Presentation Skills

**Aim of this factsheet**

To support and develop your presentation techniques.

**Introduction**

The ability to deliver a presentation is a transferable personal skill that is widely used within programs of study, job selection processes and in many professions.

Skills to be developed:

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**Verbal skills: what you say and how you say it**

- **Speak as if you mean it:** you are the expert on this subject, so assume that the audience are interested in what you have to say. You have the power to lead the presentation as you would like.

- **Use your voice to demand attention:** use tones, intonations, vary speed of delivery, speak clearly and audibly, use pauses.

- **Be clear about what you want to say and why you want to say it:** tell the audience what to expect and explain why the information you are providing is important.

**Non-verbal skills: body language, facial expressions and gesticulations**

- People believe non-verbal communication more than the verbal, so be very clear what your non-verbal body language is saying.
- Smile, appear confident, look at the audience and make eye contact if you can.
- Be aware of what your body is doing. Try to be a little animated.
- Keep smiling and engaging the audience throughout.

Other things to consider in order to enhance your non-verbal communication:

- Practice: maybe record yourself
- Dress the part: put yourself in character
- Be sure of what you are communicating
- Act confidently
• Use language you are familiar with
• Be comfortable with the technology (if you are using it)

**Use of presentation tools**

This involves using aids such as posters and flipcharts or the use of software, for example Microsoft PowerPoint. However, remember that **YOU ARE THE PRESENTATION** and not the tools, so do not rely on the aids. If things go wrong, have a plan B and be confident enough to present using just yourself as the presentation. However, if you are using presentation software keep it business-like, simple and professional (unless you have specific instructions to do otherwise).

**Tips:**

- Do not have too much information on each slide: you should talk around the key points that appear, rather than try to fit everything onto the slides
- Make sure the slides can be read by the audience
- Use pictures, colours and sounds as appropriate for your topic and audience
- Use white space

**Writing skills**

Use space and time effectively to ensure the right balance of written and verbal information.

- Writing space is often limited when doing a presentation, so be very careful about what you actually write down.
- A presentation involves you presenting information, not just reading it from paper or PowerPoint, so write enough information so that you can talk around and about the subject.
- When you are talking, ensure that you engage the audience (look at them, smile at them, involve them).
- Use language that you are comfortable with.
- Be formal and academic.

**How to avoid nerves**

Most people get nervous when delivering a presentation; your lecturers will understand this. However, there are actions which you can take to help control these feelings.

- Relax and take time to compose yourself.
- Breathe deeply and slowly before starting. Take deep, slow breaths in and out before starting.
- Act - put yourself into character.
- Dress appropriately (something comfortable but not too casual – think of this as your costume).
- Avoid fidgeting. Practice the presentation without moving your hands and arms, this makes you use your brain more.
- Smile: it makes you feel better and puts the audience at ease.
- Speak confidently and people will be more likely to believe you!
Remember the four Ps

**PLAN**
- What is the purpose of the presentation?
- Topic – what is the purpose or question to be addressed?
- Content – what information do I need to get across?
- Timing – how long do I have to deliver my information and ideas?
- Audience – who is the audience, and do they have previous knowledge of the subject?
- Visual aids – what can I use to present the information in an efficient and interesting way? How will my presentation be improved by them?

**PREPARE**
- You must be confident about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it
- Research – know your subject but remain focused on your assessment criteria
- Structure – introduce and engage, define points in a logical way and summarise/conclude
- Variety of media – remember that we all learn in different ways. Think about which points can be conveyed verbally and which visually
- Technology and venue – technology does not always work; for peace of mind ensure that you have a backup plan (e.g. printouts of slides)

**PRACTICE**
- Double check everything
- Read aloud – in front of a mirror or use peers/family as audience
- Check timing
- Gain critical feedback and be prepared to adapt
- Possibly video yourself or just record your voice
- Visit venue and check facilities/equipment
- Ask the organiser for help with the equipment
- Watch other presenters and learn from them

**PRESENT**
- Present with knowledge, enthusiasm and confidence
- Thorough preparation will give you confidence
- Accept that most people feel nervous before speaking in front of others and adopt coping strategies
- Tell them what you are going to say, say it and then remind the audience what you have said
- Be prepared for questions

Most people get nervous when doing a presentation, but clear preparation and planning will help you to perform. At university you will have a variety of opportunities to develop this skill, reaping the rewards for your efforts within both education and employment.

**practice makes perfect**
Tips

Ensure a successful presentation by adopting coping strategies:

- The title of your presentation should make it clear what your talk is about.
- Be aware of the marking criteria.
- Pay attention to the reaction of your audience and be prepared to react, but ensure that you maintain your prepared structure and do not lose focus.
- Use prompts. However, do not read from notes.
- Pause briefly between sections: this will give the audience time to process the information and give you time to prepare mentally for the next section.
- Control your own space and the audience.
- Anticipate questions and prepare answers but admit when you do not know an answer.
- Keep a drink of water handy.
- Keep to time.

Try to enjoy yourself and let your enthusiasm reflect in your presentation.

References
