

Presentation skills

When to complete: February-April

Recommended time for completion: 2-3 hours

Date completed:

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Tips
3. Find out more
4. Where do I start
5. The purpose of the presentation
6. Who will be listening to the presentation?
7. Structure
8. How much time will I have?
9. Effective delivery
10. Engaging your audience
11. Answering questions
12. Putting it all together
13. Final points

1. Introduction

The ability to deliver effective and appropriate presentations is likely to be an important part of any higher education programme. For many people giving a presentation in front of others is a daunting task and something that is outside of their 'comfort zone'. Section F aims to help you to develop your confidence in your presentation skills.

Section F will provide you with hints and tips on making a successful presentation. Even if you aren't required to make a presentation as part of your university application process, you will be called upon to do so at some stage in your studies. Presentation skills are very important. Very few people are natural presenters, most of us have to work at developing presentation skills and confidence. The secret of a good presentation lies mainly in the preparation. Anyone who prepares properly can deliver a good presentation.

This section looks at planning presentations, speaking effectively, delivering messages effectively, engaging the audience, preparing to answer questions and being ready to deal with the unexpected. Try to practise these skills as much as you can during the access year, as it will stand you in good stead later.

2. Tips

Preparation and practice are the keys to effective presentation skills. You will find your own style, and this will vary anyway depending on the subject and the audience. You might find it helpful to do some of the exercises with classmates as this will help you to critically evaluate your own performance and those of others.

3. Find out more

Hopefully you will have one or two lecturers whose lessons are particularly enjoyable and effective. Try to observe their style and identify why it works so well. Perhaps you can think of examples of other public speakers who are particularly impressive – try watching recordings of their presentations to see what you can learn from their method of delivery.

4. Where do I start?

The first thing you must do is make sure you understand exactly what kind of presentation you are required to do. It may be part of an interview or a short presentation to others in your class as part of your Communications unit or an ‘expert’ talk where you have a particular area of expertise which will be useful to others. The core elements are the same no matter which kind of presentation you are doing. In the next few pages are some exercises on how to plan and write your presentation. You could do the exercises with a particular presentation in mind – for example, you might have one coming up at college – or you could pick a subject of your choice.

Exercise 1 (planning)

What is the purpose of the presentation?

What is the main theme of the presentation?

Who will be listening to the presentation?

How much time do I have for the presentation?

Do I have to leave time for questions?

Where will the presentation be done? Will it be possible to use PowerPoint or a flipchart? Will a microphone be needed?

When you are clear about the items listed above, you can start preparing.

5. The purpose of the presentation

This is key to the overall success of your talk. For example, if the content of your presentation is most important you have to make sure you have a good grasp of the main points and can communicate these effectively to your audience. If the purpose of the presentation is to judge how effectively you speak to a group, then the points for presentation can be minimal but the way in which you deliver them is important.

A word of warning about research. Many students think they have to do lots of research before they begin to prepare their presentation. While a good knowledge of your subject is vital, a presentation lasts only a short time and the amount of information your audience can digest is very limited. Imagine your knowledge is an iceberg and you will be presenting just the tip.

Once you've thought about your audience and the structure of your presentation (both of which we will explore later in this booklet) you will have a clearer idea of what content to include.

Exercise 2 (themes)

What am I going to talk about?

What key points do I want to make?

1.

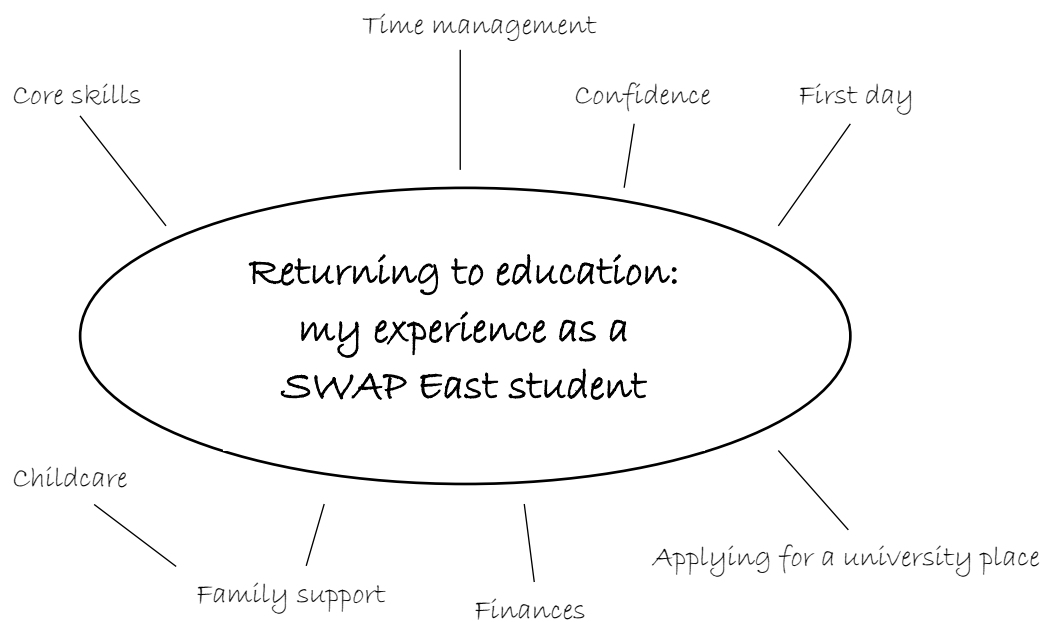
2.

3.

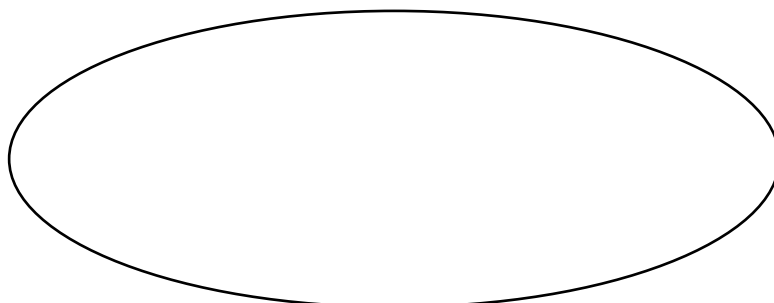
Spidergram

To decide on your key points, you may wish to use a spidergram. Put the theme of your talk in the middle and then write down any ideas that come to you around it. Read over all the ideas carefully and select the four which best fit your theme.

Example



Practice



6. Who will be listening to the presentation?

Now that you have decided on the key points of your talk, you have to think about the audience.

Who will they be?

How many of them will there be?

How much will they know about the subject?

What will they be expecting to get out of it?

The answers to those questions will determine the content, format and delivery of your talk. For example, if the audience knows nothing about the topic, you will have to provide some background. If the audience knows a lot about the subject then you can concentrate on getting your opinions across. If there are only three or four people listening (as in an interview for example) you do not have to worry about projecting your voice as much as if there were forty people. Of course, you still have to make yourself heard.

7. Structure

Here we will think about how to introduce and present your main points and how to conclude the presentation. The narrative approach where you have a beginning, middle and end is a good way to think about your presentation.

- ❖ Have a clear introduction which explains why you are making the presentation and sets out briefly what you will be talking about and in what order.
- ❖ Now, in the bulk of the presentation, state your points in detail.
- ❖ To finish, draw together the points you have made and present some brief conclusions. Make reference to the initial statements you made in your introduction, showing that you have dealt with everything you set out to.

In other words:

- ❖ Tell them what you're going to tell them.
- ❖ Tell them.
- ❖ Tell them what you've told them.

Structuring your main points

It is a good idea to think about how you present your main points. Here are a couple of structures you might want to apply to your own presentation.

Separate but equally weighted points

Lectures are often presented like this. Perhaps the points are presented in chronological order or in a logical progression with an exploration of for and against, before moving on to the next point. One point may not directly relate to the next.

_____ Point 1

_____ Point 2

_____ Point 3

Emphasising one main point and supporting it with secondary points

This structure works well when you have one main point or argument. Everything else you say will be in support of this point and you will refer back to it throughout the main body of your presentation. This works well when presenting to an audience that is knowledgeable about the subject.

_____ Main point

_____ Supporting point 1

_____ Supporting point 2

Overlapping points

This structure has separate points but they are all interconnect and would be referred to and cross-referenced throughout the presentation. It works well with informal talks to small audiences able to cope with the presentation of complex information.

_____ Point 1

_____ Point 2

_____ Point 3

Remember to signpost what part of the talk is coming next. Tell the audience that you are moving towards your final point or that you will spend a few minutes expanding on your last point before moving on to the next section. Audience attention levels fluctuate. A person is at their most attentive at the beginning of a presentation, so you may want to think about presenting your most important points early on. To raise flagging attention levels towards the end, tell the audience that you are nearly finished. This will refocus them. Try it yourself when in lectures. If you're tired or

losing concentration you'll be surprised at how you perk up when the lecturer tells you there is only one more point to deliver before the end.

8. How much time will I have?

This is the most critical factor of all. No matter how good your material is, if you do not allocate time properly to each section you won't make a coherent, complete and therefore effective presentation.

Exercise 3

As an example, imagine that you have twenty minutes allocated for your presentation. How will you divide the time? Fill in the chart.

Minutes allocated
Introduce yourself
Introduce the presentation
Key points of the presentation
Conclusion
Closing remarks

If there are to be questions from the audience remember to build in time for them. Also, be careful not to run over time. This is especially important if there are others waiting to give their presentations.

9. Effective delivery

Exercise 4

Which of the following will be most important in helping you deliver your presentation effectively?

- ❖ A clear speaking voice.
- ❖ A varied tone of voice.
- ❖ A confident manner.
- ❖ A good knowledge of the subject matter.
- ❖ Speaking without notes.
- ❖ A lot of practice beforehand.
- ❖ Good visual aids.

The most important of these is to put in a lot of practice beforehand. Practise with a friend, a member of your family and if all else fails, in front of the mirror. If you do this you will spot all those distracting habits speakers often have: standing on one foot, moving backwards and forwards, turning away from the audience while speaking. Practice is what will give you confidence and confidence means a successful delivery.

If you are confident you can then concentrate on making sure you are speaking clearly and distinctly. Whether you're using notes or reading from a script (either is fine – do whatever makes you feel comfortable) if you practise over and over beforehand you will be familiar with your material and it will sound fluent.

Most people worry about giving a presentation: even those with a lot of experience. Nerves are usually caused by a feeling of lack of control; a well practised talk puts you in control.

Visual aids are useful but not essential. If you are at all doubtful about your ability to use a visual aid, it's probably best to leave it. If your talk is short and well practised, your audience will not require them.

Remember to speak more slowly than you would normally, but not too slowly. Again, practice is the key.

10. Engaging your audience

One recommendation is that you focus on a single member of the audience and direct your talk to that person. This works well for a large audience but not a small one. If your audience is small, try to look at all members in turn and make each one feel you are directing the information to him or her. With a large audience you could also focus on people sitting at either end of a line of seats, sweeping your eyes across the people in the middle of the row as you alternate.

Remember, this is not a trial by jury! Your audience will be well disposed towards you and interested in what you have to say: take advantage of that.

One way to engage the attention of the audience is to have good opening. This may even be a joke, but make sure it is one the audience will laugh at! And be careful not to say anything which could cause offence.

If you are talking, even for a short time, you have to make use of repetition. Remember:

- ❖ Tell the audience what you are going to talk about.
- ❖ Give them the key facts (i.e. tell them).
- ❖ Then repeat (in a summarised form) what you have just told them.

11. Answering questions

If your talk is part of an interview you may be expected to answer some questions on what you have just said. If you have prepared well for your talk you should have no difficulty with this, but if there is anything you do not know or are unsure of, be honest. Don't try to make up an answer. This strategy will backfire, especially if your talk is a factual one. Answer questions briefly. Don't go into a long explanation. There isn't time for this. If the person asking the question isn't satisfied with your answer, he or she will ask another question.

12. Putting it all together

Exercise 5

You have been asked to give a twenty-minute presentation to your classmates on the following topic: *Why I decided to enrol on a SWAP East access programme*. Use the headings below to get started. Prepare as if you were really going to do this.

What is the purpose of the talk?

What is the main theme of the talk?

Who will I be speaking to?

How much time will I have?

Will I have to leave time for questions?

Will I use visual aids?

This may seem very straightforward, but if you get into the habit of answering these questions before you begin, it will help with the format of any presentations you do in the future.

Exercise 6

List the main points you want to make. (A spidergram might help you with this).

1

2

3

4

5

Exercise 7

How are you going to allocate the time? You have twenty minutes.

	Minutes allocated
Introduce yourself	
Introduce the presentation	
Key points of the presentation	
Conclusion	
Closing remarks	

13. Final points

The only way to become effective at doing presentations is to do them as often as you can. Use the ideas in this booklet and the notes you will have from your Communications class to help you. Try not to be nervous: it's easy for us to say that but if you prepare well and practise, what can go wrong? Your audience will be interested in what you have to say. If you still feel nervous, practise deep breathing. It's impossible to panic while at the same time concentrating on breathing slowly in and out – your body can't do both at once. As a mature student you should be able to organise a group session with others in your class to practise making presentations. Choose a topic acceptable to all of you and practise in the way suggested. Your time in college is very limited so you have to create opportunities for yourself. Effective spoken communication is a great asset for any student. And you can improve your skills in this area if you prepare well.