

PREPARING FOR PRESENTATIONS

In our digital age presentations have become very common in the workplace, and the technology available is varied and exciting. It is therefore important to practise your presentation skills during your university career. Although it is important to learn how to use the different technologies available, for example how to set up and use PowerPoint slides on a computer, the most important skill is to verbally communicate your research or argument to a large number of people.

To become an effective speaker, you need to do the following:

- Plan the content of your presentation.
- Use communication techniques to deliver your presentation effectively.
- Use non-verbal cues, body language and signals appropriately.
- Use your voice effectively.

PLAN THE CONTENT OF YOUR PRESENTATION

Presentations are similar to essays in that a presentation also consists of an introduction, a body and a conclusion. You should pay particular attention to the following when planning each section of your presentation:

Introduction: Give an attention-grabbing introduction. The introduction should hook your audience and make them keen to listen to the rest of the presentation.

Body: This must be well-structured, informative and logical. Your argument must be made clear in a point-by-point fashion.

Conclusion: Summarise your argument or findings. Leave the audience something to think about or present them with a challenge.

Make sure that you plan your presentation to fit comfortably into the allocated time. Establish how fast you need to speak in order to convey everything within the allocated time. Practise the pace at which you need to present. However, do not rush through your material to finish within the allocated time – rather plan properly and leave out or shorten some parts of your presentation. Decide what is most important and relevant for the audience to know before cutting your presentation.



TIP -

When planning your presentation think about audio-visual material that you can use to illustrate your points and keep your audience's attention.

You should take the following points into account when planning your presentation, as they determine the style in which you present (casual, formal or entertaining):

- Audience
- Purpose
- Context (place and/or occasion)

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES TO DELIVER A PRESENTATION

There are a number of techniques which you can use for your presentation, depending on your style, audience, purpose and context. These techniques can help you feel more prepared and in control when you finally present.



TIP -

The most important technique to ensure delivering a successful presentation is to practise it. Repeat it until you are familiar with the content, and feel comfortable and confident.

Practising your presentation will help you become a better speaker because it:

- Fine-tunes your presentation
- Helps you identify what works best for your presentation
- Helps develop your self-confidence
- Enables you to establish timing
- Helps you distinguish between relevant and irrelevant points
- Helps you to be prepared for possible questions

Practising your speech in front of a friend will help you with the last two points.

USING VISUAL AIDS



When using technology such as PowerPoint, it is important to use it as a visual aid only. Your presentation should not revolve around the slides. This means that the visual aid should not take the place of what you want to say, but should only be used to emphasise certain points. Below are a number of tips on how to use visual aids such as PowerPoint slides appropriately.

- It is a good idea to start with a slide that contains the main points of your presentation. This gives the audience a framework and helps them to understand the flow and logic of your presentation.
- Never read from your slides.
- Have as little text on the slides as possible.
- Try to limit the number of slides to 10. You need to spend more time speaking than flipping through slides.
- PowerPoint slides should display images rather than text, for example diagrams and graphs. Use it to give examples of your points of discussion.
- Always give your audience enough time to look at, read and interpret each slide. This is especially important when you use graphs and diagrams.

EYE CONTACT

One of the most important non-verbal cues is the eye contact between the speaker and audience. Look at your audience when you are giving your speech. This shows that you are confident about your material and encourages their undivided attention. It is important to do this throughout your entire presentation, including the question time at the end. Do not fix your eyes on one person only, but let your gaze move and rest on different members of your audience. If you need to use notes, keep them to a minimum and take a quick glance at them when you change the slides or when you finish a section of your presentation.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND GESTURES

When presenting to an audience, try to smile at times. This creates a friendly atmosphere which will make your audience more likely to listen and give you their attention. It is important not to remain rigid in one position – use some form of movement. This can be as simple as using your hands to show enthusiasm and emphasis, or moving your head slightly to indicate a question. Use movements that come naturally to you.

POSTURE AND BODY ORIENTATION

One way of showing confidence in yourself as well as in your presentation is to stand up straight in an assured and comfortable manner. Look at your audience and avoid staring at the floor. Having good posture helps create respect from the audience. Avoid turning your back to your audience as this makes it difficult for them to hear what you say. If you have to write on a board or flip chart, finish writing first, and then turn back to the audience to explain.

HUMOUR

Using humour as a presentation technique is a great way of connecting to your audience. It can help to create a friendly relaxed environment and an engaged audience. However, do not overdo it. Also avoid using verbal humour if this does not come naturally to you – you can always add humour with an appropriate slide.

● DEVICES TO USE WHEN SPEAKING

The following devices can be used to communicate your ideas more effectively:

- Pauses
- Rhetorical questions
- Emphasis and volume
- Analogies
- Repetition
- Tempo
- Inclusive/exclusive pronouns

PAUSES

A pause is a useful way of emphasising a certain point. It also helps your audience by giving them time to process the information. Pauses can also help create anticipation and suspense. The audience will pay more attention as they will be curious to hear what you are going to say next.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

A rhetorical question is when you ask a question but you don't expect an answer – the answer is obvious to the speaker and the audience. This is a way of encouraging your audience to agree with you.

EMPHASIS AND VOLUME

There are different ways in which you can emphasise a point, for example:

- Saying a certain word or phrase in a slightly exaggerated tone
- Pausing to emphasise a point
- Gesturing
- Using volume to emphasise an important point or word

Always avoid speaking in a monotone (i.e. with no change in pitch or intonation).

ANALOGIES

An analogy is when a speaker compares the concept he (or she) is explaining with something simple that the audience can relate to. This helps the audience understand the content more clearly and easily.

REPETITION

Repeating a point, term or definition during a presentation can help the audience remember it better. Repetition also emphasises that this particular point is important.

TEMPO

You can use changes in tempo to emphasise certain points. Changing the tempo is also a way of making your presentation more interesting and expressive. Use a slightly faster tempo to show excitement, humour or surprise. A slightly slower pace can be used to indicate emphasis and gravity.

USING INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE PRONOUNS

When preparing your presentation it is important to consider the use of pronouns, such as 'I', 'you', 'we', 'they', 'he', 'she' and 'it'. Inclusive words such as 'we' and 'our' can help the speaker connect to the audience and create a bond.

