Further readings and templates

# Chapter 10: Presentation skills

## Presentations: checklist and advice on introductions and structure

### Presentation checklist

You might want to use this checklist to determine whether you have done all that you need to do before delivering a presentation.

### Presentation preparation checklist

#### Are you clear about your aims?

Be very sure of what you are intending to achieve, and make certain that everything is designed around those objectives.

#### Do you know enough about your audience?

Do you know how …

 many people will be in your audience?

 much they will know about the topic?

 interested they will be in the topic?

 old they will be?

 tired they will be?

 their expectations?

#### Do you know how long the presentation should last?

This is absolutely vital, in order that you know how much material to prepare. Many people overrun the time given for their presentation. If using a tool such as PowerPoint, then you should have no more slides than one for every 1.5 or 2 mins. So, a ten-minute presentation should probably have around five or six slides.

Have you prepared the room and facilities? Do you know what the technology will and willnot allow you to do?

Knowing the technology that will be available, knowing whether people will be sat in groups or in rows, knowing whether there is a clock at the back of the room ... These are all crucial parts of the preparation that needs to go into a presentation. Arriving with an important presentation to do that you will access online, only to find that there is no internet connection – or finding that your video clip is not in the right format to play on the computer – is not going to be helpful.

Similarly, if you are planning to do any interaction, you will need to know how easy it will be for people to interact with each other in the room layout that you have. Interaction works well when you have people sat around in groups, but less well (though still possible) when people are in rows.

#### Have you organised all your materials?

Being organised and prepared is vital when you are doing a presentation. Things which you have prepared may well go badly, but they are much more likely to do so if you have not prepared. Make sure that all your materials are exactly where you need them to be so that you can use them when you need to.

#### Have you developed a particular format and structure?

Once you know your aims for the presentation and the audience, then you can start to develop ideas which will help you achieve those aims – and that will involve you considering the structure of what you are going to present, and a way of doing so.

#### Have you developed some brief notes?

Not everyone needs or uses notes, but most students will need to do so when they are presenting information they are not sure about. The difficulty that many students face when doing presentations is that the notes they develop almost form a script, and then there are problems:

1) The students begin the presentation by using the script as a way of building self-confidence.

2) They then continue to do so because the script has become something that means they don’t need to look at anyone.

3) These two sets of behaviours – using the script and not looking up – become the norm in their presentation, and the student then ends up effectively reading the presentation.

4) There is no rapport between the students and the audience, there may be audibility problems and there is no spontaneity in the delivery.

Notes should be brief – bullet points are usually sufficient – along with an indication of timing (how long each part of the presentation should be).

#### Have you prepared for any questions?

Preparing for questions is not an easy thing to do, but try to identify where the gaps might be and the relevant issues that different members of the audience will raise. Think about …

 items you would like to talk about but don’t have the time available for.

 issues that specific members of the audience (or a committee) might need to know about.

 particular challenges that you might not have considered earlier.

 additional sources of information that your audience might need/want to know about.

There is a limit to how much any of us can prepare: if you cannot answer a question, there is nothing wrong with replying to folk at a later date.

## Opening ideas for a presentation

Sometimes it is difficult to know how to begin a presentation, especially if you are nervous. Some ideas are given below.

### Some ideas for opening a presentation

Refer to the situation

Use a personal reference or greeting

Ask a rhetorical question

Make a startling statement

Use a quotation

Tell a humorous story

Use an illustration

Issue a challenge or appeal

Use suspense

Appeal to the listener’s self-interest

Employ a visual aid

Refer to a recent incident

Compliment the audience or a member of the audience

Refer to the preceding speaker

Request a specific action

### Structuring a presentation: the four Ps

When making a persuasive presentation, a very systematic structure might be useful, perhaps based around four words beginning with the letter ‘**P**’:

**P**osition – What is happening? What is the context? What has happened historically?

**P**roblem – What challenges are we presented with? Why is the current situation a difficult one? What problems does our current situation give us?

**P**ossibilities – What are our options? What creative ideas could help us deal with the problem(s) we face?

**P**roposal – What specific idea (or combination of ideas) might work well to solve the problem(s) we face?

Following such a structure makes developing the presentation much more straightforward than it might be otherwise.