



A short guide to presentation skills



Academic
Skills Centre

A short guide to presentation skills

During your time at university, you will probably be asked to give an oral presentation to your peers, whether as part of an assessment for a module, as a group presentation in a seminar, or during an interview. Presentations require as much thought, planning and research as written essays, even though their purpose, style and audience are often different. For many students, delivering a presentation can be a nerve-wracking experience, but it does not have to be! Here are some tips to help you develop your presentations and enjoy doing them.



Planning a presentation

Five key questions to ask yourself:

1

What are your presentation's objectives?



2

Who is your audience?

3

What content are you going to include?



4

How much time do you have?

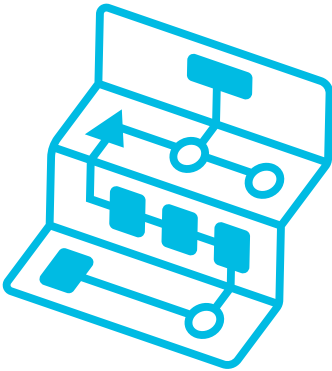
5

What visual aids will you use?

In each case, your answer should reflect the needs of your audience, plus any assessment criteria.

Writing a presentation

Script vs notes: always write notes eg, on index cards. Never rely on writing out the whole presentation and simply reading it.



Plan out the presentation to get a smooth flow of ideas.

Think extra-hard about an engaging introduction and memorable conclusion.

Using technology

- **Learn how to use PowerPoint® or a similar presentation tool**, but make sure your slides are suitable and helpful. For example, make sure your font size is large enough to be readable.
- **Use pictures and diagrams effectively!** Keep your images simple. Avoid unnecessary clutter or distracting transitions.
- **Be aware of copyright for images.** The ASC Short Guide to using visuals in your writing (2015) can help you.
- **Make sure you have a back-up plan in case technology fails.**



Delivering presentations

■ **Practise, practise, and practise!**

It's that simple. Why not ask a friend to be your audience so you can get some feedback?

- **Be enthusiastic.** If you appear passionate and interested in your topic, your audience will be too.
- **Body language and posture.** Stand with a relaxed but confident posture to deliver your presentation. Smile and make eye contact with your audience, and try not to pace or fidget.
- **Your voice is your best tool!** Practice will help you learn to speak clearly and project.
- **Watch your pace.** Many students lose marks for nervously racing through their presentation. This hinders understanding. Pause now and again to drink some water and slow yourself down.



Question and answer session

- **Be prepared.** Think through in advance what you might be asked.
- **How do you respond?** Practise some responses. On the day, make sure you listen carefully and give yourself a moment to consider your answer.
- **Do not make up the answer if you're unsure!** Be honest, and try a phrase such as 'that's an interesting question that had not occurred to me.'

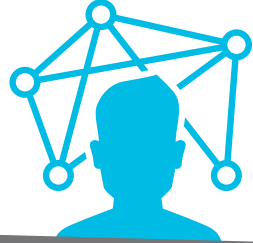
Overcoming nerves

- **Presentation nerves can be positive!** To do the best possible presentation, you need some energy, some 'edge'. Totally nerveless performances can be flat.
- **Preparation is key!** If you have prepared an interesting presentation with a clear structure and lots of examples, your anxiety will decrease.
- **Think positively.** Your lecturer, seminar tutor and your peers all want you to do well. Afterwards, you will feel great!
- **Relaxation techniques.** Everybody has their own way of controlling and channelling nerves. See the readings on the back page for examples of relaxation techniques.

Five Top tips

1

Let your interest and enthusiasm shine through.



2

A **STRONG** introduction and conclusion will focus your audience.

3

Practise your presentation and watch your timing.



4

Use PowerPoint® and other visual or technological resources, but only if they add something.

5

Aim to enjoy the experience!



Further references on presentation skills

Further reading and references on presentation skills

Chivers, B. and Shoobred, M. (2007) *A student's guide to presentations*. London: Sage.

University of Birmingham. Academic Skills Centre. (2016) *Short guide to images in your writing*. Available at: <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/skills/asc/documents/public/pgtusingvisuals.pdf> (Accessed: 10 January 2016).

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