Poster presentations

Aims and Objectives

This guide presents a strategy for producing poster presentations that encourages clarity as well as creativity, helping you to make the most of your poster design.

Introduction

Posters are often used to share information and are an important part of many conferences, seminars and exhibitions. They may be used to present quite complex material, and so it is important that the information on them is well laid out, legible and attractively presented.

General points about posters

Poster presenters are usually offered a large area to display their material (typically $1m^2$ or 2m by 1m).

Posters are usually read at a viewing distance of more than one metre. You will need to make sure that your poster is legible and easy to scan at this distance so that your information is understood quickly.

The temptation to fill the space with as much material as possible should be avoided; poster presentations should never be as dense as a printed page.

Many seminar or workshops organisers supply guidelines suggesting suitable typeface styles and sizes, along with conventions for titles and subheadings. Use these to guide your basic poster design.
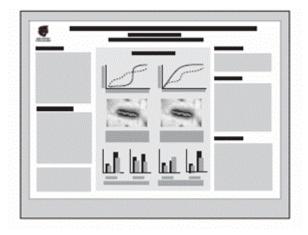
When making posters it is essential that you give careful consideration to their visual appearance as well as their content.

Methods of making posters

There are two popular approaches to making a poster.

Approach One - One-piece method

The presenter chooses to design the poster in one large piece (Figure 1). The design is prepared using a versatile software application such as Microsoft Powerpoint It is designed and produced in A3 or A4 size and is then enlarged at the printout stage.

(Figure 1:One-piece method)

(Note: producing one-piece posters can take a little while to get used to. Make sure you start working on your first poster in plenty of time. Using a template could save you some time)

Approach Two - Panel method

The allocated poster area is divided up into a number of separate panels (Figure 2). These may consist of different elements such as text, pictures, tables or titles.

(Figure 2: Panel method)

Standard word-processor or presentation software, e.g. Microsoft Word or Powerpoint is used to prepare the panels which are then mounted onto a background. Laminating the individual elements can improve their appearance and robustness.

Choose the production method that is most appropriate to your needs, abilities and resources. The panel method allows for greater flexibility and can be adapted to changing layouts. The one-piece method can be very eye-catching, making your poster stand out from the rest.

Stages in producing a poster
Step One – Choosing content

The first step is to clarify the task that you have been set and the type of information that you will need to include on your poster. The following questions are useful reminders of the range of factors that you might need to consider before you start writing the text of your poster.

- What is the purpose of your poster – to report findings, present an argument, convince an audience or promote a product?
- Who will be looking at your poster – a specialist audience, the general public, other students?
- What will your audience be looking for – detailed information or a brief summary?
- Where will your poster be displayed – in a busy conference hall or in your department?
- Are there any guidelines governing the content of your poster? These might specify the nature and structure of the material to be displayed (as well as practical issues such as the size of the poster and the size and amount of text to be used).
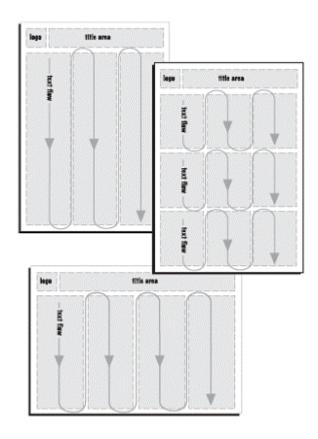
The answers to these questions will influence the nature and amount of material that you display. If you think that you are including too much information in your display, think about what could be taken out; remember that 'less' is often 'more' in visual displays.

Step Two – Making a plan

Once you have decided on the content of your poster, you need to consider the way the information should be displayed. A useful starting point is to prepare an outline plan that will help you make the most effective use of the space available to you.

Structure

Your overall structure should be clear and logical so that the viewer's eye naturally follows the flow of information in your display. To help establish a clear sequence of information, think about planning your poster on a grid system as in the diagram on the following page (Figure 3).

(Figure 3: Grid systems)

As you can see, the grids help break down the large space into convenient sized areas. Also, two main visual sequences become apparent: rows travelling across the page or columns travelling down the page. These natural 'pathways' can be used to structure your information in both panel and one-piece poster displays, guiding your reader's eye through your information in a logical and fluid way.

Using a grid system, try producing a rough sketch of your poster layout working in a reduced scale to get a feel for how you might assemble your information in the final display. Use a pencil and some scrap paper to help you think freely and experiment with different designs.

Developing your poster design

Once you have established a basic layout for your poster, try printing out rough versions of the text and use scissors and glue to move things around. This can be used to experiment with different sequences and spacings and will help you gauge the amount of information needed for an effective display.

Step Three - Preparing your final poster

When you have a fairly good idea of where you want things to go, you can start to prepare your final poster. If you are aware of a few design principles as you prepare your material, you are more likely to achieve good results. Sticking to the following

rules will help you produce an effective poster. Once you have more experience of poster production you can become more adventurous.

Using text

Once you have written your text, you need to choose how to present it. There are five main variables to consider.

- **Font** - choose a font that is easy to read at a distance. Most of the standard fonts are fine for this (e.g. Helvetica, Palatino, Times). Avoid mixing too many fonts as this can look messy. Two is often ideal; one for the headings and one for the main text.
- **Type size** - remember that your poster will be read by someone standing at about a metre away so the text will need to be legible at a distance. Use large type sizes; the following examples are at 24 point and 36 point and can be clearly read at a distance. Titles and headings will need to be larger than your main text. Developing a hierarchy of type sizes can help to differentiate between your main body text and the other text elements in your poster. Keep the number of type sizes to a minimum to avoid over-cluttering your poster. Apply your hierarchy to all aspects of your poster design to ensure consistency.
- **Line spacing or 'leading'** - using one and a half or double spacing between lines of text greatly increases the legibility of your poster design.
- **Alignment** - most word-processing packages give you the option of aligning your text in different ways on the page; the main choices are left, right, centre and justified. Avoid mixing alignments as this can look very awkward. Left aligned is the easiest to read, particularly when using large type.
- **Case** - text in UPPER CASE can be very difficult to read, even at close distances, and is best avoided.

Colour palette

Colour can add an extra dimension to your poster design, making a poster more attractive and giving you another method of highlighting particular aspects of your information. Choose colours that work well together so that they don't detract from the information in your display. It is sensible to use a small range of colours so that your poster doesn't look chaotic.

Diagrams

Displaying information on a poster gives you an opportunity to represent your data in an interesting and eye-catching way. Think about how your display can be enhanced through the use of illustrations, tables, charts or photographs. The inclusion of one carefully chosen image can be a very powerful way of drawing people's attention to your poster.

Step Four - Showing your poster

Poster presentations can take many forms. Sometimes you will be asked to stand next to your poster, talking to people as they browse and answering questions about your

work. At other times, your poster will simply need to 'stand alone' as part of a general display. It might be useful to think about how you can help an interested reader take information away from your poster: printing off A4 copies of one-piece posters or producing bullet-point summaries of panel posters are very effective ways of sharing your information.

Summary

Posters are a highly visual medium and can be a very effective way of communicating information to a wide audience. The challenge is to produce a poster design that is both pleasing to the eye and logical to the mind. Time taken to produce a coherent and creative display can produce stunning results.

Delivering an effective presentation

Introduction

An effective presenter needs to be flexible, energetic and enthusiastic. This guide will help you turn your written presentation into an imaginative public performance.

Presentation as performance

Making a presentation puts you on public display. An audience not only listens to your ideas, it also responds to the way you use your voice and your body. You need more than a well written presentation to make an impact. You will also need to deliver it in a lively, flexible and interesting way. In this leaflet we suggest many ideas for invoking energy in your presentation style.

To begin with, imagine that you are in the audience for your presentation. What might:

- grab your attention?
- stimulate your imagination?
- inspire your confidence?
- develop your understanding?

Now think about ways to encourage these things.

Now follow the six steps to becoming an effective presenter

1. Practise

The more familiar you are with your material the more you will be able to inspire your audience's trust and confidence. Do more than practise reading through your material to yourself. If possible, stand up in a room and deliver your presentation to the walls. Get used to hearing your own voice filling a room. Familiarise yourself with the words and phrases in your presentation. Play around with different volumes and see how well you can hear your own voice. Above all, familiarise yourself with the main thrust of your

argument and explore how the individual elements of your presentation piece together. This will help you to keep to your chosen objectives and avoid distractions when it comes to your actual delivery.

To read or to learn?

Should you read out your presentation from detailed notes or present it completely from memory? Find a way to compromise between these two approaches. There are dangers in each.

Reading

Reading tends to focus your thoughts on your notes, thus losing contact with your audience. Reading can also reduce your voice to a monotone, removing energy and enthusiasm from your delivery. Directly addressing your audience is much more engaging.

Learning

Learning is fine until you lose your way; for example, a member of the audience asks a question or your overhead projector bulb blows. Always have some form of notes to keep you on the right track. Also, if you over learn your notes you might lose a sense of energy and enthusiasm. Always work for a sense of confident spontaneity.

Find a way of making notes to support your presentation style. The most common form of note making is to use index cards. These can be read at a glance. Use them as visual prompts to guide you through your presentation. Use one card for each main idea, including details of the supporting information for each point. Connect your cards together with a tag or a piece of string so that they can't get out of order.

2. Assert yourself

An effective presenter needs to be assertive, not aggressive. There are two important Ps.

Posture

It is important to appear confident at all times. Different postures create different moods. A very formal, upright and still posture will create a very different atmosphere from a relaxed and active one. Remember to match your physical behaviour to the objectives underpinning your presentation. If you want to be either formal or informal, make deliberate choices about your physical style and stick to these.

Presence

Have the confidence to fill your space in front of an audience. Avoid apologising for your presence by saying "sorry" (although you must be polite if circumstances so demand e.g. the session is running over time, or the microphone has stopped working). Also, avoid physical apologies by hiding behind a desk or lectern. You must be confident that the audience wants to listen and that you have something interesting to tell them. Don't be

afraid to wait for an audience to settle down before you start speaking or to ask for quiet if this does not happen.

3. Make contact with your audience

One of the key challenges faced by the presenter is to establish links with her/his audience (a poor presenter appears to be speaking to an empty room). Making contact helps to maintain an audience's interest and encourages them to believe that you are genuinely interested in talking to them. You can make contact with your audience in a number of ways, including:

- eye contact;
- gestures;
- spoken contact;
- your use of language.

Eye contact

Eye contact is part of everyday communication and an audience can feel uncomfortable if they are denied it. Making eye contact with individuals gives them a sense of involvement in your presentation and helps to convey your objectives on a personal level. Make sure that you share eye contact with all members of a small audience and all areas of a large audience. Regularly shift your focus around the room, not so that you look nervous, but to help involve as many people as possible in your talk.

A handy tip: if you can't make eye contact in a large group, don't look at the floor or ceiling (this looks like boredom or rudeness). Try looking at people's foreheads. The people sat around them will read this as eye contact even if the individual won't.

Gesture

People use their arms and hands in every day conversation to add emphasis or to help describe events. Presenters will therefore look rather awkward if they keep their hands in their pockets or rooted firmly at their sides. Use gestures to welcome your audience, to add emphasis to your main points or to indicate an ending. Try to use open gestures which move away from your body, extending them out to your audience. This helps to break any audience/presenter divisions. Make sure that all gestures are controlled and precise; too much movement will appear nervous and unfocussed. Always watch against distracting your audience from the content of your presentation. You should continually be trying to find ways to help them listen and understand.

Spoken contact

Acknowledge your audience by making verbal contact with them. At the beginning of your talk ask if they can see and hear you, or check that lighting and sound levels on audio-visual equipment are satisfactory. During your presentation, ask rhetorical questions that you can then answer (e.g. "How do we know this was true?" or "So, what

does this prove?"). At the end of your talk give the audience an opportunity to ask questions or to clarify detail - this encourages them to take ownership of your material.

The use of questions is an important tool. Questions involve your audience's mind in a more stimulating way than simply asking them to sit and listen to your talk. Draw an audience in with clear, focused questions.

Language

Your use of language is particularly important in developing and sustaining a relationship with your audience. Try using language that involves your audience. For example, asking questions such as "What can *we* learn from this?" or "How did *we* arrive at this conclusion?" involves your audience in an exploratory process or discussion. When looking at visual aids, introduce them by saying "If *we* look at this slide we can see that ..." or "This slide shows *us* that...". Use language that is welcoming and involving throughout your presentation.

4. Use your voice

Your voice is a very flexible and powerful tool. You can use it in many different ways by varying the:

- volume;
- pace;
- pitch.

Volume

Make sure that your voice is loud enough for your audience to hear clearly. Speaking too loudly or too quietly can make it difficult for your audience to follow your presentation. Listen to people speaking in normal conversation. They tend to raise or lower their volume for emphasis. For example, they may speak loudly when giving an instruction but softly when apologising. To add energy to your presentation, use these colourful changes to your best advantage: a conspiratorial whisper can draw an audience in; a loudly spoken exclamation can make them sit up and listen.

Pace

Make sure that the speed of your delivery is easy to follow. If you speak too quickly or too slowly your audience will have difficulty following your talk. To add life to your presentation, try changing the pace of your delivery. A slightly faster section might convey enthusiasm. A slightly slower one might add emphasis or caution.

Pitch

The pitch of your voice also varies in day to day conversation and it is important to play on this when making a presentation. For example, your pitch will rise when asking a question; it will lower when you wish to sound severe.

Play around with the volume, pace and pitch of your voice when practising your presentation. Find different ways of saying the same sentence. Explore different ways of adding emphasis to your main points. Always try to convey enthusiasm and energy through your use of your voice.

5. Breathe

Always remember to breathe steadily and deeply. If you are anxious about making a presentation your breathing will become fast and shallow. This will affect the quality of your voice and your ability to speak clearly for extended periods of time. Try to take a few deep breaths before you make your presentation, making a conscious effort to slow your breathing down and taking in more air with each breath. During your presentation, use pauses after questions or at the end of sections to allow comfortable breathing patterns. Don't be afraid to slow down the pace of your presentation if your breathing becomes uncomfortable.

6. Drink

It is a good idea to have some liquid to hand to quench your thirst if you are speaking for a long time. However, be careful not to gulp ice-cold water before you go on as this constricts your throat and affects the quality of your voice. Drink a warm (not hot) cup of tea to relax your throat and ease your speaking voice.

And finally ... a note about humour

Only use humour if you know it will work. Humour needs to be relaxed and confident - if used badly, it will only heighten senses of awkwardness and anxiety if these are already present. Use humour if you know you can and if you feel it is appropriate to do so.

Conclusion

Continually explore your personal style using any or all of the above suggestions in different combinations for different effects. Above all, remember two main points:

- be yourself— even in the most formal of surroundings you will need to be yourself. No one will be impressed if you try to perform like a classical actor or act like a stand-up comedian;
- avoid any behaviour that might be off-putting to your audience— always be deliberate and clear in your use of your voice and physical actions.

Using visual images can also increase the impact of your presentation.

Planning an effective presentation

Aims and Objectives

This study guide offers you an insight into the process of planning an effective presentation. It focuses on the importance of the presenter's relationship with the audience and suggests key strategies for making an impact.

What is an effective presentation?

An effective presentation makes the best use of the relationship between the presenter and the audience. It takes full consideration of the audience's needs in order to capture their interest, develop their understanding, inspire their confidence and achieve the presenter's objectives.

Careful planning is essential.

Now follow the seven stages in planning a presentation

1. Preparation

Many factors affect the design of your presentation. A powerful presenter will acknowledge and address each of the following:

- objectives;
- audience;
- venue;
- remit.

Objectives

Why you are making your presentation? Bear in mind what you want to achieve and what you want your audience to take away with them. Once you have decided upon your objectives, you are in a much better position to make strategic decisions about the design and tone of your presentation. For example, a presentation to a seminar group might require a balanced argument, whereas a charity appeal might require a more creative approach. Ask yourself:

- what do you want your audience to have understood?
- what action do you want your audience to take following your presentation?
- how can you best design your presentation to meet your objectives?

Audience

Your audience will have a variety of different experiences, interests and levels of knowledge. A powerful presenter will need to acknowledge these and prepare for and respond to them accordingly. Ask yourself:

- how much will your audience already know about your topic?
- how can you link new material to things they might already understand?
- will you need to win them over to a particular point of view?

You may not be able to answer these questions for each member of your audience but you should have enough information to ensure that you have targeted your material at the right level for their needs. This might involve avoiding technical jargon or explaining abstract concepts with clear practical examples. If you fail to consider your audience's needs, you will fail to appeal to their interest and imagination.

Venue

Where will you be making your presentation? What will the room be like? What atmosphere will the physical conditions create? A large lecture theatre might create a formal atmosphere. Similarly, a seminar room might create a less formal tone. Ask yourself:

- what kind of atmosphere do you wish to create?
- how might the room arrangement affect your relationship with the audience?
- can you do anything to change the arrangement of the room to suit your objectives?
- what audio-visual aids can you use?

Remit

You may well have been given a remit for your presentation; you will need to stick to this. For example, you may have been asked to present a paper at a conference in a certain style or meet certain assessment criteria on your course. Ask yourself:

- how much time have you been allocated?
- are you required to stick to a common format or style?
- have any guidelines been set regarding the content of your presentation (i.e. a predetermined title, or a fixed number of overhead transparencies)?

2. Choosing your main points

Once you have thought about the design of your presentation, you can define your main points. Try presenting no more than three main points in a ten minute presentation. Always allow time for an adequate introduction and conclusion. It is difficult for an audience to follow a more complex argument without significant help from the presenter. A powerful presentation delivers information in a logical, structured manner, building on the previous point and avoiding large jumps in sequence. Ask yourself:

- what are the main points you wish to make?
- are these points structured in a logical, coherent way?
- do these main points reflect your own objectives and take account of the needs of your audience?

3. Choosing your supporting information

The supporting information helps your audience understand, believe in and agree with your main points. This evidence might take the form of factual data, points of detail or an explanation of process. It might be presented in imaginative ways using diagrams, pictures or video segments. Think about:

- what will add *clarity* to your argument (explaining complex terms, reminding your audience of any supporting theories)?
- what will add *authority* to your argument (making connections with other people's work, quoting experts, offering evidence from your own research)?
- what will add *colour* to your argument (showing a video clip or a slide, using a
practical example or a vibrant analogy)?

4. Establishing linking statements

The next stage is to develop the linear flow of your presentation. This can be achieved by using linking statements to show clearly how your main points fit together. Common linking statements include:

- *"The next stage in our project was to …";*
- *"Another important issue of consideration was …";*
- *"By following this argument we can now see that …".*

Linking statements send signals to your audience, highlighting the next point in your argument, linking to earlier ideas or clarifying the stage you have reached in your argument overall. This may be of particular importance in a lengthy presentation where even the most effective presenter has to work hard to keep an audience involved.

5. Developing an opening

The introduction to your presentation is crucial. It is your first point of contact with your audience; you can either capture or lose your audience's interest in a matter of seconds. Use your introduction to lay a clear foundation for the presentation to follow. Try using the following structure:

- introduce yourself;
- state *what* you will be talking about (a title or subject area);
- state *how* you will be talking about it (e.g. by comparing test results or reviewing the supporting literature);
- state what you intend to be the outcome of your presentation (an informed group, a lively discussion);
- state what you expect your audience to do (listen, take notes, read a handout, ask questions before/during/after).

Always give your audience a moment to absorb this information before moving into your first main point.

6. Developing a conclusion

Your conclusion is another important stage in your presentation. You can use it to remind your audience of your main points, draw these points to a stimulating conclusion and leave your audience with a lasting impression of the quality of your presentation. The following structure provides a powerful conclusion:

- a review of your title or subject area
  "In this presentation I wanted to explore the relationship between X and Y.";
- a summary of your main points
  "We have discussed the following points…";
- a summary of the process you have been through
  "By looking at X we have found that Y …";
- a conclusion clearly drawn from your main points (this must be supported by the detail of your presentation)
  "It is clear that there can be no substantive relationship between X and Y";
- a parting statement to stimulate your audience's thoughts (this might be a question or a bold comment).

7. Reviewing your presentation

Once you have written your presentation make sure that you review its content. Ask yourself:

- does the presentation meet your objectives?
- is it logically structured?
- have you targeted the material at the right level for your audience?
- is the presentation too long or too short?

Structuring a presentation

Aims and Objectives

This guide discusses practical strategies for structuring a presentation, focusing on the need to develop an argument or report through the clear, logical progression of ideas.

Presentation structure

Presentations need to be very straightforward and logical. It is important that you avoid complex structures and focus on the need to explain and discuss your work clearly. An ideal structure for a presentation includes:

- a welcoming and informative introduction;
- a coherent series of main points presented in a logical sequence;
- a lucid and purposeful conclusion.

These elements are discussed below.

The introduction

The introduction is the point at which the presenter explains the content and purpose of the presentation. This is a vitally important part of your talk as you will need to gain the audience's interest and confidence. Key elements of an effective introduction include:

- a positive start: "Good afternoon, my name is Adam and …";
- a statement of what will be discussed: "I am going to explore …";
- a statement of the treatment to be applied to the topic (e.g. to compare, contrast, evaluate, describe): "I will be comparing the four main principles of …";
- a statement of the outcomes of the presentation: "I hope this will provide us with …";
- a statement of what the audience will need to do (e.g. when they can ask questions or whether or not they will need to take notes): "I will pass round a handout that summarises my presentation before taking questions at the end."

You should aim to deliver your introduction confidently (wait until the audience is quiet before you start speaking) and communicate energy and enthusiasm for your topic.

Main points

The main points are the backbone of your talk. They play an important role in helping you prioritise, focus and sequence your information. When planning your presentation you should put aside your research notes and produce a list or summary of the main points that you would like to make, expressing each in a few words or a short sentence. Ask yourself: "what am I really telling them? What should they be learning here?". Your answers to these questions will help you communicate clear and effective messages to your audience.

After you have identified your main points, you should embellish them with supporting information. For example, add clarity to your argument through the use of diagrams, illustrate a link between theory and practice, or substantiate your claims with appropriate data. Use the supporting information to add colour and interest to your talk, but avoid detracting from the clarity of your main points by overburdening them with too much detail.

Transitions

Transitions are the signposts that help the audience navigate their way through your presentation. They can help divide information up into sub-sections, link different aspects of your talk and show progression through your topic. Importantly, transitions draw the audience's attention to the process of the presentation as well as its content. Examples include:

- "I will begin by discussing …";
- "Now that we have explored the … I would like to move on to …";

- "In contrast to my earlier statements concerning …";
- "Moving away from a focus on ….";

Transitions can also be made without speaking. Non-verbal transitions include pausing, changing a slide or other visual aid, moving to a different area of the room before resuming speaking, or making eye contact with a different group in the audience.

The Conclusion

The conclusion is an essential though frequently underdeveloped section of a presentation. This is the stage at which you can summarise the content and purpose of your talk, offer an overview of what has been achieved and make a lasting impact. Important elements of a conclusion are:

- a review of the topic and purpose of your presentation: "In this presentation I wanted to explore …";
- a statement of the conclusions or recommendations to be drawn from your work: "I hope to have been able to show that the effect of ….";
- an indication of the next stages (what might be done to take this work further?): "This does of course highlight the need for further research in the area of …";
- an instruction as to what happens next (questions, discussion or group work?): "I would now like to give you the opportunity to ask questions …";
- a thank you to the audience for their attention and participation: "That's all I have time for. Thank you very much for listening."

As with your introduction, you should try to address the audience directly during your conclusion, consolidating the impression of a confident and useful presentation.

Summary

A presentation needs a carefully defined structure to make the most impact. This should centre on a series of identifiable main points that are supported by appropriate detail. Use transitions to link and move between points, helping your audience to understand the development or your argument. An introduction and conclusion are essential elements of your presentation. They enable you to establish a clear purpose for your talk at the start and summarise your main points before you finish speaking.

Keeping to time in presentations

This guide offers practical strategies for keeping your presentation within a given time limit.

Introduction

A time restriction is a common feature of most student presentations as well as those in the professional/work context. You will either be allotted a time for speaking and a time

for questions or an overall timeslot for both. Keeping to time shows respect for your audience and ensures that you deliver a focused presentation that makes an impact.

What goes wrong?

Time limits are frequently exceeded for two main reasons:

- the presenter has tried to incorporate too much information for the time allowed;
- the process of presenting (e.g. speaking, distributing handouts, using visual aids) has simply taken more time than the presenter had planned for.

Managing the content

When planning your presentation, it is important to understand what can be achieved in the allocated time. Remember that you cannot communicate the same amount of information in a presentation that you can in a written report or essay.

Planning

It is important to prioritise your information at an early stage in the planning process. When planning your presentation, put aside your notes and write a simple outline of your talk. This outline should be based on a series of main points structured in a logical order. Make sure that you can express each of the key points in a few words or a simple sentence. If you cannot do this it is likely that you still haven't found a precise focus for your presentation. Remember that a clear focus enhances the impact of your talk.

When you have identified your main points, you can move on to illustrate your argument with appropriate supporting information. Choose the supporting detail for each main point carefully to find one or two examples that make a real impact and will be remembered. A wealth of less illuminating detail will be much less effective.

Finally, plan to open and close your presentation with a strong introduction and conclusion. Although these sections will demand time if they are to be effective, and thus further limit the amount of information that you can include, they are essential elements of effective presentations and should not be ignored.

Flexibility

If you have written your presentation as a complete script you will find it hard to adapt and reduce the content as you deliver your material. However, if you have adopted the planning structure outlined above, you will be better able to produce a flexible presentation that can be shaped according to the time that you have available. If you need to reduce the length of your presentation, for whatever reason, you should be able to shorten the introduction, deliver the main points without some/all of the supporting detail and deliver a truncated conclusion.

Managing the performance

Many presenters run out of time because they have not taken all aspects of their performance into account when planning and rehearsing their presentation. When planning your performance you will need to include time to:

- get settled in front of your audience in order to prepare your visual aids, notes etc. before you start talking;
- distribute handouts at the start/during/end of your talk;
- develop points in more detail if it appears that your audience hasn't understood an area of your talk;
- accommodate any slight deviations from your script that you might make 'off the cuff';
- respond to questions whilst you're speaking and after you've finished;
  work with your visual aids (change slides, annotate images etc.);
- accommodate any pauses whilst you review your notes / allow your audience time to think between main points.

The delivery of your presentation will need to be controlled and well-paced to achieve the best impact. If you have not allowed time for the different elements of your performance, your presentation will appear rushed and congested.

Planning your use of time

It is important that when you have written the content of your presentation, you map out how it will be delivered. This should include, for example, a clear plan of when you'll be giving out handouts, where you'll be taking questions and the precise moment at which you'll be changing visual aids. This will help make these elements of your presentation appear more purposeful as well as ensuring that you allocate time for such non-spoken aspects of delivery. Many presenters mark such features on the script of their presentation so that they are all included in the final performance (much as a play script includes stage directions to remind the actors what to do and when to do it).

When practising your presentation, try to replicate the actual delivery as closely as possible. Simply running through the words in your head is not enough to accommodate all aspects of the performance. Ideally, try the presentation out in a seminar room or lecture theatre where you can practise integrating all the elements of your talk, and time the whole thing. If this is impossible, rehearse out loud, pausing where you would need time for other activities.

Cutting time

Even though you may run to time in rehearsal it is still important to leave a few minutes spare for the actual presentation. The impact of nerves and any interaction with your audience will take up more time than you'd think. It is safer to plan to be a little under time to make sure you can accommodate all aspects of your talk and avoid rushing.

If you have followed the above advice about structuring your presentation around main points and supporting information, it should be fairly easy to reduce the length of your presentation. To save a small amount of time, cut out some of the supporting detail. To save larger amounts, review your main points and reduce these in number. Never try

speeding up the pace of delivery; this appears amateurish and seriously affects any impact that you may be trying to make.

Managing the 'mental clock'

Many presenters rely on their own mental awareness of time passing to keep themselves to time. Unless you are a very experienced presenter, this rarely works in practice (it is not unusual for a presenter to feel that they've only spoken for 5 minutes when in fact they took closer to 15). Always refer to a clock at the back of the room to keep a track of time. Alternatively, prop your wristwatch up on the desk in front of you to avoid having to glance down at your wrist. Time your delivery in rehearsal and make a note on your script where you should have reached in 5, 10, 15 minutes etc. If it looks like you're running out of time, pause for a moment to review what you can realistically achieve in the last moments. Always remember to include a conclusion, no matter how brief. This is where you make a lasting impression on your audience and is a vital part of your success as a presenter.

Summary

Keeping to time requires that you carefully prioritise information for inclusion in your presentation and plan each element of your delivery carefully (i.e. the script, your use of visual aids, questions from the audience). Rehearse your presentation thoroughly so that you have a clear idea of how the different elements fit together and can gauge how much time you should allocate to each. When delivering your presentation, keep an eye on the passage of time and be able to adjust your presentation accordingly. The more experienced you become, the more skilled you will be at determining the amount of information that can be included in a given time slot. However, even this isn't fail-proof and you should always rehearse carefully to ensure that you keep to time.

Presenting to large groups

Aims and Objectives

This guide addresses the key difficulties associated with speaking to large groups, offering creative and practical solutions for making powerful presentations.

Introduction

Large groups can be a challenge to even the most experienced of presenters. Anxieties can arise from:

- the lack of contact with the audience;
- an increased fear of making mistakes;
- the difficulty in assessing whether or not the audience has understood and valued the presentation.

Yet, despite these concerns, making presentations to large groups can be a very rewarding experience, particularly if you approach the task with imagination and enthusiasm. This Study Guide presents many practical suggestions for speaking to large groups, encouraging you to develop strategies to overcome the problems and develop an effective speaking style.

Strategy one: preparation

The presenter's tools of eye contact, body language and voice work that succeed with small groups can become less effective in large group settings. This is because the presenter is trying to share them with the whole group rather than focusing on a few individuals. As these tools are powerful ways of promoting learning and communicating with clarity, this sharing limits the ability to communicate complex information. This is because it becomes harder for the audience to pay attention and take everything in as less of the talk is directed to them individually. However, research has shown that the personal qualities of the presenter are the most important elements in effective communication in both small and large groups. Careful preparation will therefore help you overcome these problems.

Understand your material

To begin with, it is important that you have a full understanding of your material. This will help you identify clear main points and construct a strong linear argument. Use these points to select appropriate visual images, examples and analogies to help your audience understand key concepts. Large group presentations benefit from carefully chosen visual images to make bold and instantly accessible statements. Think about using handouts to support your presentation. This will give your audience something concrete to 'take away' and is a powerful way of communicating complex detail which might be lost in the large group setting.

Map out your performance

Another important aspect of your preparation includes the need to have a clear understanding of your performance as a whole, including the pace of delivery and how you plan to use your visual aids. This can best be achieved by 'mapping out' your presentation in advance to identify what you will need to do at each stage. Some presenters make notes on their script to remind themselves to do certain things at certain times; to pause, to change slide, even to smile! The following visual prompts can help you create a map of your presentation so that you know what you need to do at each stage of delivery.

Slow pace   Pause   Lift tone   Change slide   Pause for questions   Dim lights   Turn lights off

(Figure One: Simple visual prompts for annotating a presenter's notes)

Understanding the venue

Even a well-prepared presentation can fail if you are not in full control of your environment. If at all possible, visit the venue beforehand to explore the physical layout and the audio-visual equipment. Visualise yourself presenting there, ask such questions as:

- what problems might arise in this space (e.g. where do people come in and go out)?
- where's the best place to stand so that everyone will be able to see and hear? is all the equipment that you need in place?
- where are the light switches and volume controls?
- do the lights operate at different settings (i.e. will you be plunged into complete darkness and unable to read your notes when trying to show slides)?
- how might you make best use of the environment to create an impact?

If you can't visit the venue, try to request a floor plan or ask for a list of technical specifications to help you prepare.

Strategy two: reducing anonymity

A particular difficulty associated with presenting to large groups is that the presenter feels distanced from the audience and vice versa. It is important to try to break down this barrier from the very moment the audience comes in. The following strategies have been found to work:

- display a title slide which includes your name whilst the audience are drifting in. This will help set the scene and prepare the audience for your talk;
- avoid hiding at the front whilst the audience are coming in and settling down. Instead, move amongst the audience, welcoming people that you know;
- encourage the audience to start filling the venue up from the front; this puts you more in charge of the event and encourages casual dialogue;
- introduce yourself and your talk (don't assume that everyone knows what's going to happen next);
- check that everyone can see your visual aids and hear your voice. Show consideration for your audience by addressing any problems.

Large venues often prevent audience members asking questions and may limit any discussion that you try to generate. Clearly announce where you'll be taking questions so that the audience knows what will be expected of them. Try to be creative in your approach to discussion, offering alternative ways of contacting you other than questions during and after your talk. Displaying your email address or a 'phone number can help an audience ask questions after the event has finished, thus reducing some of this pressure.

Strategy three: presentation style

In order to make the most of a large venue, you will need to pay attention to certain aspects of your performance. Key issues here are to make sure that the audience is

following your presentation, that you avoid distractions, and that you keep things moving at a lively pace.

Recommendations for presenting to large audiences include the following:

- wait until everyone is settled before you start to speak (remember, you are in control of the event, not the audience);
- announce the start of your presentation and wait for quiet (don't be afraid to calmly and politely assert your control by asking for quiet if this isn't forthcoming);
- try to avoid speaking for all of the time as this can become tiring for the audience, and yourself. Use visual aids such as slides or video clips to punctuate your presentation;
- be careful to lead your audience through your presentation, making sure that you use clear verbal and visual signposts to show progress and development (e.g. "moving on from ...", "in contrast to ...", "now that we have ...");
- show enthusiasm for your work and the process of sharing your ideas with your audience (remember, your interest will breed their interest).

The most important point to remember is to remain focused on your work throughout your presentation. Although demanding, this is the best way to ensure that the audience remains involved and interested.
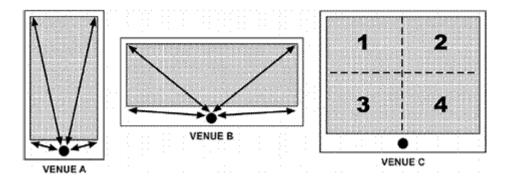
Strategy four: stage craft

It is important to think about the impact of the sheer physical size of the lecture theatre or seminar room that you'll be presenting in. Problems here include:

- sightlines - for you/your audience
- audibility - for you/your audience
- attention spans
- audience behaviour.

Sightlines

Sightlines relate to the ease with which you can make eye contact with the audience. Some venues are long and thin where it can be difficult to make contact with those in the furthest corners of the room (Figure Two: Venue A). Other venues are shallow and broad where it can be difficult to make contact with those to either side of you (Figure Two: Venue B). The danger with the first (A) is that the back rows only ever see the top of your head. The danger with the second (B) is that those to the left and right only ever see your side or, at worst, your back. A simple way of addressing this issue is to draw a mental plan of the venue (whatever its shape), dividing this into numbered sections. You can then alternate your eye contact with each sector to make sure that each area of the audience feels involved (Figure Two: Venue C).

(Figure Two: Sightlines in different shaped venues (A-C))

Audibility

It is of course vital to make sure that you can be heard by everyone in the audience. Check volume levels with your audience but always avoid shouting. This comes across as aggressive and can be very difficult for the audience to listen to. If there is a microphone, consider using it, but also be aware that it can restrict your movement and produce variable sound levels (e.g. as your head turns away from the microphone). Practise with the microphone to learn its strengths and limitations. Remember that most microphones in lecture theatres are set to amplify your normal speaking voice without the need for additional volume.

Attention spans

Try to vary your delivery to provide new and interesting stimuli for your audience's attention. This can involve the use of visual aids as well as different speaking styles (e.g. factual, discursive, speculative). You can also grab attention by physically moving around the 'stage' area. Try to do this purposefully (i.e. to make a particular point) rather than simply wandering around; this latter can be distracting. Come forward, make a point, then move again.

Audience behaviour

It is always difficult for your audience members to pay attention for 100% of the time, and you should allow for this. Try not to become too sensitive to an audience's behaviour. Un-responsive faces and heads propped up by hands are more likely to be indicative of audience fatigue than they are of deliberate rudeness. Of course, if the behaviour of a few individuals begins to threaten other people's ability to hear, you must act immediately, even stopping your presentation and addressing the situation directly.

Strategy five: using visual aids

Visual aids can be an important tool in improving the effectiveness of presentations to large groups. They can be particularly useful during key stages of your presentation, for example:

during the **introduction**

- display your name and the title of your presentation;
- define particular technical terms or abbreviations;
- indicate structure, either diagrammatically or in text;
- display an image which encapsulates your theme;
- highlight a question you intend to answer;

during your **main points**

- highlight new points or topics with an appropriate image or question;
- support technical detail with clearly displayed data;
- indicate sequence by linking points together;
- link theory and practice through the use of examples and illustrations;

during your **conclusion**

- summarise your main points;
- present your conclusions in a succinct phrase or diagram;
- display your key references or web sites to promote further exploration;
- display your email or 'phone number to prompt questioning and discussion.

Try to make your images as visually appealing as possible. For example, a photograph of a car will be more dramatic than the name of the car as a bullet point on a slide.

Conclusion

The key to speaking to audiences in large venues is to take control of the space and to carefully plan your presentation to stimulate and maintain your audience's attention. It is important to be well prepared and to have a clear understanding of what you will be doing and when this will happen. Although working with large audiences can be challenging, attention to both detail and process can result in a powerful presentation that interests and informs.

Using visual aids

Aims and Objectives

This guide will help you use visual aids in your oral presentations to achieve the best impact. Your visual aids should be clear and concise, providing a stimulating addition to your spoken word.

Introduction

Visual aids can be a very powerful tool to enhance the impact of your presentations. Words and images presented in different formats can appeal directly to your audience's imagination, adding power to your spoken words.

Think of using visual aids for the following reasons:

- if they will save words - don't describe your results - show them;
- if their impact would be greater than the spoken word - don't describe an image - show it.

Think about using a variety of different visual images. Try using photographs, tables, diagrams, charts, drawings, key words, or video sequences. Be creative and deliberate in your choice of images to achieve the most impact.

Think of your next presentation. How can you display your material visually? What techniques might help you present your argument or results in a stimulating way? What might add emphasis to your spoken words?

When to use visual aids

Words and images can be used throughout your presentation from the introduction to the conclusion. However, remember to restrict their use to key moments in your presentation; an over use of visual aids can be hard to follow.

Think about using visual aids at the following times:

Introduction

- display the title of your presentation;
- define particular technical terms or units;
- indicate a structure to your presentation by listing your main points;
- display an image which encapsulates your theme(s);
- highlight a question you intend answering during the course of your presentation;

Main points

- highlight new points with an appropriate image or phrase;
- support technical information with clearly displayed data;
- indicate sequence by linking points together;
- offer evidence from your research to support your argument;

Conclusion

- summarise your main points on a slide;
- present your conclusion in a succinct phrase or image;
- display your key references to allow your audience to read more on your topic.

Different types of visual aids

There are many different types of visual aids. The following advice will help you make the most of those most commonly used.

PowerPoint (or equivalent)

Microsoft PowerPoint is probably now the most commonly used form of visual aid. Used well, it can really help you in your presentation; used badly, however, it can have the opposite effect. The general principles are:

Do	Don't
use a big enough font (minimum 20pt)	make it so small you can't read it
keep the background simple	use a fussy background image
use animations *when appropriate*	but don't over-do the animation - it gets distracting
make things visual	use endless slides of bulleted lists that all look the same

Overhead projector slides/transparencies

Overhead projector slides/transparencies are displayed on the overhead projector (OHP) - a very useful tool found in most lecture and seminar rooms. The OHP projects and enlarges your slides onto a screen or wall without requiring the lights to be dimmed. You can produce your slides in three ways:

- pre-prepared slides : these can be words or images either hand written/drawn or produced on a computer;
- spontaneously produced slides: these can be written as you speak to illustrate your points or to record comments from the audience;
- a mixture of each: try adding to pre-prepared slides when making your presentation to show movement, highlight change or signal detailed interrelationships.

Make sure that the text on your slides is large enough to be read from the back of the room. A useful rule of thumb is to use 18 point text if you are producing slides with text on a computer. This should also help reduce the amount of information on each slide. Avoid giving your audience too much text or overly complicated diagrams to read as this limits their ability to listen. Try to avoid lists of abstract words as these can be misleading or uninformative.

White or black board

White or black boards can be very useful to help explain the sequence of ideas or routines, particularly in the sciences. Use them to clarify your title or to record your key points as you introduce your presentation (this will give you a fixed list to help you recap as you go along). Rather than expecting the audience to follow your spoken description of an experiment or process, write each stage on the board, including any

complex terminology or precise references to help your audience take accurate notes. However, once you have written something on the board you will either have to leave it there or rub it off - both can be distracting to your audience. Check to make sure your audience has taken down a reference before rubbing it off - there is nothing more frustrating than not being given enough time! Avoid leaving out of date material from an earlier point of your presentation on the board as this might confuse your audience. If you do need to write 'live', check that your audience can read your writing.

Paper handouts

Handouts are incredibly useful. Use a handout if your information is too detailed to fit on a slide or if you want your audience to have a full record of your findings. Consider the merits of passing round your handouts at the beginning, middle and end of a presentation. Given too early and they may prove a distraction. Given too late and your audience may have taken too many unnecessary notes. Given out in the middle and your audience will inevitably read rather than listen. One powerful way of avoiding these pitfalls is to give out incomplete handouts at key stages during your presentation. You can then highlight the missing details vocally, encouraging your audience to fill in the gaps.

Flip chart

A flip chart is a large pad of paper on a stand. It is a very useful and flexible way of recording information during your presentation - you can even use pre-prepared sheets for key points. Record information as you go along, keeping one main idea to each sheet. Flip back through the pad to help you recap your main points. Use the turning of a page to show progression from point to point. Remember to make your writing clear and readable and your diagrams as simple as possible.

Video (DVD or VHS)

Video gives you a chance to show stimulating visual information. Use video to bring movement, pictures and sound into your presentation. Always make sure that the clip is directly relevant to your content. Tell your audience what to look for. Avoid showing any more film than you need.

Artefacts or props

Sometimes it can be very useful to use artefacts or props when making a presentation (think of the safety routine on an aeroplane when the steward shows you how to use the safety equipment). If you bring an artefact with you, make sure that the object can be seen and be prepared to pass it round a small group or move to different areas of a large room to help your audience view it in detail. Remember that this will take time and that when an audience is immersed in looking at an object, they will find it hard to listen to your talk. Conceal large props until you need them; they might distract your audience's attention.
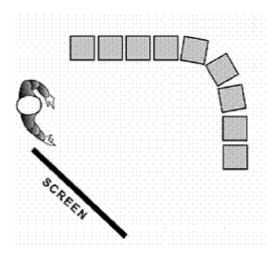
Designing visual aids

There are many different rules for designing visual aids, some of which will apply directly to different kinds of equipment. In general, sticking to the following guidelines will produce high quality visual images:

- use one simple idea for each visual;
- make the text and diagrams clear and readable;
- avoid cluttering the image;
- keep your images consistent (use the same font, titles, lay out etc. for each image);
- make sure your images are of a high quality (check for spelling and other errors).
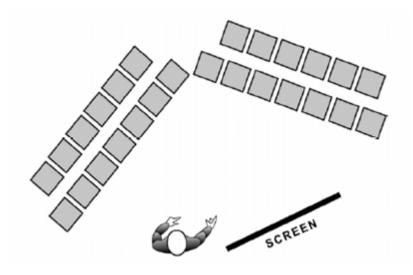
Always remember that an audience should be able to understand a visual image in a matter of seconds.

Room layout

Remember that your audience needs to be able to see you as well as your visual aids. Try to involve every member of your audience by changing the layout of your room. Below are some suggested layouts to help maximise contact between you, your audience and your visual aids.

(Speaking to small audiences)

(Speaking to larger audiences)

Try these arrangements in different settings. Use them to create different atmospheres; for example, an intimate setting might suggest an informal tone, whilst placing yourself at a distance might suggest a more formal relationship.

And finally ... practice

Always check your equipment to make sure that it:

- works;
- is equipment you are familiar with (How do you start the slide show? How do you change the pad? Should you use permanent or waterproof pens?).

There is nothing worse than a presenter struggling with their visual aids. Be familiar enough with your tools to ensure that you won't be thrown if something goes wrong. A confident use of visual aids will help marry them to your spoken presentation helping them become part of an impressive performance.

Summary

Use visual aids to display complex information clearly and introduce variety into your delivery technique. Make sure that you are familiar with the equipment required to create and display visual aids, and deploy visual aids creatively in your presentations mixing techniques and media to create an impact.

Using PowerPoint

Introduction

This guide introduces some general principles to help you make effective use of PowerPoint to support your presentations. It does not cover the technical aspects of using the software. If you have experience of using other Microsoft Office programs such as Word, you may find PowerPoint easy to use.

What is PowerPoint?

PowerPoint is a computer program that allows you to create and show slides to support a presentation. You can combine text, graphics and multi-media content to create professional presentations. As a presentation tool PowerPoint can be used to:

- organise and structure your presentation;
- create a professional and consistent format;
- provide an illustrative backdrop for the content of your presentation;
- animate your slides to give them greater visual impact.

PowerPoint has become enormously popular and you are likely to have seen it used by your lecturers and fellow students or in a presentation outside of the University. Learning to present with PowerPoint will increase your employability as it is the world's most popular presentational software. Used well, PowerPoint can improve the clarity of your presentations and help you to illustrate your message and engage your audience. The strategies contained in this study guide will help you to use PowerPoint effectively in any type of presentation.

Before you begin

Not all presentations require support from PowerPoint so you should consider whether it is appropriate for your presentation. This decision will need to take into account the venue of your presentation, the availability of equipment, the time available and the expectations of the audience. Whether you choose to use PowerPoint or not, your presentation will need to be carefully planned and structured in order to achieve your objectives.

Step 1: Designing PowerPoint slides

There are a number of features to consider when designing effective PowerPoint slides. The guidelines given below will ensure you create slides that will be easy for your audience to read and understand.

Using colour

- Be consistent. Ensure that all of your slides have the same or similar background images and colour schemes. PowerPoint's design templates can be used for this.
- Prepare slides that use a bold colour contrast, e.g. black or deep blue text on a cream background (black and white can be too glaring for the audience).
- Avoid using red or green for text or highlighting as it can be difficult to read.

Using text

- Avoid using too much text. A useful guideline is the six-by-six rule (slides should have no more than six bullet points and each bullet point should be no more than six words long).
- Create bullet points which are clear summaries of key points. It is not necessary for bullet points to be complete sentences.
- Don't mix up your fonts and font sizes. Too many variations in font size and type can be visually confusing.
- Ensure that your text is at least 24pt otherwise it may be difficult to read on screen.
- Choose left align for all text to make it easier to read.
- Avoid multiple columns of text on a single slide as they can be difficult to follow on screen.
- Use bold for a clear and simple form of emphasis and headings rather than UPPER CASE, italics or underlining.
- Set clear hierarchies for type size to help your audience distinguish between headings, main text and other types of text.

Step 2: Making the most of graphics and animations

Using graphics

Many people find it easier to understand and remember concepts if images are used in addition to text. PowerPoint allows you to easily include graphics in your presentations, but think about the issues listed below.

- Try not to use Clip Art (files of images that come free with software packages) that you have seen in lots of other people's presentations: familiar images have less impact on an audience.
- Choose an appropriate quality for scanned images. Scan at 150 dpi for images where accurate colour reproduction is not important and at 300 dpi for higher quality images.
- Beware of images that you take from the internet. They are generally of a very low quality and are likely to pixelate (lose their smoothness) when you project them onto a large screen.
- Make sure graphics are relevant to your text and not just decorative.
- Consider using graphics to replace text where you think an image would be easier to understand.
- Ensure that the images that you use are simple and clear enough to be easily read at a distance. A small, overly complex and poor quality image will only frustrate your audience.

Warning: Many images are protected by copyright. If it is not explicitly stated that an image is copyright free, or available for use in educational contexts, you should ask for permission to use the image.

Using animations and transitions

Animating elements of slides and using Slide Transition are two of the most powerful features that PowerPoint offers. However, it is very easy to overdo your use of these features and create a presentation where the animation distracts your audience from the content of your presentation.

- Use animations to show progression. Animation is very effective at revealing a process one stage at a time.
- Be conservative. Make sure that any animation you use serves a clear purpose (e.g. to introduce a new piece of information at an appropriate point). If you cannot think of a reason to animate your slide – don't do it!
- Be consistent. Try to ensure that you use similar types of animation for similar functions. For example, if your text always drives in from the left it will be distracting if it suddenly appears from another direction or uses another animation technique.

Step 3: Using PowerPoint to help structure your presentation

Once you have designed your slides you should review your planning and think about whether you need to refine the structure of your presentation. PowerPoint offers a number of features that can help you. All views can be selected from the 'View' menu.

- Use the 'Outline' tab in Normal View to display the textual content of your presentation. This can help you to focus on and review the structure of your content rather than the visual impact of your presentation.
- Use the 'Notes' pane in Normal View to create a script or prompts which you can use when you are delivering the presentation.
- Use the Slide Sorter View to gain an overview of the visual impact of your presentation. This is also a useful view for rearranging the order of your slides or deleting multiple slides.

Use these PowerPoint tools to give you an overview of your presentation so that you can create a clear focus and a logical structure for your talk. Avoid using too many slides in your presentation, as this will be distracting for your audience. In general you should use about one slide every two minutes, so a ten-minute presentation should have around five slides.

Step 4: Preparing to Present

Find out as much as you can about your audience and the environment in which you are going to be presenting before you present. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How large is the room that I am going to be presenting in? Will people be able to see my slides from the back?
- Do any of my audience have any special requirements (visually or hearing impaired, dyslexic, etc.)? Is there anything that I can do to ensure that they can access the presentation?
- Have I rehearsed my presentation to check that all of my slides work in the way they are supposed to?

- Does my presentation fit into the time that I have been allotted? Choosing Rehearse Timings from the Slide Show menu can help you to judge how much time you are spending on each aspect of your presentation (but choose 'No' when asked 'Do you want to keep the new slide timings to use when you view the slide show?').
- Have I checked that the necessary equipment (laptop, data projector, speakers for sound) has been booked for my presentation?
- Do I have an alternative plan in case the technology fails? This may be a second copy of the slides on acetates, a set of handouts or a second disk format (such as USB drive).

Step 5: Presenting with PowerPoint

An effective presenter uses PowerPoint to illustrate and emphasise points that are made in the presentation. An audience that is trying to copy down detailed information from slides will not be able to give you their full attention. Consider using handouts for your audience so they are free to concentrate on listening and understanding. Some points to consider when presenting with slides are given below.

- Treat each slide as a mini-presentation where you make a point to introduce the idea, give the detail and then conclude that slide with an explanation of how the point fits in with the rest of your presentation.
- Direct your audience's attention to the slides when they contain information that is key to getting your message across.
- Give your audience time to assimilate material on your slides. If, for example, a slide contains a quotation or a diagram – introduce the slide, give them time to read and understand it and then explain its relevance.
- Don't leave your screen saver on, as this will distract your audience.
- Don't move your pointer on the screen unless you are using it to demonstrate something as this will distract your audience.
- Don't just read out the text on the slides, they should be a summary or a supplement to the content of your spoken presentation.

Useful keyboard shortcuts

Keyboard shortcuts can be very useful when you are presenting and can help to ensure that your presentation runs seamlessly. Many more shortcuts can be found using the F1 key while running the slide show.

Shortcut key	Function
Space, N, right or down arrow, enter or page down	Advance to the next slide
Backspace, P, left or up arrow, or page up	Return to the previous slide
Number followed by Enter	Go to that slide
B	Blacks/Unblacks the screen
Esc	End slide show
F5	Start slide show

Summary

PowerPoint is widely used across the world so it is worthwhile learning to use it. It can be a powerful tool in creating clear, well structured presentations that have a strong visual impact. However, over-use or misuse can detract from your presentation. Following the guidelines in this study guide will ensure that you use PowerPoint effectively to support your presentation and engage your audience.

Involving your audience

Aims and Objectives

This guide offers straightforward suggestions for getting and keeping your audience involved in your presentation.

Introduction

Creating a rapport with your audience and helping them feel involved in the delivery of your talk can optimise its success. The following sections of this guide explore simple yet effective strategies for making the audience feel fully involved in your presentation.

Why involve your audience?

Listening to a presentation for any length of time can be a difficult process. If the talk doesn't engage their attention, the audience will start to feel distanced from the talk, begin to lose track of the flow of information and eventually fail to absorb your ideas and insights. To engage an audience fully, the presentation needs to be energetic, purposeful and staged as if it is a direct conversation between two interested parties (the presenter and the audience). The following four strategies are important elements for getting the audience involved.

Strategy One - Planning your talk

When planning your presentation, there are several ways that you can think about involving your audience.

Plan from the audience's perspective

The first step is to think about your presentation from the audience's perspective:

- what will they be interested in?
- what will they already know?
- what might help them learn?

By asking these questions, and by being able to identify answers, you are starting to think creatively about your audience's interests and needs. Remember, the aim is to give the impression that your presentation has been planned according to your audience's specific interests. You can reinforce this impression by referring to information that the group already knows: "When we looked at Porsche last week we saw that …" This helps your audience assimilate new information much more effectively by building on their existing knowledge.

Questions and answers

Asking rhetorical questions as you move through your presentation involves your audience by stimulating their own thought processes. This technique also helps move between sections of your presentation as it establishes a clear transition from one point to another: *"I think this proves that there is a strong relationship between A and B but what are the implications for the working practices of C?"*

When planning your presentation you should also identify opportunities for your audience to ask questions. Some presenters prefer to be interrupted as they go along, to pause for questions after each key stage or to reserve any questions until the end of the presentation. All of these approaches have their advantages and disadvantages but it is useful to tell your audience when you will be taking questions so that they know what is expected of them.

Strategy Two - Delivering your talk

There are a number of strategies that you can adopt when delivering your material to maximise the sense of audience involvement. Some of these are listed below.

Eye contact

Making eye contact is one of the most powerful techniques for involving your audience. If used well, eye contact can serve to make your address much more personal and thus more effective. If eye contact is avoided, the presenter can appear to be nervous and unconvincing. If eye contact is held too long, audience members can feel awkward and intimidated. It is important to share eye contact with all members of a small audience or all sections of a large audience. Avoid making eye contact with just the people you know or don't know, taking particular care not to deliver your entire presentation to the person who's assessing your work. Remember that you will need to involve (and therefore make eye contact with) the whole audience if you are to make an effective presentation.

If you are nervous, eye contact can be very difficult to establish and then maintain. Remember that some eye contact is better than none and that you should try to build your confidence over the course of your presentation(s). To build your use of eye contact focus on people's foreheads so that you are at least looking in their direction. This sounds silly but is much better than looking at the ceiling, floor or your notes. Gradually start to feed in some direct eye contact as you become more confident.

Body language (position, posture and gesture)

An effective presenter pays close attention to the physical relationship with her/his audience. If you stand hidden behind an overhead projector or stand too far away from your audience, they will not develop a bond with you and this will limit the effectiveness of your presentation. Similarly, standing over them or sitting too closely in amongst them will not establish enough distance to secure your identity as the presenter or leader of the session. Your posture will also dictate levels of audience involvement. If you're too relaxed and sit slumped in a chair to deliver your talk, the audience might drift away. Find a comfortable but purposeful position in relation to your audience and adopt an upright sitting or standing posture that allows for movement and gesture.

Your use of gesture is of course another way of involving your audience in your presentation. Audiences respond well to the physical energy and enthusiasm being conveyed by a presenter, and thus the use of clear and controlled gestures will greatly enhance your presentation. Gestures that are open and reach out to your audience serve to extend your presentation to them and thus help them feel more involved. If you stand at the front with your hands in your pockets you will, quite literally, not be reaching out to them and this will again impede the effectiveness of your talk.

Strategy Three - Using language effectively

Your use of language has a direct influence on the way that you engage your audience. The most important point here is to make sure that you are talking 'their' language. In other words, try to avoid using forms of language that are too formal or informal, too technical or too simplistic depending upon the nature of your talk and the knowledge base of your audience. Pitching your presentation at the right level can be a challenge but it is very effective for making the audience feel involved.

Another method for involving your audience is to make sure that you are using a conversational tone rather than a formal 'academic' tone. In other words, a natural speech pattern will feel more familiar and easier to listen to than a formal and complex language. Of course, the level of complexity should suit your audience, but it is possible to communicate highly challenging ideas using simple clear sentences.

Strategy Four - Hard work

The final way of involving your audience is to work hard at communicating your presentation to all areas of the room. This requires energy as you will need to make sure that your voice and gestures are 'big' enough to communicate over a distance. A presenter who stands and reads with his or her eyes buried in a script will only ever communicate over a limited distance. However, a presenter who is working hard at making eye contact, pays attention to the volume of his or her speaking voice, conveys enthusiasm for ideas and uses facial and body gestures to welcome, reassure and involve the audience will be transmitting energy over a much wider area.

Whilst a presenter should always appear natural and avoid using exaggerated behaviour to get a message across, an effective presentation is hard work to deliver because there are so many elements to control. The effort of creating and pushing out enough energy to make an impact will be tiring, but worth the extra work.

Summary

Involving your audience is essential to making an impact. Your presentation should pull them in, get their attention and stimulate their thoughts and understanding. This can be done in a number of ways. The way that you plan your presentation will be critical in terms of using language and ideas that your audience will understand. You must also ensure that there is sufficient time for questions and discussion. The way that you deliver your presentation should create a bond with your audience. Your use of eye contact, gesture, spoken language and energy should communicate effectively and enthusiastically with all areas of the room, thus ensuring that the audience receives positive messages about you and your material.

Responding to questions effectively

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this guide is to give you some practical strategies for handling and responding to questions during or at the end of an oral presentation.

Introduction

Many presenters fear the question and answer session at the end of their presentation because they feel that they are losing control of their input (speaking seems so much safer). However, it is important to remember that the questions are a vital part of the presentation for the whole audience as they allow for clarification and consolidation of learning. The presenter can enhance the effectiveness of the question and answer session by treating it as a formal part of the presentation that requires as much careful planning and control as the delivery of the core material.

Plan to take control

The background work that you undertook whilst planning your presentation is the key to handling questions effectively. If you have defined a precise focus for your presentation and have explored this thoroughly in your background research and planning, you are more likely to be able to respond to questions with precise answers. If you have been unfocused in your preparatory work, this will come across in the way you answer questions.

When planning your presentation, you will need to:

- identify when questions will be invited in your talk and plan to inform your audience of this;
- plan to leave plenty of time for questions so that the audience doesn't feel rushed (this might involve having to reduce the content of your talk);

- prepare prompts for questions that are open and straightforward: "That's the end of my presentation. I would now like to stop and take questions from the audience".

As a further part of your planning you may decide to:

- define the topics for discussion: "Have you any questions on the four principles that I've outlined?";
- avoid answering questions that fall outside of the remit of your talk: "I'm afraid that really falls outside of my objectives for today's presentation. Perhaps we can resume discussion of that particular point later?"

Responding to questions

One of the main problems with question and answer sessions is that the presenter's nerves frequently force an inappropriate response. This could be because a question has been misinterpreted or that only key words from the question have been heard rather than the full content. The following steps will help you respond more effectively to questions from your audience.

- **Step One - Listen**

It is important to listen to all parts of a question before drawing premature conclusions about your 'best' response. Frequently questions can change direction at the last moment, particularly if the questioner is thinking on her/his feet. This can throw you if you have already started to leaf through your material for the 'appropriate' response. Remember that questioners will frequently try to make a point whilst asking their question: *"Surely a more meaningful interpretation of X is that it ....?"* It is therefore important to both hear the content of the question and try to decipher the questioner's intention.

- **Step Two - Understand**

If you are worried that you haven't understood a question, clarify the area of enquiry before going any further. Check for direct confirmation by paraphrasing the question back to the questioner *"You want me to explain the process of ...?"* or check that your reply will be heading in the right direction *"Do you mean in relation to factor X or factor Y ?"*.

- **Step Three - Communicate and involve**

It is important to remember that even though you are taking a question from one member of the audience, as a presenter, you are still responsible for the interest and engagement of the other audience members. This is particularly important in large groups as the audience will become bored if the presentation descends into a series of one-to-one discussions. To involve the rest of the audience (and avoid potentially extended dialogue with the questioner) make sure the whole audience has heard and understood the question by outlining the area of enquiry: *"I've been asked to outline my thinking behind ..."*

- **Step Four - Respond**

When you reply to a question, direct your answer to both the questioner and other members of the audience. Try to keep your responses as focused as possible. This will help keep them brief and preserve space for other questions. To avoid going into too much detail, stop and check back with the questioner to see if you have answered his/her query: *"Does that explain why we chose to …?".*

- **Allow follow-up questions**

A particularly effective technique encourages your audience to ask questions after the event has finished through email discussion or telephone comments. This shows a particularly high level of respect for your audience's ideas and implies that the topic still has much further scope for enquiry.

Things to avoid

When handling questions and answers, you will still need to be as polished and professional as you have been for the main delivery of your presentation. There are some common dangers that are useful to avoid.

- **Answering the question you wished you'd been asked**

A common trick played by politicians, this strategy ignores the precise nature of the question and uses a predetermined answer to the broad topic area. If handled ineptly, this technique is very obvious to the audience and frustrating to the questioner.

- **Making a second 'mini' presentation**

This is the process whereby you make a lengthy response, including all the information you'd left out in planning the main presentation. Remember, you left that information out for a reason! Your unplanned response will be unstructured and rambling, so keep things focused and brief (check the time as you respond). You can always offer to forward lengthy detail after the event.

- **Passing the blame**

"That wasn't my idea, my supervisor did the preliminary work, I've simply attempted to …" Passing the blame to others comes across as weak and evasive. If an idea from the audience is a good one, acknowledge its value. If it isn't, make a polite rebuttal and move on.

- **Defensive answers**

Occasionally, questions can really put you on the spot, but it is important to remain calm and in control. An aggressive or defensive reply will be seen as weakness on your part and will spoil the effect of an otherwise successful presentation.

Handling difficult questions

It is important not to start responding to a difficult question before you have thought about the answer. Repeating the question and asking for clarification will help create some space for your thoughts.

Sometimes you will need to think about a question for a moment before responding. You may be able to buy a little bit of thinking time to help focus your response. Useful strategies include searching for an appropriate visual aid to help focus your response or simply pausing for a moment or two to think. For even more time, suggest that you'll come back to the topic later (but don't forget to do this).

Sometimes questions are too difficult to answer. Don't worry about admitting that you don't know something or haven't considered an alternative approach. An enthusiastic *"That's an interesting idea, I'd not thought of that"* is much more positive than a mumbled "I don't know". Remember that a presentation is a two-way process and it is important to show that you are learning from your audience as well.

Occasionally, questions will fall outside of the remit of your talk and it would be too much of a diversion to tackle them in front of the whole audience. Respond positively to any such questions and suggest that they best be tackled by a quick chat after the event.

Finally, you can come across a questioner who disagrees strongly with your argument. Although this can feel very awkward, remember that you are still responsible for the whole audience and that you cannot allocate all of your question time to one individual (no matter how passionate her/his views). If you feel that you have answered the initial question, announce that you will move on and suggest that you might continue discussion after the presentation. If the questioner persists, use an assertiveness technique called 'broken record' to assert your position calmly: *"I'm afraid I need to move on ... I do need to move on ... I would like to move on now."* Your final sanction is to take another question or even close the presentation.

Summary

Question and answer sessions are important elements of any presentation. Plan for the question session by determining when you will be inviting questions and specifying any themes that you would like questioners to pursue. Clearly announce the start of your question session and involve all audience members in the way that you repeat and respond to questions. Make sure you respond to the question being asked and have practiced methods for dealing with awkward questions. Avoid common pitfalls by responding to questions positively and enthusiastically whilst keeping your answers brief and focused. Above all, don't be afraid to admit what you don't know: it is better to admit the limits of your knowledge than attempt an uninformed answer.

Before you give a presentation

Introduction

Before you go to give a presentation you might want to work your way through this checklist.

Preparation

- I have rehearsed my presentation.
- I have rehearsed my presentation in front of a mirror.
- I have given my presentation a trial run to a friend or colleague.
- I have checked that my presentation runs to the time allotted.
- I have taped/videoed myself and listened back to it.
- I have prepared speaker notes or cue cards.
- I have annotated my notes to help me get the emphasis right.
- I have thought about where to breathe.
- I have numbered my notes in case I drop them.
- I have prepared any visual aids that I may need.
- I have prepared any handouts that I wish to give out.
- I have checked my facts.
- I have done a grammar/spelling check.

Technical

- I have confirmed that the audio-visual equipment I require will be in the room.
- I have saved my PowerPoint presentation onto at least two formats (disc/USB/hard drive/email).
- I have practised using any unfamiliar technology that I am going to use.
- I have sourced an alternative version of any audio or video material (DVD and VHS)
- I have seen the room that I am going to be presenting in or had it described to me.
- I have turned off my mobile phone.
- I have checked the start time.

Audience and Other Speakers

- I have thought about who is going to be in the audience.
- I have brainstormed a list of likely questions that I may be asked.
- I have found out who else will be speaking and what they will be speaking about.
- I have thought about any special needs my audience may have.
- I have thought about ways to engage the audience in my presentation.

Personal

- I have got enough sleep the night before.
- I have considered how to combat my nervousness.
- I have thought about my personal appearance.
- I have looked after my health in the week preceding the presentation.
- I have brought a bottle of water to drink if my throat gets dry.
- I have thought about what else I am going to be doing that day.
- I've eaten breakfast.

Stress management for presentations and interviews

Aims and Objectives

This guide aims to help you recognise and understand anxiety and nervousness which may arise during presentations or interviews. This is sometimes referred to as performance anxiety. The guide also offers strategies to help you minimise any detrimental effects and provides details for a number of further sources of help and advice.

What is performance anxiety?

Many people feel nervous when speaking publicly, either to a room of course peers, conference delegates or an interview panel. This is sometimes referred to as performance anxiety.

Performance anxiety, however, is not necessarily harmful; a slightly increased anxiety level can motivate you to do the work needed so that you are effectively prepared for the event: it can make you more alert and energised. However, should your anxiety levels and nerves become too great, difficulties can occur, which may impair your ability to prepare effectively for, and perform, during the event.

What causes it?

Performance anxiety and nerves can be caused by many factors which may include:

- worrying about past performance during presentations or interviews;
- how you will compare with your friends or other students;
- any negative consequences if you don't do as well as you would like;
- the reaction of others to your work.

Lack of preparation as indicated by:

- hurriedly writing the presentation at the last minute;
- not rehearsing and practising your speech;
- not thinking in advance about the kinds of questions the interviewer might ask.

You may not be able to identify a particular cause, you may just be aware that you typically experience nerves or anxiety at the prospect of a presentation or interview.

What happens when you are nervous?

When you experience nerves, anxiety or stress about an event, certain physical reactions happen automatically. If you recall a time when you were interviewed or made a presentation you may have noticed that you reacted in some of the following ways:

- your voice trembled;
- you had sweaty palms;
- you experienced shortness of breath;
- your heartbeat accelerated;
- you had butterflies or an upset stomach;
- you experienced a generalised feeling of fear.

These reactions are driven by the production of hormones and equip us to fight or escape from situations that are dangerous or threatening. This is known as the fight or flight response; your body is alert, ready for action and is preparing itself to cope with the situation. Once the threatening event is over, your body will gradually return to normal. Although this process is designed to assist you during potentially threatening situations, it can cause difficulties, particularly if your level of anxiety is too great and/or it occurs for a long time period.

What are the signs of performance anxiety?

There is a range of signs which may indicate that you are experiencing performance anxiety and these signs could begin just before your presentation or interview, hours or days before it, or even at the moment you find out about it. Signs can even persist throughout your presentation or interview.

The signs could include negative thoughts such as 'I'll never manage it'; 'It will be a disaster'; 'I'm no good at this'. Having thoughts of this kind can distort your perception of the event and create a cycle whereby the more negatively you think about it, the more stressed and anxious you become, which in turn can increase your negative thoughts about it and so on.

Holding negative thoughts can also have a big impact on your feelings; you may be aware of feeling scared about the event or you may feel generally irritable but not be sure why. You may also observe behavioural changes, such as putting off thinking about and planning for the presentation or interview, or alternatively being unable to stop thinking about and planning for it. You may also experience physical changes, such as experiencing headaches, changes in your appetite or developing sleeping difficulties.

Strategies to help you deal with performance anxiety

The strategies outlined below offer some simple steps that you can take to try to control your level of performance anxiety. However, for them to be effective you need to be active in implementing them prior to and during the event.

1. Develop positive thinking and visualisation skills

As described previously, having negative thoughts is one indicator that you may be experiencing performance anxiety. It is useful, therefore, to be aware of some of the common negative thought patterns so that you can try to replace them with positive thoughts.

Negative thought	Positive replacement
'It will be a disaster.'	'I will aim to do the best I can.'
'I never do any good at this kind of thing, it's bound to go horribly wrong.'	'Just because I had a problem with this is in the past does not mean that things are bound to go wrong.'
'They won't like me.'	'They like what they have read on my application form/CV otherwise they would not be interviewing me.'
'They are looking for ways of catching me out.'	'They are giving me an opportunity to demonstrate my knowledge of something that I have worked hard to understand.'
'They will ask me about an item on my application form that is a weakness of mine.'	'If it had been a big problem they would not have short listed me for interview. How can I talk about it in the most positive way?'
'I will fail my degree and never get the career of my choice if I don't do well in this presentation.'	'The marks for this presentation are only a small percentage of my overall degree. If I don't do as well as I would like there will be other opportunities to improve my marks.'

Try to become aware if you are having negative thoughts and, if so, think of a positive replacement for them (you could consider asking your friends to help you with this).

It may also be useful to visualise yourself successfully completing the task. Imagine yourself coming out of the interview or presentation and moving on to other things in your life beyond the anxiety provoking experience. Plan a treat or social event afterwards that is not dependent upon the outcome.

Using these processes will help you to keep a sense of perspective about the event and stop things from spiralling out of control. Focus on the present and what you can do now to deal with the situation, rather than dwelling on what you should have done or how similar events went in the past.

2. Plan and practise your presentation carefully

Planning and practising for your presentation or interview carefully can have a number of beneficial effects on your anxiety levels, including helping you to feel more confident and in control prior to the event. The better prepared you are and the more you know your material, the more likely you will be to recall it when you are feeling nervous or stressed.

When you are rehearsing for your interview or presentation, picture yourself as if you are in front of your audience/interview panel and rehearse out loud. If possible, do this in front of some friends who could give you constructive feedback about your verbal and non-verbal communication, and your time-keeping. If you do not want a friend to watch you, consider making an audio or video tape of yourself. You can then listen or watch the tape and provide your own feedback. Identify at least five positive things about your skills, as well as areas for further development.

Preparing for questions at the end of a presentation or during an interview may also help to lower your anxiety levels. Read over your presentation notes or application form critically to identify areas of possible weakness and prepare positive answers. Friends and staff in the University may be able to assist with this. During the event, give yourself time to think of a response to the question by pausing, repeating the words of the question or, if you need longer, asking for a few moments to consider your answer.

3. Map out your anxieties

You may find it helpful to identify the aspects of the situation which are causing you the greatest levels of anxiety, in order to plan steps to prevent them from becoming a reality. Imagine the presentation or interview and write down the aspects which cause you to feel particularly anxious, and then identify something you could do in advance which would help to prevent this from occurring. For instance, if you are worried about using equipment, make sure that you practise using it before the event. Alternatively, if you are worried that a weakness will be highlighted, plan a positive response to this in advance.

4. Look after yourself

Taking care of yourself physically and emotionally will help to control your anxiety levels by making you feel relaxed and using up some of the nervous energy that is produced when you are under stress. The following strategies are recommended.

- Eat a well balanced diet which limits alcohol, caffeine and sugary foods.
- Aim to have between six to eight hours sleep per night.
- Exercise regularly as this uses up nervous energy and relaxes muscles.
- Make time for fun such as participating in a sport or hobby.
- Practise taking control of your breathing. Concentrate on breathing out to a slow count of four; the breathing in will take care of itself.

On the day of the event

1. Expect that you will feel some nerves or anxiety

On the day of the presentation or interview expect that you will have some nerves or anxiety. This is your body's way of preparing itself to cope, so do not try to eliminate your nerves totally, but aim to keep them manageable.

You can also expect to feel nervous particularly at the start of the interview or presentation and it is likely that you may feel shaky or possibly your voice will tremble. If this does happen, change to a slower pace, breathe more deeply and expect that the tremble/shakiness will go away. People do expect to see some nerves at the outset. Allow yourself time to settle into the presentation or interview and then you can perform to the best of your ability as it continues.

Nerves can make you speed up or slow you down on the day. If you are using note cards in a presentation, you may find it useful to put reminders to yourself to check the time and to think about whether you need to slow down or speed up.

2. Think positively: don't jump to conclusions about people's reactions

Do not forget to use the positive thinking skills that you have been practising up to the event on the day itself. Tell yourself you can do it and try not to jump to conclusions about how people appear to be reacting to you. Some people may look stern or uninterested, when they are actually just concentrating very hard on what you are saying.

3. Try to relax yourself physically

Remember to use the breathing exercise that you have practised. You may also find it useful to do a relaxation exercise to release muscular tension in places such as the neck and shoulders. Take some deep breaths, aim to increase the distance between your shoulders and your ears. This will help to lengthen your muscles and relieve tension.

4. Be careful about what you eat and drink

Avoid food or drink that is high in sugar, alcohol or caffeine as these can make you feel more jittery. Immediately prior to the event it can be better to have a warm rather than cold drink. Cold drinks tend to constrict the vocal chords and may increase the likelihood of your voice trembling.

5. Prepare strategies in case you feel overwhelmed

Do something that will distract you from the frozen state. You could change your posture or focus your gaze just above peoples' eyes for a few seconds which may help you to collect your thoughts. If you are really stuck you may need to ask for a short amount of time to concentrate because you have lost your train of thought through nerves. People are generally supportive and will think more positively if they see you trying to gain composure.

6. Reward yourself for a job done

Praise yourself afterwards for a job done no matter how well or badly you think it went, and then do something which you enjoy as a special treat.

What can I do to support a friend with performance anxiety?

Friends are usually the first people we turn to when we are under stress. Often, very simple things can help.

- Help your friend to keep a sense of perspective about the event and to develop positive thinking about the situation. Encourage them to do the best that they can and to accept that they are not a failure if they do not do as well as they would have liked.
- Help them to rehearse and practise their presentation or interview techniques. Provide them with constructive feedback which highlights some good aspects of their techniques along with identifying areas that could be improved.
- If you will be at the presentation, give your friend some positive encouragement and feedback during the session. Smile, show interest, ask a question.
- Be there to meet them after the presentation or interview and support them no matter how well or badly they think they did.
- Plan something enjoyable to do afterwards to celebrate a job done.
- Encourage them to follow the strategies outlined in the guide and to seek further support if these strategies are not helping.
- Don't take them to the pub beforehand - it rarely has the desired effect!