



UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH
ASK - ACADEMIC
SKILLS UNIT

Presentations: Top Tips.

It is easy to advise on what to do. It can be a lot harder to actually do it. If you wish to refine your existing skills, or if you are anxious about giving presentations, please contact Ask. Details can be found at the end of this handout.

There are different types of presentation. The tips in this handout apply to all of them. This handout is divided into two sections: [Preparation](#), and [While You Are Speaking](#).

Preparation.

1. Make sure you know the range of topics before committing to a specific area. Read any course and task guidelines carefully, and check for any further details in Moodle.
2. You are given a time limit for a reason. Don't put in lots of detail or try to cover too much ground just to squeeze everything about the topic into the presentation. This means being selective. Choose your material carefully, to fully answer the brief.
3. When working out your timing, allow time for questions at the end. Also allow time for slide changes, using visual aids, change-overs between group members, and for speaking more slowly. See "[while you are speaking](#)" below.
4. Rehearse many times – and do it out loud. Don't just think it in your head. Don't learn a script: **know** your material. If you lose touch with the script, you will find it extremely difficult to find your way back to it.
5. If you must use notes, use them minimally. Again, this is about **knowing** what you are saying and not having to look down at a piece of paper throughout the presentation. If you really do find it difficult to look up, you can briefly glance up and towards the audience between points and during slide changes. See "[while you are speaking](#)" below.
6. You are the "face" of the presentation, so don't deliberately try to distract the audience from you by preparing excessive audio-visual aids. Use them for their value to the presentation, not as a distraction from you. The focus for the audience should be the content, not you.
7. Diagrams, images and other visual aids can enhance a presentation: a picture can speak a thousand words, and images are often more interesting than words.
8. Ensure your material has clear signposting which takes the listener through your presentation. This includes letting the audience know that you have finished and that they can now ask questions (if this is required for your presentation). [Please see our handout, "Presentations: Signposting"](#).
9. Lubricate your voice before any public speaking, including rehearsals. Plain, still water is always best; caffeine is best avoided.

While You Are Speaking.

1. Face the audience while you are speaking. However, try not to plant yourself to stand solidly facing them throughout. This would mean turning about 180 degrees to look at the screen, and thereby turning your back on the audience. Instead, stand at about 45 degrees to the screen, so that you can turn slightly to glance at the screen or draw the audience's attention to it, and so that you can then easily turn back to face them.
2. While you are introducing yourself, move your gaze around the audience. Also do this while you are speaking, to avoid staring at one person - but don't continuously sweep your head and eyes back and forth in a steady rhythm. This would look a bit odd.
3. If looking at the audience is difficult for you, you can glance at them periodically. This is not best practice, but it goes a long way to helping engage them.
4. If making direct eye contact is difficult for you, find the person who is farthest away and look at the top of their head. Make that your eye line. You can move your gaze around at that level to avoid eye contact. This doesn't guarantee that you won't make eye contact, but it significantly reduces the likelihood of it happening.
5. Speak more slowly than usual. Adrenaline can make us talk faster than we realise.
6. Pause at the ends of key points and slides. This gives you time to gather yourself and prepare for what comes next and, perhaps more importantly, it gives the audience time to engage with your content and help them to remember it afterwards.

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Resource revised 2019 by Heather Lee.

