

WRITTEN PAPERS INTO ORAL PRESENTATIONS

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"There are two types of speakers: those that are nervous
and those that are liars".

Mark Twain



Many famous presenters, comedians and actors report nerves and stage fright. Even speakers who seem like 'naturals' have usually thought through and planned what they will present. We may not all be 'naturals' at public speaking but with practice we can become skilled at academic conference presentations.

Why are we doing this seminar?

Finding the right conference, title and abstract, structuring and timing, controlling your nerves and speaking like a pro.

The seminar is interactive and participatory. Feel free to contribute at any time.

AIMS

- **To highlight some of the pitfalls in planning, writing and delivering conference papers and similar presentations**
- **To outline the principles of good conference paper writing and presenting**
- **To provide an initial opportunity to practise key skills**
- **To set up continuing support groups and/or seminars**

WHAT'S IN THIS SEMINAR?

KEY MESSAGE: THE SIX Ps:

- 1. PLANNING (before, during and after)**
- 2. PEER SUPPORT (colleagues, consultation and support)**
- 3. PITCH (what is the rationale for your presentation, its audience and its type: why? to whom? format?)**
- 4. POINT(s) (what are the key message/s? simplify, emphasize and pace your key message)**
- 5. PROOF (choose and pace your illustrations, examples, findings)**
- 6. PACE (timing is critical)**

The six Ps are covered within the three stages of any conference, seminar or keynote presentation, as relevant.

A) BEFORE THE PRESENTATION - from when you first consider a presentation until you arrive at the venue

B.) DURING THE PRESENTATION - after you arrive at the venue, while you deliver the paper, and until the question and answer period has finished

C.) AFTER THE PRESENTATION - after your session, and once the conference is over

My brief is to address how to propose and present an excellent conference paper (and/or convert existing writing). Therefore we will spend most time on the sections A) 'before' and B) 'during' the presentation.

WHY ARE WE HERE? WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO GET OUT OF THE SEMINAR?
(Round of introductions)

We have all attended memorable presentations and awful ones. Let's begin by sharing our experiences and listing some of the attributes of each.

MEMORABLE

AWFUL

BEFORE THE PRESENTATION

PLANNING

Early planning: which conference, and what type of paper?

- Targeting conferences and academic peer groups
- Conference timing
- Offering a paper twice
- Funding
- Timing
- Academic and cultural locations: who are the organisers and the likely audience; what do they expect?

Typical academic conference papers:

- Work-in-progress paper (work starting out or partly-finished, progress report, work struck a snag, where next?)
- Paper seeking feedback to help improve it for publication
- Completed, published, or in-press paper
- Overview/research report for professional colleagues
- Paper principally about visual texts
- (Not covering poster papers)

Style:

- Formal read paper
- Expert address or keynote (1 hour or more)
- In/formal paper, spoken to notes
- Panel with topic to address or experiences to share
- Seminars and Symposia (round tables, with everyone hearing all papers; papers address similar themes)
- Hands-on papers with audience participation (e.g. demonstration of some technique or findings)

PACE: 1. Time available for the paper?

When first considering a conference paper, inquire about the likely available time for the presentation: 10 mins v 20 mins v 30 mins, makes a big difference. Repeat your enquiry about 2 weeks out from the conference and when you arrive (often papers are withdrawn or added late). Plan for a shorter and a longer version of your paper to allow for changes.

PACE: 2. Write a timeline covering the whole sequence of planned stages from start to finish - including first conception and applying for entry through to attendance at the conference and keeping in touch with other participants afterwards.

PARTNERSHIPS:**PARTNERSHIP 1. Mentors, collegial support**

- **Approach your mentors or colleagues for support early** - even prior to submission of the proposal stage
- Be open to them saying 'no', and have other possible people in mind
- Tell them your topic and the general form the presentation will take
- When and where will it happen?
- Devise a rough timeline and negotiate to suit
- Do you want them to read and comment on a plan and a draft? Allow lots of time! At least one week for a busy academic, ideally two.
- What are you doing for them in return (if appropriate)?
- When your paper has been accepted, repeat these steps with greater precision and organise a specific timeline and consultation agreements with mentors.

PARTNERSHIP 2. Conference Organisers, Chairs.

- Often there are conference organisers and also section and session organisers or chairs - can be three different people.
- Make sure you have all their names, email addresses, cellphone no's and other contacts, to take with you.
- Organise a place to stay, well ahead. Locals can help here.
- **Publication possibilities.** Early on, ask if there will be a conference publication that your paper might be part of, e.g. proceedings or a book. Accept that sometimes these things happen, often they don't and have alternative publication plans.

PITCH (decide on your rationales for doing the paper and the type of presentation: why and to whom?)

- Why do it at all? What are your aims and objectives?
- Academic and cultural locations: who are the organisers and the likely audience; what do they expect? Read the conference materials, title, pitch, call for papers, participants, panels, streams and keynote speakers well ahead. Ask questions.
- Make sure to include a short bio for yourself along with your synopsis
- **Writerly and readerly texts**

A/V or not A/V?

- **Think through the a/v support early. Ask the organisers for what you will need at the time you propose the paper, even if it changes later.**
- Match technology to culture, audience, and location.
- Sometimes a low-tech or no-tech paper is fine (whiteboard and talk v OHP or document scanner).
- Prepare audio-visuals early
- Allow time to make changes as your plan develops

- Trial and play with the visuals or sounds to check content, spelling, sizes, colours, appropriateness
- Practice the presentation with the audio/visuals and time it
- Allow enough time to reconsider the presentation as a whole, including A/V materials. Be ready to drop or add audio-visual content
- Have a plan B *for your presentation without A/V*. What if the technology failed? Power outages, missing or incompatible equipment, lost slides etc. should not ruin your presentation.
- Contact the organisers immediately you think you know what A/V equipment and facilities you will need.
- Room layout and wiring are important. If appropriate, ask for the specific type of room you need. A tiered lecture theatre versus a flat space, versus a round table discussion, or chairs and tables set out for group work, or an action space somewhere etc.

GETTING YOUR PROPOSAL ACCEPTED

- **TITLE** Devise a snappy title that also describes what you are doing clearly.
- **SYNOPSIS**

A good synopsis is a valuable professional research and conference tool. It should be clear, succinct and attractive. Depending on your specialisation, topic and the type of paper, it may need:

 - i. Statement of specific topic area or subject
 - ii. Nature of the research question or hypothesis
 - iii. Nature of any materials generated or dealt with
 - iv. Methodology and /or methods

- v. Theoretical approach - reference major theorists whose ideas you use or discuss
 - vi. Analytic framework/concepts and connections
 - vii. Steps in the argument a, b, c, d
 - viii. Conclusion(s)
 - ix. Keywords
 - x. Often conference organisers will tell you the word length (e.g. 150 words or less)
- **Include a short professional bio with your synopsis**
 - Write a first draft synopsis (helps to figure out frameworks, key points and focus)
 - Consult your mentor(s) and get feedback
 - Write a second draft synopsis, edit, and polish. Show mentors and/or submit.

WRITING THE PRESENTATION

The first step is to outline your **presentation plan**. Identify the key message(s), main concepts, data/materials, and principle points you plan to make. Identify a clear conclusion. Then, determine which if any require a visual for clarity or illustration. Write the script with an indication of where the visuals fit in.

POINTS (key messages? simplify, emphasize and time them)

Your presentation needs a key message to start it off. Leave listeners in no doubt about what you came to tell them. Don't waffle or lead them up to your messages. Tell them your key message(s) directly **within the first minute** of starting your talk. If you don't do this, you risk losing their attention. An overview of the paper with a visual is a good idea.

Your key message should contain:

- The main point(s) you want your audience to take as a result of listening to you
- Reference to the audience
- Reference to an example that you will elaborate on.
- Thinking through and writing your key message is often the most time consuming and difficult part of preparing your conference paper. If you do not think through your key message you may be wasting everyone's time.

My top three reasons for poorly presented conference papers:

- **poorly prepared key points**
- **lack of timing/rehearsal**
- **lack of flexibility in accommodating changes** (to A/V, format, cultural expectations, time available, other panellists, bad facilitation)

When it comes to converting your WRITERLY article/book chapter/thesis chapter/research report into a READERLY oral presentation these three tips may help:

- Write a presentation **quickly**
- Write a presentation that makes material **accessible to the audience**
- Write a presentation that is **easy to remember**

(Jones, 2002)

Be clear about why you are using the A/V materials and why you insert them when you do.

WRITE TWO SCRIPTS: the full paper, and your summary points/reading notes. The latter are probably headings and bullet points, and they summarise the argument, evidence and conclusions. You

will use them to speak from. Make sure to clearly mark and highlight places where A/V will be used. If necessary, use coloured tabs to mark places in the original script.

- Make your content clear and memorable
- **Develop and organise presentation content**

PITCH:

Who are you addressing? Create an audience profile and set presentation parameters around that. For example, an undergraduate audience is very different from a specialised professional group. With the latter you can afford to discuss the niceties of theories, data, images or examples for an hour or more. With the former they probably sign off early.

POINTS AND PROOFS:

Condense your speech outline into bullet pointed notes you can speak from

PACE: Timing your presentation. Rehearse the entire presentation through at least twice, and time each section. For the final run through invite others to be your audience, dress up, include A/V, get someone to facilitate, and have them feedback - constructively.

PROOF: Choose and pace illustrations, examples, findings. Check that your script has clearly marked spaces where A/V will occur and that you have timed this carefully.

We will deal with these skills more in our exercise.

⇒ **B.) DURING THE PRESENTATION**

- **At venue, and before the presentation:** stress relief and anxiety management techniques - share ideas.
- Good preparation is important for controlling nerves.
- Check room, A/V and that you have all necessary resources technology and papers.
- Check again that your full and speaking scripts have the marked spaces where A/V will happen.
- Do you want to give out copies of the paper? Often the organisers will want a copy.
- On the morning of the presentation, or the night before, read through your notes one more time. Visualise how good you are going to be!!
- Now, forget the presentation until it's time to give it. Go for a walk, socialise and talk about other things. Get distracted.
- **NOW IS THE TIME!**
- Set up your watch where you can easily see it. Make sure the facilitator has been clear with everyone about the timing and her/his method of signalling when time is nearly up: e.g. flash cards with '2 mins', '1 min.', 'STOP'.
- **Poor facilitation. If your paper is near the end of a session and other speakers go over time and are not stopped, it is better to alert the chair subtly and politely, than to be left with 7 rushed minutes instead of 15!**
- Start by introducing yourself briefly. Say what sort of paper yours is: completed and published, work-in-progress, thesis extract etc.
- If your aim is to seek audience feedback, say so, and stress its importance.

- Say where and when in the address you want interruptions, responses or feedback: "I will speak for 20 mins and then I would like to hear your feedback"
- Provide an overview (A/V?)
- Tell a joke (OH/Slide?) if that is your style otherwise don't
- Give key message(s) early on. (A/V?)

Be aware of verbal and nonverbal messages

- Practice nonverbal skills to help handle nerves and engage the attention of your listeners, such as pauses, eye contact, strategic interjection of A/V and Support Materials. Watch to not be jittery, sit in one place, remember not to wander around, fiddle, wipe your nose or gulp water etc.
- Make sure the clothes you wear feel comfortable and appropriate so they don't distract you. Not a good time to wear super tight gear or new shoes (unless of course you have multiple agendas)!

PACE:

- **RELAX INTO the Presentation**

Experience the benefits of having rehearsed, and of adhering to a time frame and the power of speaking from notes.

PARTNERSHIPS:

HANDLING QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Many beginning presenters fear receiving aggressive or heckling questions or questions they can't answer. Mostly people at professional conferences lean over backwards to be generous and supportive to new presenters and early career researchers. If you see a powerful debate it is more likely to be between leaders in a field. Although senior staff have all seen heckling and aggression this is rare.

Explain the importance of the question-and-answer session for you, if this is a major aim in presenting your paper.

- Respond professionally to questions Usually you will find you know a lot more than 90% of the audience about your topic area.
- **Difficult questions and situations**
- If a question is off the topic gently bring the Q back to your own field.
- Be like a politician: *answer the question you wish they had asked* - or, if no one asks it, say what it is and answer it.
- If someone persistently asks irrelevant or aggressive questions feel free to move on to another Q. The chair should assist here.
- If you don't know, say so - don't fake it.
- Write down interesting points from the discussion as they occur, or have a colleague do it
- Write down the names of people who are talking intelligently and enthusiastically, and make a point of seeing them afterwards to talk.

⇒ C.) AFTER THE PRESENTATION

PLANNING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Buttonhole those people you most want to talk with. Don't be shy. Over a conference dinner may be good but sometimes the quieter venue of an adjoining café or a stroll in the grounds may be better.
- Are there special outcomes to be negotiated with other participants, such as co-work initiatives, publications, academic exchanges, thesis examining, moderation, research contacts and other agreements?
- Further conferences? Maybe you want to organise a conference.

PITCH

- Make sure you get to talk to the major people with whom you want to make contacts, in an appropriate way. Sometimes the conference dinner is not the best place, but rather a quiet chat over coffee etc.

POINT

- Will there be a publication? Review what you have achieved Self Evaluate. When you get back talk to the mentors about what happened.

Further Reading and Resources

Jones, G. 2002 'Why How Prove It: A guide to developing perfect presentation skills'

<http://www.whyhowproveit.co.uk/index.htm>

Radel, J 1999 'Effective Presentations'

<http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/effective.html>

University of Newcastle on Tyne 2005 'Presentation Skills'

<http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/Dept/Tips/present/present.htm>