



Faculty of Engineering
and Applied Science

TIPS FOR GIVING EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

In the following module you will learn the following:

- 1) Presentation basics: planning & organization
- 2) How to prepare effective slide content
- 3) Tips for delivering your talk in an engaging way

Every one of us knows the feeling of having experienced a great presentation. We also know the feeling of having experienced a really bad one. What makes the difference? **Audience engagement** makes all the difference. While not every presentation contains ground-breaking information, you can always find a way to engage your audience no matter what your topic. Some of the key features of an engaging presentation include:

- ✓ **Focus** – stick to supporting your core message and try not to get side-tracked
- ✓ **Good timing** - don't try to cram too much material into the allotted time
- ✓ **Clear language** - make your ideas as understandable as possible for the audience
- ✓ **Show enthusiasm** – always act and speak with passion for your topic

Here are some tips and guidelines to help you give engaging and effective presentations.

1. Presentation basics: planning and organization

To start preparing your presentation, it helps to think of your talk as a series of three main steps – the opening, the supporting body, and the wrap-up/conclusion (figure 1). Each of these steps must accomplish a task, and together these tasks should leave a lasting impression with your audience.



Figure 1: Presentation Basics - 3 steps

The Opening

This is where you introduce yourself and give the audience a brief overview of what you are about to present to them. Be sure to include a clear, plain language description of your topic and an agenda of what it is you are about to present to them.

Some things to consider:

- ✓ You will have limited time to make your points so don't overdo it with the introductions – Briefly state who you are and then get on to describing the motivation/purpose of the talk
- ✓ Include a concise and engaging title
- ✓ Add a slide that describes the agenda for the presentation; the “what to expect” list for your talk
- ✓ Add visuals that support your overall message and grab the audience's attention

The Support

The support section is where you provide all the details to support your main message. Remember that every detail of your project cannot and should not be recounted in a presentation. Concentrate on key information that supports the overall message.

Some things to consider:

- ✓ Present ideas in a logical flow, beginning with basic background info and building to conclusions
- ✓ Anticipate audience questions and provide answers to these within the presentation
- ✓ Provide visual aids that enhance understanding; avoid using them for decoration
- ✓ Present data in tables and figures, whenever possible
- ✓ Never over-complicate your ideas - keep language as simple as possible

The Wrap-up

This is where you provide the support section “highlights” and restate your overall message. Think of this section as your opportunity ensure the audience leaves with a clear idea of what was said.

Some things to consider:

- ✓ Don't just stop talking after the last piece of support info – it makes your talk feel unfinished
- ✓ Clue up with a final statement, conclusion, list of recommendations, etc.

2. Preparing your slide content

A Google search of “*How to prepare a Power Point presentation*” will reveal an overwhelming amount of “expert” advice, do's and don'ts, and Top 10 lists for you to consider. Often, this information may be contradictory and not relevant to your present situation. So what “rules” should you follow?

There is only one rule that you need to remember when preparing slide content and it can be summed up as one simple question. After you prepare each slide, ask yourself:

“Does this slide enhance audience understanding of my message?”

If the answer to this question is “No” or “I’m not sure” then you need to change something.

The following is a list of common slide preparation mistakes that **will not** enhance audience understanding:

- ✓ Using slides overloaded with text – these will immediately make the audience tune out
- ✓ Using decorative fonts – avoid these; they impede clarity
- ✓ Decorative visuals – unless the graphic aids in explaining your topic, it is distracting
- ✓ Axes labels/figure titles that are not readable – avoid this
- ✓ “Death by bullet point” presentations – make sure you alternate between slides with text and slides with visuals

Remember, if you fill your slides with text, the audience will either read them and not listen to you or tune out. You want to avoid both of these scenarios. Think, “Does filling my slides with text enhance my presentation?” The answer is “No,” so don’t do it!

For some examples of engaging engineering student presentations, [click here](#).

3. Delivering your presentation: Engaging your audience

It is important that you do not fall into the trap of thinking that the slides are the most important part of a presentation; this is not true. A presentation consisting of attractive slides, full of visuals and catchy transitions, will fail to impress an audience if the presenter lacks knowledge, enthusiasm, and preparedness. It is essential to embrace the fact that **YOU are the presentation**. The slides should be thought of and used as props to help the audience understand.

It is very difficult for those not connected to the material to appreciate your message if you simply read off the slides or from notes. Here are some points to help you deliver an effective presentation:

- ✓ Nervousness is ok. It shows that you are human. Just learn to control it as much as possible. The more often you present, the easier it becomes. **Learn about how to become a more confident speaker [here](#).**
- ✓ Practice as often as possible
- ✓ Try not to talk too fast
- ✓ Get a handle on your body language when presenting. If you exhibit distracting behaviours or speech patterns (um’s, ah’s, awkward pauses or gestures, etc.), you can learn to control these. But you need to be aware of them first. Often your peers won’t say anything for fear of insulting you so try recording yourself during a practice run.

Communications expert Melissa Marshall has a great take on how to create engaging scientific presentations. She has given talks to audiences around the world about how scientists and engineers can make their ideas more accessible to others. You can read her blog containing speaking tips and a video about this topic [here](#).