



The Open University



Communicating and Presenting

This booklet accompanies the Skills for OU Study website: www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy

Skills for OU Study

Communicating and Presenting

The Open University Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

Copyright © 2008 The Open University

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher or a licence from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd. Details of such licences (for reprographic reproduction) may be obtained from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd of 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP.

Open University materials may also be made available in electronic formats for use by students of the University. All rights, including copyright and related rights and database rights, in electronic course materials and their contents are owned by or licensed to The Open University, or otherwise used by The Open University as permitted by applicable law.

In using electronic course materials and their contents you agree that your use will be solely for the purposes of following an Open University course of study or otherwise as licensed by The Open University or its assigns.

Except as permitted above you undertake not to copy, store in any medium (including electronic storage or use in a website), distribute, transmit or re-transmit, broadcast, modify or show in public such electronic materials in whole or in part without the prior written consent of The Open University or in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302).

Edited, designed and typeset by The Open University.

Printed in the United Kingdom by Thanet Press.

ISBN 978-0-7492-2919-1

Skills for OU Study

Communicating and Presenting

Knowing how to communicate and present effectively is an essential skill in many areas of life, not just in your studies. This booklet accompanies the *Skills for OU Study* website <http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy>, which contains advice, quizzes and exercises to help you improve your skills.



Contents

1	Introduction	7
2	Communication skills	9
3	Presentation skills	11
4	Planning a presentation	15
5	Giving a presentation	25
6	In conclusion	29

1 Introduction

Effective communication allows you to engage your listeners, convey your point of view clearly, and convince them of the validity of what you have to say. However, communication is not just about *what* you say, but also about *how* you say it and how you present yourself.

As an OU student you may be asked to give a presentation to your fellow students, say at residential or day school. In presentations, communication skills help you to pitch the content at the right level for the audience while keeping the message clear and authoritative. Good communication skills give you the confidence to control your voice, speak steadily and clearly, and use your appearance and body language to help influence your audience.

Communication skills are valuable both to your studies and your career progression.

However, communication skills have a much broader application than this. Thinking about the best way to communicate is a good discipline to use when you're preparing an assignment, or even when just talking with your tutor or other students on the phone or in an online forum.

Communication skills are also relevant and valuable in other areas of your life, particularly in your study and your career. The sooner you develop these skills, the sooner you'll feel the benefits they bring.





Visit www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy for advice on study skills and working with others.

2 Communication skills

Communicating our ideas and opinions (for example, at a tutorial) helps us to develop understanding because it makes us question our assumptions and forces us to justify ourselves. This is really important not just while studying, but also in our home and professional lives. When we are required to give a presentation, we clearly need to make sure that we are confident that we can rely on our communication skills to be effective.

Effective communication and presentation skills can benefit you in job interviews, business meetings, career reviews, emails and letters.

Effective communication and presentation skills can also benefit you in job interviews, business meetings, career reviews, emails and letters ... when making a complaint, for example:

Academic, business and professional people who regularly make presentations to colleagues or clients are expected to be practised and persuasive speakers. If your career plans lie in any of these directions, then presentation skills are important to your success and you should start to develop them at the earliest opportunity.

Moreover, many job interviews now include a requirement for you to give a presentation to allow the panel to assess your skills in this area. And of course at an interview you are, in effect, giving a presentation – where the topic is you.

2.2 Effective communication

Being an effective communicator is, however, about more than just speaking coherently. You also need to be able to convince people of what you say, and make them want to listen to you. Interestingly, some of the aspects of this are not related to verbal skills at all (see Figure 1).

- You must be believable. However keen you are to persuade others to adopt your argument, resist using over-emotive language or a biased viewpoint. Keep your message balanced and reasoned; support any claims you make by evidence; and take care not to contradict yourself.
- Present yourself as an authoritative person, one who can stand up confidently, hold the audience's attention and speak in a relaxed manner. Body language, how you dress and stand and your general demeanour all contribute to this level of skill.

- Communication, even in a presentation, is a two-way process. Try to develop a rapport with the audience. Be aware of your audience's reaction to what you are saying and be prepared to make small adaptations or changes in emphasis. A speaker reading from a script or depending totally on slides has little chance of achieving this rapport. You can also personalise your presentation by making comments that acknowledge the audience's interests and responses.

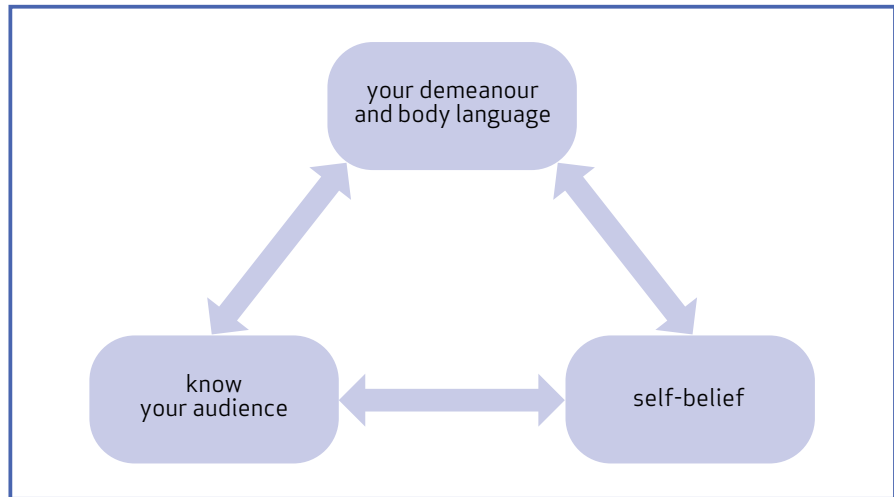


Figure 1 Some of the most important aspects of effective communication are non-verbal

‘ I’d done a presentation at residential school, just to the others in the group. I knew that I could speak before an audience without too much trouble, so I wasn’t in a panic about having to give a presentation at a job interview. But I also remembered how difficult it had been to keep everyone’s attention because I’d just sat at the table with the rest of the group and they’d started chatting among themselves rather than listen to me! So for my interview I wore my suit, made sure I stood where everyone could see me, and kept each point punchy and focused. And I got the job. ’

3 Presentation skills

When planning how to communicate effectively as a presenter, one of the most important aspects is to ‘tune in’ to your audience so you speak to them appropriately. You also need to develop the skill of speaking fluently from notes.

However, communication skills are not the whole story when making a presentation. In addition, you need to have:

- knowledge of the topic – so you can prepare the content for your presentation and answer questions from the audience
- organisation skills – so you can decide which material to include and the most effective sequence of points, and then fit it all into the allotted time.

Whatever the level of your skills, it is important to accept that good presentations take thorough preparation and quite a lot of practice.

3.1 Understanding your audience

You can develop this skill by thinking about what you would change if you had to speak on the same topic to three different groups – say a group of your fellow students, a group of children and a group of your friends and neighbours. You may find that you already use this skill automatically. Or you may find yourself in an uncomfortable position because you have ignored a potential audience – or targeted the wrong audience. It always pays to consider who might be looking at what you are presenting. For example, what may be acceptable on a social networking site is not always acceptable in another situation.

‘When I decided to set up my own business I had to write a proposal to get a loan from the bank, and another to get a marketing grant from a local charity. I thought I could write a single proposal in an afternoon that would do for both, but a week later I was still struggling. My daughter, who is a postgrad student and knows a bit about communication skills, convinced me to think about what to include from the point of view of each user. So the bank got spreadsheets, forecasts and financial references, while the charity got product illustrations, ideas for new lines and quotes from our user trials.’

3.2 Speaking fluently

The skill of speaking fluently on a topic from outline notes can take a while to develop. Start by analysing the skills of other speakers and then practise your own technique. Give yourself small speaking exercises by choosing a subject that you know something about and then talking out loud on that topic for a minute. You don't need an audience – try it in the shower or give the cat the benefit of your knowledge. At first you'll find it difficult to structure your ideas into coherent sentences, but each time you do it you'll improve. As with all skills, the key is to analyse exactly what you need to improve and then get a lot of practice. The reward is fluency and self-confidence. Remind yourself that no-one enjoys listening to a presenter who reads word for word from a pre-prepared script; it's just too impersonal and stiff.



Visit www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy for more guidance on live presentations.

3.3 Using your knowledge

As an OU student you may be asked to give a presentation to the other students in your group. You may be given a title, you might choose one from a list, or perhaps you'll be asked to present the results of a discussion, project or experiment you have conducted at residential school. In all these cases the preparation for the presentation contributes to your understanding of course materials – you are not expected to have far more knowledge than the others in your group. However, it is often the case that students get very involved in background research for their talk and find that their knowledge of the topic improves tremendously as a result of the work done for a presentation.

Postgraduate students are expected to give presentations on their work on a regular basis – perhaps as part of a seminar programme where they get advice and support from members of their department. Research students may also be asked to attend meetings or conferences and present their findings in the form of a poster for display, or they may be asked to present to the conference. In these cases it is assumed that the presenter has an extensive knowledge of the research topic and is able to answer searching questions from other specialists.

In many professional careers, in business and in teaching, you require in-depth knowledge of your subject in order to do your job of presenting information on a day-to-day basis.



3.4 Applying organisation skills

The skills required to organise the content of a presentation are very similar to those required in planning an assignment for your course. If you want to develop your organisation skills, think about the kinds of thing you do to prepare for an assignment.



For more advice on assignments and how to prepare for them, look at the *Skills for OU Study* website (<http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy>).

Whatever means of communication you use – written or verbal – organising your thoughts before you begin pays dividends.

- Take a little time to think about what you want to achieve before you start. This helps you plan what you want to say and the order in which to say it, which is just as relevant in an online forum as in a presentation.

- Decide which points can be conveyed verbally and which would benefit from a slide or other illustration. This skill is similar to the one you use when choosing to include a diagram in a TMA because it conveys information more effectively than words alone could do.
- Check that you are not being repetitive, and that you haven't missed out anything important. Whether you are writing an email, talking on the phone or giving a presentation, the person at the other end needs to be able to follow your train of thought.

‘
When I became an OU student I didn't want to tell anyone about my mobility problems, but then I saw information on the help available and decided to apply. The first time I phoned the wrong place and asked for the wrong people, but they put me through and someone told me how to register and which forms to fill in. There's quite a bit to deal with and I realised I'd have to get organised and make sure I communicate properly. It just took a bit of thought and effort but now I have a list of helpful contacts and everything is sorted out.’

4 Planning a presentation

The first step in planning a presentation is to consider the fixed elements – the aspects you usually can't do much to change.

The fixed elements are the topic, your audience and your resources.

4.1 The topic

Whether you are giving a presentation to fellow students in your course, to tutors as part of an assessment, or at work, you are expected to know your topic well. You not only have to communicate facts clearly but you may well have to answer questions on what you have said. So if you have a choice, don't be too ambitious with your topic: pitch it at a level you are comfortable with.

The title of your presentation should make clear what your talk is about and also give a clue to what you are trying to achieve in the time available. Is your talk purely instructional, or are you putting a case for a fresh point of view? Are you comparing two alternatives, attempting to inspire people to action, or aiming to entertain them? How much time has been allocated to your presentation? Do you need to leave time at the end for the audience to ask questions?

4.2 The audience

You may know the members of your audience and be familiar with their level of knowledge on your topic. At residential school, for example, you may be asked to give a presentation to other students on the same course. To stand out from the crowd try to avoid following the structure and style of the course materials. Good speakers can make even familiar material seem fresh by provoking their audience to rethink, so work within the guidelines given but try to take a different angle or adopt a challenging viewpoint.

Where the presentation is assessed, such as in a language exam or a viva, then tighter guidelines may apply and this approach would not be appropriate.

If you have no knowledge of the audience beforehand then do ask the organiser for further information, for instance:

- How much do they already know about your topic? Are they familiar with specialist terminology, or should you avoid it?
- How many people are likely to attend? Do any of them have particular requirements that might affect you? For example, in a small room a deaf person may prefer to lip-read, in which case you should be sure to stand where your face is well lit, whereas in a larger room you may be asked to use a microphone that links to an induction loop or infrared equipment.
- Is the audience a formal group and keen on facts and information, or are you presenting to a more social meeting where you could take a less formal approach?
- Does the majority have a particular background in common, for example in terms of academic or ethnic grouping, age or profession?

Some academic seminars are open to members of the public. You need to know if you are speaking to a diverse group of people.

Remember, some academic seminars are open to members of the public and you will need to know if you are speaking to a diverse group of people.

This information will help you to plan appropriate content for your presentation, but you should guard against it leading you to make unfounded assumptions about the audience as a whole.

4.3 The resources

Before you can plan the content of your presentation you should consider the resources available, as these affect how you organise your talk.

- What is the room like and where will you stand in relation to the audience?
- How is the seating arranged? If it's a small meeting, do you want to ask if it could be changed?
- What equipment is available? Should you bring your own laptop if there is a data projector?
- Is there a table where you can leave reference material for the audience to read? Do you want to find somewhere appropriate to display a poster?
- Should you prepare handouts to distribute at the end as a record of your talk?

Table 1 Presentation resources

Resource	Pros	Cons	Comments
Flipchart, whiteboard, blackboard	<p>Nothing much to go wrong.</p> <p>Chart pages can be kept as a record, or referred to again when summarising your talk or when taking comments and questions from the audience.</p>	<p>Your audience will get bored and distracted if you stand with your back to them and write out extensive notes.</p>	<p>Only useful for noting very brief points.</p> <p>Make sure you have the right type of pen for a whiteboard.</p>
Data projector and computer	<p>Good slides can be very effective and look professional. You can see the slides on your laptop screen.</p> <p>All you may need to bring is the slide show on a memory stick.</p>	<p>There may be unexpected conflicts between software versions.</p> <p>It can be tempting to allow the slides to dominate your presentation.</p>	<p>You may have difficulty getting a data projector to work with your laptop. Anxiety related to these sorts of problem can add substantially to your nerves.</p>
Overhead projector (OHP)	<p>You can pre-prepare the material and print out the acetates from your computer, or write directly onto acetates while speaking.</p>	<p>The projector fan can be noisy – it's best to turn the power off between slides.</p>	<p>You may occasionally still come across slide projectors and overhead projectors. These older technologies have their own inherent issues such as bulbs blowing and slides not fitting the carousel.</p>
Slide projector	<p>You have to stand where you can see the projection screen.</p>	<p>Can be temperamental. Make sure you load the slides in the carousel the right way round, and practise using the remote control before you begin.</p>	<p>Using any of these options can require much more preparation time.</p>

There is no doubt that using visual props such as the resources described in Table 1 can bring the content to life and also give you a little breathing space during your talk, which can be helpful especially in your first few presentations. And some topics are very difficult to

convey in words alone. A pre-prepared chart projected for all to see can easily take the place of a five-minute description.

However you may have experienced presentations where the talk centred entirely around a slide presentation. In effect, the slides take over the presentation – the speaker just reads from the screen, and may just as well have left the slide show to run on its own and not said a word. So do consider the advantages and drawbacks of these resources before you decide what to use. You may also want to have a contingency plan in case of equipment failure.

4.4 Selecting the content

Once you have taken into account the fixed elements as described above, you can give some serious thought to the content of your talk. The next few sections take you through shaping your content and organising your notes (see Figure 2).

Just as when you select material for a written assignment, a good first step is to consider what *must* be included in order to deliver what is promised by the title of your presentation. Aim to identify a series of points that will form the core of what you want to say. You could jot these down to give a content plan, either by listing them as a series of main headings or making them the central points in a mind map.

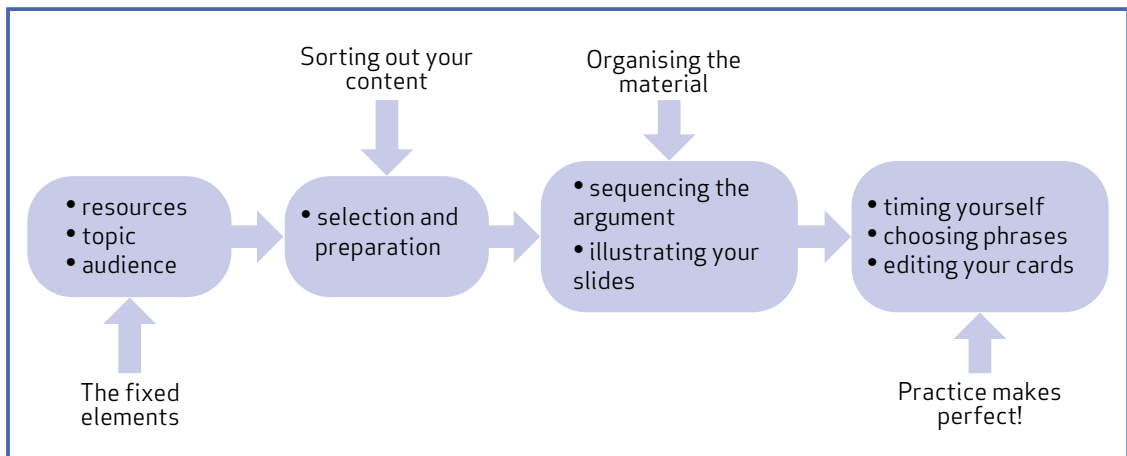


Figure 2 Planning your presentation includes several steps. Be prepared to revisit some of these steps as you make progress on your preparation

4.5 Preparing the content

Your content plan gives you a good basis for assembling the content of your talk. You can now begin to extend your plan from these essential points. Under each main heading, add the relevant points you want to make and note whether a supporting illustration would be beneficial. While doing this, keep in mind:

- the time available for your presentation – this will dictate the amount of detail and the number of examples you can include
- the audience's knowledge – this will help you decide where you need to include the most explanation and where you might particularly want to use slides to illustrate what you say.

It's probably a good idea to identify more content than you think you might use, as you will only be able to finalise the amount later by doing some timed practice runs. You could annotate your plan to show which points are essential, which are desirable and which are optional.

At this stage you may be very tempted to go another step and develop your notes into what amounts to a script for your presentation. However, unless you are prepared to learn it word for word, the only way to use such a script effectively would be to hold it up and read aloud from it, which is not the way to make a presentation. And trying to refer to a script now and then leads to a disjointed talk – you lose your place, spend too much time shuffling paper, and speak differently when you're reading to when you address the audience directly.

Even though the thought may be nerve-racking, the only way to make a presentation is to glance quickly at a brief note of each point you want to cover, which perhaps includes a few key words or phrases, and then rely on your communication skills to construct your sentences. That way you will be able to look at the audience and present yourself as well as the information. You'll get a feel for how they respond to what you say, so that – with practice – you'll be able to adapt and personalise your content as you go.

Making your notes on separate cards helps you to keep track of where you are – just put each card aside as you finish with it. If you use large writing you may be able to leave the cards on a table in front of you and just glance down at each one as necessary.

4.6 Organising your notes

Once you have selected and prepared the material for your talk you should go through it again to make sure it works.

Check:

- that the information you want to include is organised into a series of points
- that the sequence of points gives your talk a logical progression, without any gaps or duplication
- that you know which points to illustrate, and how.

Then start to transfer your notes onto cue cards.

- Have one card for the beginning – write out the first couple of sentences of your talk, introducing what you plan to cover.
- Have another card for the end – write out the last couple of sentences of your talk, summarising the most important point or re-stating your argument to give a strong conclusion.
- Add a series of cards for the talk itself – write out the heading for each point, adding a few key words or phrases that you want to make sure to use.

Mark the appropriate cue card where you have an accompanying slide or illustration.

Where you have a slide or other illustration to include it can be useful to mark the appropriate card as a reminder, for example by putting a coloured blob in the top corner.

Once your notes are organised then do check that your material still matches the title of your presentation and its aims. Ensure that the structure you have chosen will make sense to your audience – you may need to include ‘sign-post’ phrases to make it clear, for example, where points are linked or where you are making a comparison.

4.7 Illustrating your talk

Slides are best used to present material that is not easy to convey verbally. However, many speakers now use them instead of notes on cue cards to give an outline to the talk and act as prompts. If you do this, be sure to keep each point on the slide very brief and then interpret it in your own words while adding detail.

You can use slides for charts, photographs, diagrams or tables.

You can support your presentation with pre-prepared slides or acetates, or by making brief notes on a board or flipchart while you speak (see Table 1 on page 17). Other options for illustrating your talk include video, audio and live demonstrations.

You can use slides for charts, photographs, diagrams or comparison tables. They are an effective method of adding interest to your presentation, but they can be very time consuming to prepare. If produced with software such as PowerPoint, you will need a computer to prepare them and a data projector to present them. If you use photographic slides, you can load them manually into the carousel of a slide projector.

Each slide should have a clear heading, and the text should be large enough for everyone in the room to read, which in effect means that seven or eight lines of text are about the maximum per slide.

Be aware of other factors that could make your slides difficult to read, such as coloured text or backgrounds. In particular, some people cannot distinguish between red and green, so it is safest to stick to black text on a white background for most audiences.

You may be tempted to try and lighten the mood by including a cartoon or comic image in your slides, but don't jeopardise the quality of your presentation by using something inappropriate or in poor taste.



4.8 Practising the presentation

Try to practise delivering your talk as much as you can, especially if you haven't done a presentation for a while. Make sure that you feel comfortable when you practise. If you are worried about being overheard, choose a place that is private. The benefits of practising before the day are considerable. Some of these benefits are:

- You get used to the sound of your own voice in 'presentation mode'. Try to project your voice so everyone can hear you, and speak in a structured way without sounding too stiff. Use sentences rather than disjointed phrases, and try to avoid repeated use of annoying interjections like 'You know'. At first this is difficult, so the more you practise the better.
- You have the chance to choose which words and phrases you will use. Simple words, phrases and sentences are the most effective. Apart from the specialised terminology relevant to your topic there is no need to use elaborate vocabulary. A natural, conversational style is the most pleasant to listen to, so don't try to sound like a text book.
- You can time yourself over several runs to check whether you have the right amount of content. It is difficult to judge how much you can say in the allotted time, and it is bad form to over-run, especially in meetings or conferences where there are several speakers. Remember to account for time for questions at the end, if that is expected.
- Practising your presentation is the best way to get used to using notes on cue cards as prompts and for checking that the structure of your talk does work. After a practice run you may find yourself re-arranging points, leaving some out or adding to others.
- You can really consider whether your slides or acetates convey what you want them to. Do they add anything to what you have said? Will the audience be busy reading them rather than listening to you? Be ruthless and cull any that are dispensable.
- If the talk is really important then try to do a practice run with an audience of friends or family who will give you some honest feedback.

Remember to account for time for questions at the end, if that is expected.

4.9 Dealing with anxiety

Many people are apprehensive about giving presentations. However, as you have seen in earlier sections, presentation skills are helpful in many parts of your life and once you have started to develop them the idea of giving a presentation becomes less daunting.

*I knew I'd have to do oral exams in my language course and couldn't imagine how I'd manage to speak out while being assessed – and in a foreign language. My tutor advised me to practise in English first, by planning and then “presenting” something to a group of friends. In the end I made up a game with my family, like *Just a Minute* on the radio, where we took turns to speak on a topic we all knew something about. It was quite jokey but we all improved our confidence in speaking to a group. Now I just need to get to grips with the language aspect.*

OU tutors are keen to help students develop their skills, so giving your first presentation while you are a student should be a positive experience. Most of the students in your group probably have similar misgivings, and mutual support within the group can be a big factor in building confidence.

Last year in my course I was always very quiet at tutorials. Usually other students asked about the things I wanted to know so it was easy to keep a low profile. This year I'm doing really well and feel more confident. Before a tutorial I think about what I'd like to know, and although I feel myself going a bit red I do manage to ask a question, and even sometimes talk about which parts of the topic I understand and which I still find difficult. One of the other students asked if I'd exchange emails, as she thought I'd talked well about something she'd not understood.

Practising your talk beforehand is the most practical step you can take to improve your confidence, along with the knowledge that you have prepared and structured your talk well.



Visit www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy for more guidance on dealing with stress.

On the day of your presentation, once you have made full preparations, do not dwell on anxious thoughts. If others are making presentations too then note the differences between those speaking for the first time and those with more experience, and think about how exhilarating it will be when you are a confident speaker.

When it is your turn to speak, take a moment to arrange your notes and check that you have everything you need. Remember to pace yourself as you did when practising, and allow yourself to pause for a few seconds between each point, to take a few breaths and collect your thoughts before you move on.

As you become more experienced you'll find you can relax and speak more fluently. Moving around can also help you to relax – you could point out something on the screen, for example, or have some props to show to everyone. Props and demonstrations can be fun to use, but do make sure that they are large enough for everyone to see and that they do not divert attention away from the points you want to make.

After your presentation think about how you did and what you would like to improve next time. But don't agonise too much if some things didn't go to plan, as the audience didn't know what you should have done and probably didn't notice. If possible, arrange to do several talks within, say, a six-month period to have the best chance of consolidating your skills and improving your confidence.

5 Giving a presentation

Whether or not you have experience in giving presentations there are quite a few details to remember each time. The points below cover the circumstances you could find yourself in as a graduate student giving a seminar, or at an academic meeting or conference. Select the ones that are relevant to your circumstances from the following checklist.

5.1 Before the presentation

- Agree on a title for your talk, and the date, time and duration.
- Discuss the content with the organiser in general terms and ask about the audience – particularly their interests and level of knowledge. Take the opportunity to find out about the room layout and the resources available.
- The organiser may ask for information about you to use in an introduction. Supply a couple of brief paragraphs at most, giving some background to support your credentials in giving the talk.
- Plan to wear something comfortable and professional looking. Attention will be focused on you and you will feel better if your outfit is slightly too formal rather than too casual.
- Be prepared for extremes of temperature – perhaps wear a jacket that can be taken off.
- Have a back-up plan (or two) in case the technology fails. For example, if you're travelling to a meeting abroad then email the slides to yourself just in case your luggage is lost. In small meetings it can be reassuring to know that, if all else fails, a flipchart or a whiteboard is available.
- On the day, arrive early so that you have plenty of time to see the room and prepare yourself. You may find you have to move furniture around, get the data projector from a locked cupboard or ask for a flipchart paper refill.
- Where will you stand to speak? It is important to stand where everyone can see you and where you don't have your back to your audience for longer than absolutely necessary. Is there somewhere convenient to put your notes? Has a jug of water been provided?

- Mentally go through your presentation and check that everything you need is in place. Make sure the equipment you want to use is there, it works, and it does what you want it to. For example, if you plan to use overhead projector (OHP) acetates check that the projector is set up to focus on the screen and that you know where the on-off switch is.



5.2 The presentation

- Wait to be introduced by the organiser, then stand up and smile. Make a strong start by pausing until you have everyone's attention before you begin to speak.
- If you haven't been introduced then say who you are and give the title of your presentation.
- You may prefer that people attend to you rather than take notes. If so, announce that you have provided handouts to be distributed after the presentation.

Don't give handouts before the talk, as then all you will see will be the tops of heads as people busily read.

- Don't leave handouts where they might be picked up before the talk, as then all you will see will be the tops of heads as people busily read rather than listen.
- Say briefly what you plan to cover. Your first card has the opening sentence or two noted on it, so glance at it and then speak to the whole room.
- Even though you might catch the eye of someone nodding enthusiastically in support of what you say, be careful not to focus your gaze on just one or two members of the audience. Try to scan the room, relaxing and allowing your expression to change as you speak.
- Keep in mind the importance of how you present yourself. Does your body language contribute to the strength of your argument or detract from it? Is your tone of voice or pace of speaking monotonous?
- As you begin each new point, glance at your notes to remind yourself what to include and whether you have a slide or other supporting material to incorporate.
- As you finish each point, quickly check the card to make sure you haven't missed anything, then put it aside and go on to the next. Also take the opportunity to check that you're on track with regards to timing. Keeping a sense of timing and progress will help you to maintain a sense of control.
- At the end of your presentation use your last card to help you to summarise the main points or the argument you have made and then offer to answer any questions.
- The organiser may then take charge and select who poses each question, or you may be left to do this yourself. Be prepared to deal with questions that you can't answer – there's no point trying to fudge the issue, just say frankly that you don't know. You could offer to speak to the enquirer after the talk, to get back to them later, or you may be able to refer them to a book or journal.

5.3 After the presentation

- Remember to pass around your handouts if you agreed to do so, and make time to talk to any members of the audience who approach you. Someone may ask if they can contact you later, so decide beforehand how you feel about making your contact details available. An email address is a good compromise between practicality and security.
- Speak to the organiser to check whether they have any further requirements, and make sure to collect your notes, acetates, memory stick, etc.
- Try to find time to think over your talk and note any aspects you would change in future. If you know anyone in the audience, you could ask what they thought of the presentation – the presenter is not always in the best position to judge how it went. It helps to have someone confirm to you what went well, so you know which aspects *not* to change.

6 In conclusion

Many people don't learn presentation skills until they absolutely have to. But gaining these skills early can give a real boost to your study and your career, as well as adding to your self-confidence in many situations. You don't have to give presentations to find these skills useful, they are valuable every day – communications play an important role in all our lives.

As an OU student the methods you can use to communicate with your peers and your tutors are more varied than those at many universities, and a particular effort is made to promote a wide range of communication skills. You will find that they add a further valuable strand to your growing range of abilities.



The Open University

ISBN 978-0-7492-2919-1



9 780749 229191

ISBN 978-0-7492-2919-1