

Conference presentation checklist

Introduction

A successful presentation will largely depend on the extent to which you prepare. This means you should do the following.

- **Understand your audience:** try to gather as much information as you can about their interests, attitudes and information needs. What do they already know about your subject, and how does it relate to their daily concerns? How do you reflect their interests in your content, language and approach? For international conferences, how can you adapt your messages to non-UK contexts? What words, acronyms or figures of speech may not be clear to people who speak English as a second language?
- **Know how to engage and connect with them:** talk to your audience and not at them. Demonstrate that you have thought about their interests. Use stories, questions, 'show of hands' exercises and examples.
- **Be clear about how your presentation fits into the programme:** check who else is presenting and their likely angle on the topic. Be aware if your research is likely to overlap with some of the other work presented. If you are presenting a very different view from the rest of the speakers, you may need to identify ways to bring the audience with you.
- **Keep it simple:** aim to communicate up to three core messages. Make sure at least half of your speaking time is devoted to these points. If using charts or images, they should illustrate one of your key points. Exclude any unnecessary detail that may distract from this.

Checklist: do you have everything in place?

Research

- Your audience: their knowledge, interests and information needs
- Your slot: how long do you have? Who else is on the agenda? What other subjects are covered? Who is introducing you? Does it involve a Q&A?
- The venue: where is it? How will you get there? What time can you arrive? What facilities will you have (Wi-Fi, PowerPoint, microphones, lectern)? What is the room layout? Do they have technology available to enable interaction with the audience (eg live voting)?

Plan your content

Decide your objectives: what are your 2–3 core messages? Do you have:

- a strong start, a definitive ending and a clear structure?
- content that reflects your objectives?
- a strong focus on the stories, tangible examples, data and facts that will engage your audience and bring your subject to life?
- answers ready for any predictable questions from the audience, and a couple of ideas for how to prompt questions or comments if they are not forthcoming?
- if appropriate, a handout for people to take away?

Get the delivery right

- Run through your presentation and time it using any visual aids (remember: you will speak for up to half as much time again on the day as you do when rehearsing). Do not over-rehearse so that you sound stilted.
- Prepare yourself short-hand speaking notes if you need them, particularly if you might suffer from nerves on the day.
- Check the visuals. If you have a slide that is too detailed to be understood from a distance, take it out and think of another way to present this content. Aim for a minimum font size of 20pt (text) and 32pt (headings) in your slides.

Do a quick risk assessment

- If you are presenting preliminary findings, ensure that these come with the right caveats about the status of your research. Check that the findings can't be easily misconstrued. Consider whether sharing the content might influence your chances of securing publication in a peer-review journal or raise issues around self-plagiarism.
- Include any copyright statements if required. Where this is relevant, do not include information that might preclude your chance to seek intellectual property at a later stage.
- Check the content with your host organisation, sponsor, partners or funder if there is a requirement for this.
- Ensure that you have declared any conflicts of interest. This is sometimes required by event organisers in advance, or you may need to include a slide declaring these at the start of the presentation