

Presenting your conference presentation

When presenting your conference presentation you need to know your answers to the following questions:

- Is the purpose clearly stated: are you reporting, comparing, convincing, arguing, questioning...?
- Is the thesis/topic clearly stated: “In this paper, I want to report the findings of recent research which shows that under certain conditions, dolphins can be taught how to ride bicycles”?
- Are your main arguments/ideas supported with evidence?
- Are all the materials relevant to the topic?
- Have you demonstrated your knowledge of the subject?
- Is the level of technicality suited to the audience?
- How do you reply to audience’s questions: long questions, ‘mini papers’ disguised as questions...?

Organise your presentation

Most presentations are organised according to a predictable pattern. They have three main stages: introduction, body and conclusion (i.e. tell them what you are going to say; then say it; then tell them what you have said).

When a presentation does not have these clear sections, it can be very difficult for listeners to follow what is being said:

- **Introduction**

The introduction prepares listeners for body (i.e. tell them what you’re going to say). This is the most crucial part of any presentation. You need to capture the audience’s interest in your topic and establish rapport with them. Your introduction should let the audience know what they are going to hear in the presentation. They need to know what to expect in order to get interested

and to be able to follow you. Giving them an outline of your presentation in your introduction enables them to do this.

You need to:

- capture the audience's attention with a question, quotation, anecdote, or interesting statistic, etc.
- tell them what your presentation will be about:
 - main theme or argument
 - main points you will cover and the order in which you will cover them.

It is a good idea to give your audience an outline (handout or slide) of your talk to help them follow it.

• **Body**

In the body, you 'say it'. The body of your presentation must be clearly organised with the main points highlighted. One effective technique is to number your ideas. Any idea which is new to your audience needs to be presented simply with supportive evidence or examples which will make it more easily understood. Each important idea should be presented several times in different ways within the body of your presentation. Your audience needs several opportunities to absorb the full meaning and the significance of the most important ideas. It is also important to state the links between your ideas clearly.

The body is where you develop your main ideas/argument, using supporting ideas/evidence. Use techniques that make it easy for the listener to follow your talk:

- number your ideas: "There are three main factors..."
- arrange your ideas in logical order: chronological; cause→effect; problem→ solution; comparison
- use transitional devices to help the audience follow the direction of your talk: "secondly...; another important point is...; on the other hand...; I would now like to move on and look at another aspect of the research..."
- support and clarify your ideas:
 - state the main idea
 - provide support for this idea
 - refer to experts, provide examples to illustrate the idea
 - provide statistics, facts, tell anecdotes (if time permits)
 - provide case studies, etc.



- repeat important ideas using different words so the audience has several opportunities to absorb them
- don't make the information too dense – remember the audience is listening, not reading!

• Conclusion

The conclusion sums up main points: 'tell them what you've said'. The conclusion should reinforce the central ideas of the presentation and signal a forceful ending. A weak, inconclusive or apologetic closing detracts from a good presentation. You should show in your conclusion that you have covered all the points that you said you would in your introduction. You should also show that you are confident, and that you have communicated effectively.

It is important to have a strong conclusion so the audience is left with a good impression.

- Summarise the main ideas of your presentation.
- Don't introduce any new ideas.
- Work towards a strong ending – don't finish abruptly or say 'That's all'. Perhaps leave the audience with something to think about.

• Presentation

Preparation

It is very important to analyse the needs and expectations of your audience. Try to find out as much as you can about who will be there, what their background is, why they will be coming, and how much they will already know about the topic. The more you know about your audience, the more likely you will be able to give an effective presentation.

Also, practise using fixed and clip-on microphones, practise with other technical equipment (overhead projectors, data projectors, computers...). Go to the room where you will make your presentation and get a feel of its size, acoustics, seating, etc. If you can (and are using any during your presentation), familiarise yourself with the equipment in the room.

Clear pronunciation

Your voice must be clear and distinct. If you know you have difficulty with pronunciation, speak a little more slowly than usual. Use intonation, stress, changes in pace (slow down at important



points, speed up at details, anecdotes) and pause to keep the listeners' attention, and focus attention on important points.

Body language

It has been estimated that 75% of meaning transferred is non-verbal. Thus your appearance, posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact are all vital to a successful presentation. Try to maintain eye contact with your audience. Watch them to see how they are responding to you. Try to appear serious, friendly, sincere and confident.

Visual aids

A presentation can be enhanced by the effective use of overhead transparencies (slides), charts, pictures, posters or PowerPoint presentations (with limited graphic/sound gimmicks). They provide variety and can help reinforce points made. However, you are still the main communicator of your message. Be familiar with your visual aids, refer to them specifically and only display them when you are referring to them, otherwise they will only be a distraction.

- Physical charts, graphs, pictures, etc.: ensure that the size is appropriate for a large room. If necessary, back up with handouts.
- Video: cue the tape (rehearse on equipment at the conference); ensure segment shown is not too long (in relation to the overall length of your presentation).
- PowerPoint (or other data projector presentations or overhead transparencies) design basics:
 - Limit the amount of material on each visual: your listeners should be able to read and understand a visual in five seconds or less
 - Be sure your visuals are large enough to be seen by everyone: the lettering should usually be 0.5 cm to 1 cm in height (18-22 pt. font).
 - Use a simple, easy-to-read lettering style.
 - Use diagrams, graphs and charts instead of words where possible.
 - Avoid unnecessary audio-visual gimmicks.
 - Eliminate unnecessary detail from diagrams, graphs and charts.

Timing within prescribed limits

You need to practise (with a tape/video recorder, in front of friends, your family...) to ensure you stay within the allocated time.



- **Expression and style**

Try to speak to your audience using notes rather than memorising or reading your presentation. In order to do this, you will have to practise your presentations as many times as you can. If possible, perform in front of an audience. If no one is available or willing to listen to you, practise in front of a mirror or record yourself on a tape recorder. Practising beforehand will make you familiar with your material, and it will also give you an idea of how long your presentation will take.

Use a conversation style to make your audience feel personally involved. Each time you use the word 'you', the audience feels compelled to pay attention.

Thorough planning and preparation will ensure a good presentation. Some people will always find it more difficult than others to speak confidently in public. However, with practice and perseverance, most people can deliver an effective presentation.

Adapted from the following source:

Barthel, A. 2010, 'Presenting a conference paper', ELSSA Centre, University of Technology Sydney.

