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WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

This document is primarily intended for students of my PhD English course on Scientific Communication. So some of what is written will only make sense if you have done the course.

However, most of what is contained herein should also be useful to anyone wishing to improving their presentation skills – including native English speakers.

There is also a Part 2 to this document, which covers aspects that I did not deal with in the course.
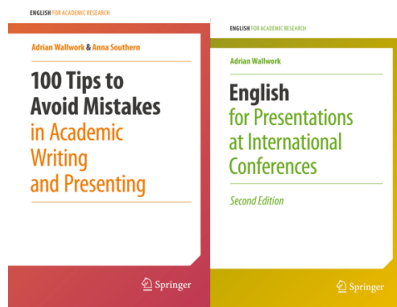
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If you give a good informative and entertaining presentation people will:

- be interested in what you do and want to learn more

- may be interested in collaborating with you

- may invite you to their university

- may give you funds to continue your research

No matter how good your results are, if you cannot communicate them well (orally or written) then they will have no real value. If you want a successful and rewarding career you need to learn to present well.

Being an academic you probably see yourself as immune to market and commercial forces. In reality your job at the presentation is to SELL yourself and your ideas to the audience. If they BUY these ideas, then you will become successful, if they don't buy them you will have to look for another job or be content with a very low university salary for the rest of your life. Believe me!

If you are going to deliver a good presentation it is ESSENTIAL to you really understand

- why you chose your specific research

- why this research is important to you and why it makes you HAPPY

- why it is important to tell other people about your research

- what would happen if NO ONE did your research

Consider having TWO versions of your presentation

Version 1: minimal text, minimal graphics

Version 2: much more text and more detailed tables, figures; same number and order of slides as in Version 1

Use Version 1 in your real presentation to the audience. It will be easy for you to say/explain and easy for your audience to understand. Give audience access to Version 2 (e.g. upload on conference website or give viewers the url), then if they don't understand something you've said or if they miss the presentation entirely, then they can refer to this version.

Why you should go to conferences and give presentations: visibility

- Disseminate your research

- Make yourself known in your field

- Make contacts

- Gain visibility = improve job possibilities + career = $+$+$+$+$+$$+$+$

Remember the AIM of your presentation

- Be memorable

- Be approachable

The result will be that people will want to contact you and you will have a greater chance of getting funds.

Fears of giving presentations

One in four Americans are afraid of speaking in public: are you? Why?

1. Being center of attention

2. Being judged – feeling stupid compared to profs in audience

3. Losing track

4. Not feeling prepared

5. Not being clear or understood

6. Getting + keeping audience attention

7. English (pronunciation + grammar)

8. Q & A session

Solutions to fears

1. Practise being the center of attention in your everyday life. With family, friends, colleagues do not be the one who stays silent but talk more. Prepare in advance things that you can say to people. Take up hobbies that put you at the center of attention: acting, dancing, playing music etc

2. Your professors were once PhD students. They know what you are feeling. With a few exceptions, the audience is always on your side, they want you to do well, they are not judging you. What profs (not including your prof) really want is to see how well you express yourself and communicate, because then you will be useful to them in their teams. They might offer you a period in their lab.

3. Have written notes, upload onto your phone, use water technique.

4. You have no excuse for this. You must practise practise practise practise practise practise practise practise

5. Same as 4.

6. Use personal story, interesting counterintuitive statistic, question, video. Do NOT simply introduce yourself and your topic.

7. Use Google Translate for the pronunciation. Have a few individual lessons with an English teacher to practise your speech and giving the presentation.

8. Get family and friends and colleagues to ask you as many questions as possible. Note down the questions and if possible have the answers integrated into your slides. In any case prepare answers for all the questions. This will also increase the chances of you hearing the question during the Q&A. Arrange with a colleague or friendly person that you have met the conference to ask you the first question. If you don't understand a question, admit it. Say "I'm sorry, I am not sure if I have understood the question. Could you ask me again during the coffee break".

Learn to enjoy yourself

The key factor is to enjoy yourself. If you enjoy yourself you will automatically give an engaging presentation. To enjoy yourself you need to know why you LOVE your research and why it is important to tell others about it. If you don't know why, you will NEVER give a good presentation.

Instead of starting your preparation by doing your slides, you should prepare your speech.

1. Talk about your research with family and friends. Note down what they find interesting and what they don't.

2. Write notes of what you want to say based on Point 1.

3. Use these notes to test out discussing your research – again with family and friends, but different ones.

4. Write your speech and practise it with colleagues.

5. Get colleagues feedback on what you have said. Encourage them to tell you things you could cut, and also things that you forgot to mention.

6. Write your speech.

7. Write the accompanying slides.

8. Test out the presentation on other PhD students – preferably studying other disciplines.

9. Refine the speech and slides until they are perfect!

Using your speech to practice your pronunciation

Uses slashes (/) to stop you speaking too fast.

First of all / thank you very much / for coming here today. My name's Pinco Pallino / and I am a researcher / at XYZ.

Use **bold** to indicate the words to stress.

> **First** of all / **thank** you very much / for **coming** here today. My name's **Pinco Pallino** / and I am a **researcher** / at **XYZ**.

Underline specific words that you want to stress and where you could use your hands to enumerate.

> Let me just outline what I'll be discussing today. <u>First</u>, I'm going to tell you something about the background to this work. <u>Then</u> I'll take a brief look at the related literature and the methods we used. <u>Finally</u>, and most importantly, I'll show you our key results.

Underline the stress in individual words

> Let me just <u>out</u>line what I'll be dis<u>cuss</u>ing today. First, I'm going to tell you / something about the <u>back</u>ground to this work. Then I'll take a <u>brief look</u> at the re<u>la</u>ted <u>lit</u>erature / and the <u>meth</u>ods we used. Finally, and most im<u>port</u>antly, I'll show you our key re<u>sults</u>.

Pronunciation

Use the speech icon on Google Translate to hear your speech and to note the words that you can't pronounce. Examples

literature Think of other words ending in '-ture' that you know how to pronounce (picture, nature)

Then write down the pronunciation next to the word and practise it: literature : *li tri cer*

When you've checked the pronunciation of the word, associate words whose pronunciation you already know.

> <u>me</u>thod   get > met > metal > method

If possible, avoid words you have difficulty in pronouncing e.g. replace *innovative with new, novel, creative, unusual*

Be careful of:

- Words that Italian has adopted from English: *hardware, lockdown, report*

- Technical words from your field. Say key words and English technical words more slowly.

- Acronyms: PC, USA, EU. (say each letter slowly). Give equal stress and time to each letter in an acronym.

Disadvantages of online presentations

- technical difficulties and wasting time

- you can't see your audience as a whole - detached from reality

- you can't see if they are nodding, following, losing attention

- holding audience attention is more difficult as you lose the dynamism of your body movements

- harder for the audience to be involved in what you are saying

- on a laptop your camera is looking up at your face (sometimes up your nose)

- audience not in a novel situation, sitting in front of their PC like they do every day. No excitement of being in conference hall

- probably watched 1000s of online presentations. Low expectations. You have to work hard not to meet such negative expectations

- more distractions. Free to look at their phone, write an email, chat to someone else in the room, etc

- they only see your face, thus you lose the impact that your body language can give

- many presenters look down at their notes and thus make no eye contact with audience

Advantages of online presentations

- You can read from your script. + Have two versions of presentation.

- You can be more relaxed

- You can time it almost exactly (but allow for technical difficulties)

- Much easier to show slides and highlight particular parts

- No problems with your hands

- Q&A can be aided by 'chat'

Gaining attention online

Look at camera (not down at your notes).

No headphones.

Talk like you're talking to a good friend.

Be enthusiastic.

Prepare visually pleasing and varied slides.

Easy-to-follow slides and explanation.

Statistic

Video / Photo / Image

Story / Personal

Question

Example (before theory; why before how)

KISS (keep it short and simple)

Emphasize key words

Seem / Sound / Look like a nice person

Don't make anyone feel stupid

Connect first slide with last slide to create a sense of completion

Tips for online presentations

The Australian 'expert' mentioned that most presentations are of a very low level, but bear in mind she was speaking in early 2020 when online presentations were just beginning to become common. She felt that audience expectations are low, which could be an advantage as simply by doing a clear well organized presentation you will already impress your audience. She suggested:

- choosing a mono-color background

- standing up

- rehearsing, i.e. practising again and again and again

- having back-ups for when you have technical difficulties (e.g. with videos that don't work)

Typical issues with online presentations

Make sure your head is in the middle of the screen.

Headphones – don't wear them

Don't introduce yourself or your department

Don't read your title

Too much info – too much text

Too much happening in same slide

There is not necessarily a correlation between number of slides and the length of the presentation

Don't compete with your slides

Don't spend too long on same slide

Don't talk too much

Don't give too much info

Animations –sometimes good, sometimes too distracting

ONLINE: eyes down, headphones, background noise, messy backdrop, jewellery clanking, pen clicking

Typical faults of presentations in general (both online and with a 'real' audience)

- Lack of preparation and practice

- Reading speech

- No eye contact with audience

- No clear structure / No clear message

- Too much text – hard to find key info

- No images

- Presenter reads the text / Monotone voice

- Too long + too many technical details

- Too many animations

- Too small fonts, bad use of color

- No match between speech and slides

4 WHAT MAKES A GOOD PRESENTATION?

- Captivating introduction

- Description of problem + goal + results

- Concise

- Clear slides - essential info

- Passionate, convincing, interesting, enthusiastic and confident presenter

- **A presenter who is AUTHENTIC, PROFESSIONAL AND FRIENDLY who the audience will be happy to talk to after the presentation, and who will be memorable for more than a few minutes. You want your audience to REMEMBER you: they will never remember the info from your presentation, but they WILL remember how they felt while watching you and what final impression you gave them.**

Make sure you:

- Connect with audience

- Speak slowly and pause often

- Don't go into presentation mode

- Are transparent about limitations

- Don't worry about seeming vulnerable

Use a two-part title.

The first title (short) attracts attention. PhD students have miniscule brains.

The second explains the first title. Extremely low IQ levels in PhD student brains as an indicator of wasted tax-payer funding of pointless research

Make good use of statistics

Audiences want data. But they want it explained. They need a context to be able to understand it.

A statistic is only meaningful if it is compared to another statistic.

From the Leaning Tower statistics we learned that:

- most people agreed on which statistics were the best – make a list of statistics you can use and then select the best three. Make this decision by talking to family and friends too
- we shouldn't present statistics on a plate. Make the audience think about them first, by using a question, mini quiz – and then giving them the answers
- only give a limited number of statistics (and info in general)
- you should never make the audience feel stupid

Have a concluding slide that ensures that people will contact you

NEVER write 'Thank you for your attention' – no one will ever remember your slide or you.

Think about any limitations to your research. Use these limitations to get people interested in contacting you to help you overcome these limitations, and hopefully collaborate with you now and in the future. Alternatively, if you have something that others don't tell them – tell them that they can use your equipment, see your data etc. Suggest that they come to your lab.

The best, or certainly most enjoyable, presentations we saw in our lessons were those where the presenter simply <u>chatted</u> to the audience and / or tried to connect with them <u>immediately.</u> You can do this by using <u>one</u> or more of the following techniques:

1. give a clear example in the first or second slide (or on the whiteboard) that encapsulates the whole meaning of the presentation and immediately gives the audience a context that they can relate to on a personal level. The example probably works best if it is visually appealing

2. say something topical (di attualità) which relates with what you want to say

3. give the audience some very interesting information (statistics)

4. ask a question that contains a counter intuitive or surprising answer

5. say something personal about yourself – how you first became interested in the topic, what you particularly like about this area of research, a particular event that took place during the research (eg an unexpected problem, an unexpected result) – show the audience your enthusiasm for the topic

6. say why you think the audience will be interested in what you are going to say

All the techniques above are useful if you have a <u>diverse audience</u> – i.e. when not all the audience is doing exactly the same type of research as you.

Techniques 4-6 are even good when the <u>audience is essentially doing the same research</u>, particularly No. 5 because the audience will naturally compare what you say with their own experience.

You probably think that these techniques are just optional.

But it is fundamental to connect with the audience. If you don't connect with them, they will not give you the attention you deserve.

If your presentation is scheduled just before lunch, after lunch or at the end of the day, then you MUST use one of the techniques otherwise the audience will either sleep or even die.

Things to avoid

PROBLEM	EXPLANATION
having no introduction	you need time to relax, and the audience needs time to adjust to you voice. An introduction simply means anything (qualsiasi cosa) that is not the main technical part of the presentation. It should last 30 seconds -3 minutes.
rigid body language	relax and smile (if you can)
panic and nerves	practise in non-critical situations
forgetting what to say	prepare well, and if necessary use the 'bottle technique'
going into 'presentation mode'	just speak and behave like you normally do
speaking too fast	when you are nervous or have too much to say, you tend to speak too fast. The problem is that the audience may not understand you.
too long sentences	ensure that each sentence can come easily out of your mouth. I recommend sentences of no more than 15-20 words. Use the slash (7), <u>underline</u> and **bold** techniques to mark up your script
a long boring presentation title	you don't have to have the same title as your paper
tedious and abstract slide titles	try and give your slides a concrete title, use verbs not just nouns
a slide with the outline	just talk instead (you can have your outline on a piece of paper, for your eyes only, to remind you of what you want to say), or at least have an interesting but relevant picture. If you think you really need an outline, have it as the third slide or write it on the whiteboard
unnecessary bullets	Powerpoint encourages excessive use of bullets - only use them when you really need to
too much text	reduce to the absolute minimum (then you will have something to say rather than just reading the slide), in any case give the audience time to digest the slide before talking.
too many slides	you probably only need 3-5 slides: you only need slides to show sets of statistics, and technical details

improvising and saying 'er'	practice saying aloud the first three minutes at least 10 times
annoying colors and animations	keep it simple, unless you want to create a special effect to get audience's attention
spelling mistakes	spelling mistakes attract audience attention and distract them from what you are saying
mispronouncing key words	make a list of your key and make 100% sure you can pronounce them
don't use the passive	don't say: "the method was developed" say: "we developed the method"
the user	if possible find a way to present your research by relating it to the audience and their experience, and so use "you" not "the user"

1. *** If you do a bad presentation, the problem is <u>not</u> with your English but with your slides and with what you say ***

2. you will be nervous at the beginning of the presentation. Nerves make you speak too fast. So practise speaking the first three minutes slowly.

3. exploit your uniqueness, i.e. think what makes you different from the other and thus intrinsically interesting

4. know where your hands are, put them in front of you at the beginning (not behind, or in pockets)

5. smile or at least try to appear that you are enjoying yourself rather than being tortured

6. give examples

7. always talk in the concrete not the abstract

8. present comparative information in columns not in rows

9. create variety: turn the screen off (use B on your keyboard), use the whiteboard (this also takes the focus off you, and you can relax a bit)

10. create variety: move around, produce objects from your pocket

11. maintain eye contact

12. don't correct mistakes that you make in English, otherwise you will draw attention to the mistake rather than the important data you are giving your audience

13. the audience will remember YOU and not your presentation

14. if you enjoy preparing your slides you will enjoy showing them and your audience will enjoy watching you

15. if you are passionate about your topic your audience will watch you with more enthusiasm

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Don't ignore everything I have told you and deliver your normal standard boring presentation (don't just try to keep your own prof happy).

If you experiment with being different then strangely this will give you extra confidence as you will see the positive reaction from the audience