the **audience's** body language. Know when to stop and also when to cut out a piece of the presentation.

Visual Aids

- Powerpoint slides
- Alternative presentation formats - eg Prezi
- Videos/clips eg Youtube
- Webpages
- Real objects - either handled from the speaker's bench or passed around
- Smartboard, or flip chart - possibly used as a 'scratch-pad' to expand on a point

Keep it simple though - a complex set of hardware can result in confusion for speaker and audience. Make sure you know in advance how to operate equipment and also when you want particular displays to appear. Sometimes a technician will operate the equipment. Arrange beforehand what is to happen and when and what signals you will use. Edit your slides as carefully as your talk - if a slide is superfluous then leave it out. If you need to use a slide twice, duplicate it,

Slides should contain the minimum information necessary. To do otherwise risks making the slide unreadable or will divert your audience's attention so that they spend time reading the slide rather than listening to you.

Try to limit words per slide. Never have too much information on one slide.

Avoid using a diagram prepared for a technical report in your talk (unless your guidelines specify that you must use one). It will be too detailed and difficult to read.

Use colour on your slides but avoid orange and yellow which do not show up very well when projected. For text only, white or yellow on blue is pleasant to look at and easy to read.

Room lighting should be considered. Too much light near the screen will make it difficult to see the detail. On the other hand, a completely darkened room can send the audience to sleep. Try to avoid having to keep switching lights on and off, but if you do have to do this, know where the light switches are and how to use them.

Finally, enjoy yourself and be enthusiastic about your topic.

(Adapted from : <http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/Dept/Tips/present/comms.htm>)