Timing

Getting your timing right is absolutely vital. If yours is one of a set of presentations, overrunning is discourteous to the other presenters. Good time-keeping demonstrates a professional approach and respect for your audience and fellow presenters.

If you only have a brief amount of time, convey a clear message by focusing on main points only. It can be hard to cut down a lot of work on a topic (for instance, your whole dissertation) to a few points. However, communicating a few ideas clearly is more effective than confusing the audience with a barrage of information. Remember that you can always expand in response to questions.

- Practise your presentation aloud.
- Try to speak clearly and at a natural pace.
- Don’t be tempted to speed up to fit things in – think in advance about what you could cut out if you’re overrunning.
- You can use pauses to emphasise important points or changes in subject.
- Pause for slightly longer than you think necessary – it won’t seem that long for the audience.

For more information....

See Presentations 1. Preparing your presentation.

See Presentations 2. Visual aids and poster presentations.


Study Advice and Maths Support

Delivering your presentation

Presentations 3

This guide advises on giving your presentation, including:

- Overcoming your nerves
- Engaging your audience
- Dealing with questions
- Timing

Overcoming your nerves

Most people are nervous about speaking in public. Often this is because they are unsure about what they will face, and how to deal with it. Being well prepared and taking control can help to defuse these concerns.

Practising your presentation will give you more confidence about your timings. If you’re using visual aids, check them carefully – make sure you are familiar with any technical equipment or have assistance.

If you are anxious that the audience will judge you, adopt a disguise! Dress more smartly than usual and play the role of a confident person for the day. Let them judge the disguise, not the real you.

If you are very nervous you may feel like you ought to apologise for this – or for other things like your accent, lack of time for preparation etc. It’s better not to do this – apologising shows lack of confidence and will cause your audience to feel anxiety too. Act confident, even if you don’t feel it. If you feel yourself getting anxious, take a few deep breaths, or have a sip of water - it’ll give you an excuse to stop for a moment.

For more on this and other aspects of academic study, see our website at www.reading.ac.uk/studyadvice

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Engaging your audience

You can get your audience on your side by making sure that they enjoy the presentation. If you look nervous, they will be uncomfortable and that will make you more nervous.

- Take control of the room – signal the start by introducing yourself, and the end by thanking the audience and sitting down. Smile – you will feel better instantly, and the audience will warm to you.
- Make eye contact – looking up and out at the audience will help you create a connection. If you find this difficult, have a friend sit in the audience – you can pretend you’re giving the presentation just to them and they can nod approvingly at you!
- Making eye contact also means you can check the audience’s reaction. If they are looking puzzled, you may want to slow down and explain more.
- Be aware of your body language. Standing up straight, facing the audience, and looking welcoming can make a big positive difference.
- It can be helpful to think about your speaking tendencies. Do you tend to talk too quietly, too quickly, or too flatly? Give your presentation to a friend and ask them to comment.

It’s tempting to write your presentation as if it were a script for you to read. Unless you are a practised actor, and know how to memorise and deliver a line perfectly, this rarely works. It looks more natural and sounds more interesting if you speak from brief notes – say three bullet points on each of your main points. Most importantly, always try to talk to your audience – not your slides or the screen on the wall!

Presenting posters

If your presentation is in the form of a poster, you will still be expected to ‘present’ the information. This usually means standing by the poster and being prepared to talk through the information and answer questions. You are more likely to be dealing with individuals or small groups.

It will still help to rehearse what you want to say, and think about the kind of questions people might ask and how you will respond. Have some information for people to take away – perhaps a small version of the poster, or a slip or card with the poster title, your name and email address if you don’t want to give away your results.

Dealing with questions

The prospect of people asking questions can be anxiety-provoking. It may help to think of questions as a dialogue with the audience, not an interrogation. People are usually genuinely interested and sympathetic, and want to find out more.

It is a good idea to prepare for questions. Think of likely topics or types of questions people may ask, and how you might answer them. You may drop a hint in your presentation, such as “you can ask me more about this later…” if there is a particular area you want questions on. Or get a friend to ask a question that will give you the chance to expand on something you’ve mentioned briefly.

When you’re answering, give yourself time to think by using phrases like “That’s a good question, I haven’t considered it that way before…”, or “Could I get back to you on that afterwards?” Remember that you are in charge – you can ask people to repeat the question if you haven’t heard it, or politely ask for clarification if you’re not sure you’ve understood it. You are the expert in your work, so keep control – but be open to discussion afterwards.

If there is a persistent questioner who keeps taking the floor, suggest that it might be better to continue that discussion afterwards, then ask if there are any other questions.

You might also want to think ahead about areas that you are concerned about. Prepare for questions about these. And don’t be afraid to say if you don’t know – you can open the question up to the audience: “What do other people think…?” or “Has anyone else had any experience of this…?”