

20 Tips for Top Academic Presentations

Approaching the Presentation

1. Don't cover too many ideas. Develop the key message of your presentation, something that can be reduced to a single sentence and that everything else in the presentation supports.
2. Don't think about your presentation in terms of a paper, think about it as a story; stories stick in an audience's mind.
3. Give your presentation a beginning, middle and end which set the stage, piques the interest, and wraps it all up respectively.
4. Make the presentation relevant to the audience. This involves placing yourself in the mind of the audience and tailoring the content, style and delivery of your presentations accordingly. Your presentation should tell the story of your research in a way that everyone present can understand.
5. Engaging the audience is the most important. In general, less is more: focus on the message rather than the data and ask what the audience needs to know rather than what you want to tell them.
6. Bring a personal touch to your story. The audience will want to understand what motivated your research so explain how the work emerged and evolved. Did your plans change overtime? Are there any anecdotes that could be used to illustrate the motivation for the work? This will help an audience connect with you and your work.
7. You don't have to provide all the answers. Work-in-progress presentations allow you to share the work you have carried out to date, the ways you have approached the research (and why) , what you have discovered, and how you plan to progress the work.

Preparing the Presentation

8. Organise your content in a way that makes sense, the links between slides should be logical.
9. Thinking in threes gives a balance and rhythm to presentations. Try and develop three main sections that divide into as many groups of three as necessary. Using a matrix of three to plan your presentation will allow you to focus on the message rather than the slides.
10. Avoid having a slide at the beginning of a presentation outlining the order of the presentation, explain the structure of your story instead.

11. Eliminate as much text as possible from a slide and use great visuals instead – but apply the KISS principle – Keep It Simple Stupid.
12. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! Make sure you practice all aspects of your presentation, particularly the transitions between slides. Poor transitions make a presentation jerky. Rather than transitioning at the end of a sentence, try it during the course of one. It makes you sound professional and allows you to emphasise the overall narrative of your presentation's story.

Delivering the Presentation

13. Firstly, it's ok to be nervous. Begin informally to build your confidence and connection with the audience. Keep it personal and conversational throughout.
14. Introduce yourself at the beginning of your talk and state your 'rank' as this helps adjust the audience's expectations for your presentation.
15. Be enthusiastic, animated and direct. Move during the presentation, maintain eye contact with the audience and don't speak to the screen.
16. Try using objects as well as visuals in your presentation. They are a great way to engage the audience and illustrate points.

Dealing with Questions

17. Always be polite.
18. If you don't know an answer, say so but offer a speculative reason or offer to do your research and get back with an answer at another time.
19. If you are asked a question where the person has clearly misunderstood, or failed to hear something you said, simply answer the question as if it were perfectly acceptable.
20. If you get an off-beat question that is purely designed to trip you up, don't engage with it too deeply. Thank the questioner for the question and explain that you need to look into it more fully and offer to email the person the next day.

Sources

- Patricia Gongal – [Giving academic presentations: 10 tips to impress at a seminar or conference talk.](#)
- J. Paul Robinson – [Seminar on How to Present a Seminar.](#)
- Ireen Daly & Aoife Brophy Haney - [53 Interesting Ways to Communicate Your Research.](#)
- Sarah Knowles – [How to win at academic presentations: top tips on what to say and how to say it.](#)
- Jesse Desjardins – [You Suck at PowerPoint!](#)