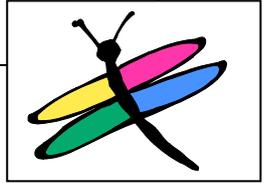


# Presenting at Scientific & Other Meetings

## Part 1. Content: choosing and organizing the material



### **The aim:**

- To get your story across.

### **Key points:**

- Tell a story with a beginning, middle and end.
- Tell one story with one message. Keep it simple; most people try to give too much information rather than too little.
- Don't be afraid of repetition. "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em. Then tell 'em. Tell 'em what you've told 'em."
- Value what you have to say and respect your audience. Otherwise, don't give the talk.

### **Who is my audience?**

- Pitch your talk to the level of the audience.
- Don't underestimate their intelligence
- Don't overestimate their knowledge & interest in your subject
- If in doubt, ask the chairperson or someone else who knows the likely audience before you prepare your talk.

### **Select your story:**

- If you've been asked to give a talk, give the talk you've been asked to give. Stay on the topic.
- Have one main message. Start by writing it down in just a few words.
- Make a basic plan of your talk, then 'brainstorm'.
- Do some extra reading around the topic and look for points of special interest.
- Don't leave preparation to the last minute; leave time to 'sleep on it'.
- If you're unsure of the message you want to get across, or what to put in or leave out, check it with someone experienced whose judgement you trust.

### **Write it out:**

- Write out a full draft of your talk in as much or as little detail as you require with prominent headings.
- Avoid acronyms, abbreviations and jargon. Explain any terms that non-experts might find confusing.
- The steps must be clear [for example, a research paper]:
  1. *Introduction:*  
Tell the audience who you are and where you are from.  
Start with a plain short statement [e.g. "Housing is critical to health."]  
Then give a broad background picture of the topic and how your research question arose.  
Describe how you came to do the work and give this talk.
  2. *Aim:*  
State just one primary aim.
  3. *Methods:*  
Step by step; as simply as possible.  
Charts and flow diagrams are useful.

Not too much ‘cookbook detail’. Those people in the audience who want more detail will ask you later or look up your subsequent paper or you can provide a handout with more detail.

4. *Results:*  
Clear & precise. Avoid disgorging of big slabs of information (“data dumping”). Visual presentation is best. If possible, convert tables to charts and graphs. Always explain the axes and the units on any graph.
5. *Discussion:*  
Make clear the implications of your results  
Compare your results with other studies.  
Mention the limitations and strengths of your study.
6. *The conclusion & the future:*  
Fit your findings back into the big picture.  
Suggest the next step. Be a little provocative.

***Time your talk:***

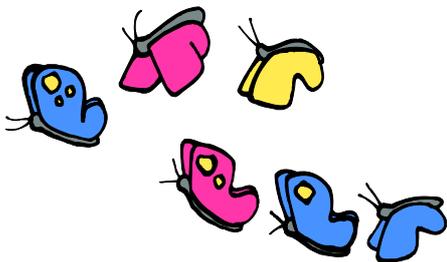
- Practice your talk out loud, preferably to someone who will give you honest feedback. Watch the clock.
- Your talk should go for no more than two thirds of the time allotted. Half of the time is even better.
- If it is too long, shorten it. There should be no excuses.
- The reason: question time is often the most valuable time of the talk [see Topic 4].
- **NEVER, NEVER, NEVER** let your talk go over time. It is annoying, disrespectful to the chairperson and the audience, and disruptive, especially if there is another speaker after you. Going over time always leaves a bad impression; stopping in plenty of time leaves a good one.

***Consider:***

- Preparing a one-page handout; longer handouts are seldom read.
- Providing a reference or resource sheet, including Internet addresses.
- Providing your e-mail address & telephone number for those people who want to contact you.

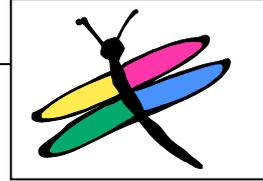
***The take home messages:***

- Keep it simple.
- Keep it short.
- Consult. Don’t do it all alone.



# Presenting at Scientific & Other Meetings

## Part 2. Context: the tools & the environment



### ***The Aim:***

- To get your message across effectively - without stuff-ups.

### ***Key Points:***

- Murphy's Law especially applies to scientific presentations. Stuff-ups can destroy the confidence of the speaker and distract the audience. Most are preventable.
- Always arrive 10-15 minutes early, especially if you're unfamiliar with the venue. Ask the chairperson or someone familiar with the equipment to meet you there and show you how things work.
- Carefully check the equipment and the room, and then run through any visual or audio presentations.
- Whenever possible, the speaker should be in control. Helpful and well-meaning incompetents can bring down your career.
- Important rule: the more complex the technology, the more likely it will stuff up.

### ***The Venue:***

- If you have a choice [and it pays to check], go for the smallest room that can comfortably accommodate the audience you anticipate. Large empty spaces often make people uncomfortable. Audiences tend to sit at the back; this psychologically and physically separates speaker from audience. That's always a bad thing.
- Access [e.g. doors]: make sure people can get in and out without disrupting the talk.
- Check there's not too much external noise, such as someone drilling a wall next door.
- Ventilation & climate control: check for open windows, fans, air-conditioners, etc. Stuffy & hot rooms are the enemies of talks, especially just after lunch.

### ***The Layout:***

- If possible bring seating to the front and remove the rear few rows [stack them at the back]. Have chairs facing inwards, rather than in straight rows.
- Make an aisle in the middle and down each side where the speaker can wander [Delivery styles & techniques – Session 3].
- Remove obstructions [e.g. electrical leads & unnecessary equipment] that you trip over, bump into or inadvertently activate.
- Note any steps on/off a stage; these can bring you down at a critical moment.

### ***The Lectern or Desk:***

- Useful for placing notes on and keeping tools [pointer, etc.] but tempting to hide behind it, a barrier between the speaker & the audience.
- Try to remove or avoid lecterns/desks if possible, if not stand to the side [Session 3].

### ***The Pointer:***

- Often a useful tool and often under-used.
- Put it down when not in use; otherwise it can be distracting, especially if you're shaking.
- Beware of laser pointers. Don't point them at the audience. They usually run out of battery power at the climax of your presentation and won't come good with attempted brutal persuasion.

**Lights:**

- Find out where the switches are. Check that they do work and that you can work them.
- Never leave the audience in the dark for the duration of your talk.
- If you need darkness for a visual presentation, check that the blinds/curtains can be drawn.

**The Sound System:**

- Avoid a microphone if possible; try to speak up and move closer to the audience.
- If you decide to use one, test it first and also ensure there's no feedback.
- Beware of any microphone leads trailing behind you.

**Visual Aids:**1. *Blackboard/whiteboard*

- First check you have chalk/marker pens and eraser on hand.
- Use for headings & diagrams; not good for detail.

2. *Butchers Paper*

- Cheap but messy. Can be pinned up for later viewing.

3. *Overheads*

- Make sure you know where the on/off switch is and how to focus. Check the focus after you start; several times. Make sure the screen is set up properly before you start.
- Use three colours at most and do not cram the screen with information.
- Use a pointer on the screen not on the projector and be aware that some people find 'sequential revelation' excruciating.
- Type & print out the transparencies; hand drawn/written overheads have less impact.
- Keep the number limited: a maximum 15 overheads per talk.
- Never photocopy an article or book and put up on an overhead [the death penalty applies].

4. *PowerPoint*

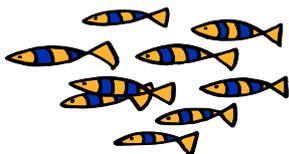
- Versatile & widely used, but not essential. Set up and run through all slides beforehand.
- Keep slides simple [7 lines – 5 points] and use the mouse as a pointer.
- Beware of complex backgrounds, animations, gimmicks & awful colours [avoid red].
- No more than one slide per minute of the talk, preferably less.
- Avoid 'information dumping'; make fewer points & aim for a good discussion.
- Try to use the computer provided; if you bring your own it may be incompatible.
- If possible bring your talk on a memory stick AND a CD. You can offer leave the CD with the chair or interested person.
- If the equipment doesn't work; turn everything off, then plug in and turn on again. If it still doesn't work, violence is acceptable ['percussive maintenance'].

5. *Videos & DVDs*

- Effective but a high risk of stuff-up. Run through everything several times before the talk.
- Make sure that you know what you're doing and there is a backup plan.

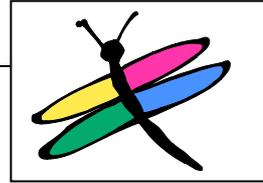
**Handouts:**

- Usually greatly appreciated. Also a good backup when technology fails.
- Give out at the beginning or end? There's no right answer.
- Keep to a page; possibly both sides.



# Presenting at Scientific & Other Meetings

## Part 3. Delivery styles & techniques



### *The Aim*

- To connect to the audience and to enjoy yourself.

### *Key Points*

- Everyone has his or her own style – value it and keep it.
- Be yourself: let people see what a good person you are.
- Be prepared: this demonstrates that you respect the audience.
- The audience wants you to give a good presentation; they're on your side.
- Practise. Practise. Practise.

### *Starting slow*

- Once the room is set up before the talk, leave enough time so that you can take yourself off for a quiet moment.
- If introduced, walk up slowly and greet the chairperson. Don't rush.
- If you have to introduce yourself, go to the front and stand quietly for a moment.
- Take a deep breath, say to yourself "slow up" and check that everything is in place before saying anything.
- Thank the chairperson for the invitation to speak [looking at him/her] and the audience for the privilege of speaking to them [looking at them].
- Pause again before starting on your presentation. Smile. Check the clock/watch.

### *Speaking*

- Use your normal speaking voice, but turn up the volume just a little. Don't shout.
- Perhaps ask, "Can everyone hear me?"
- Look up. Speak up. Speak slowly, especially at first. If possible, avoid reading your presentation. Reading is boring and disconnects the speaker from the audience. Use notes with headings or your overheads/slides as a guide.
- Pause from time to time, especially after you have delivered a key point. Sometimes it's good to then repeat the point. If there is a glass of water available, take a sip from time to time.
- Vary your pace and volume. Once you have your audience's attention, lowering your voice and speaking very slowly for a moment can be effective for getting a point across.

### *Standing, sitting, walking and comfort*

- Make sure you're comfortable before you start.
- For small audiences [ $< 20$ ] it may be OK to remain seated; for larger audiences stand up.
- It's OK to stand still or walk about a bit, but try not to pace up and down.
- If there is a large podium or desk acting as a barrier, stand to the side.
- Don't stand in front of the screen and block the view.
- Walking into the audience, and even behind, can be quite effective, especially when you have something very important to say. Walk slowly.

### *What to do we do with our hands?*

- Some people use hands gestures for expression and others don't. Either way it's OK.
- If you're nervous clasp hands together.
- If your hands are shaking don't hold things [paper, pointer, etc] that make it obvious.

***Connecting with the audience***

- Tell the audience your name, where you're from and who your people are [see Session 1 - Content: choosing and organizing the material]. You can even put up a map or photo.
- Comment on how well you have been welcomed, or how you like the place you've been invited to. Maybe you can greet someone you recognise in the audience.
- If you're nervous you can say so [or not]. Remember most people want you to do well.
- To start off find a friendly face to talk to, then another.....then another.
- Personalise: tell people about the challenges and problems you faced in your work.
- Get the audience into your confidence, as though there is 'just us together'.
- Show that you are passionate about your topic.
- If at all possible, get physically close to your audience. Show yourself; don't hide.

***Humour***

- Humour can make a big difference, but be gentle.
- Humour should never be at someone else's expense; laugh at yourself.
- You can use cartoons, quotes and items of interest. Avoid lewd jokes.

***Annoying habits***

- Avoid fiddling, fidgeting, playing with the equipment, rattling keys, etc.
- Avoid mumbling, rambling on, diversions off the point and frequent "errs".
- Apologies. **NEVER, NEVER** apologise for your presentation. It's the best you can do.

***Irritating people in the audience***

- Don't put anybody down. If possible stop and ask the chairperson to handle any problems.
- If not, say "Can I take that up with you at the end?" Never get into an argument.

***When disaster strikes***

- Turn to the chairperson for help; if there's no chairperson, a senior person in the room.
- Have a back up plan: maybe you can keep going with your talk using a handout.

***Finishing***

- Don't just fade out; leave an impression. Prepare for the last 5 minutes in case time is short.
- You can thank the audience for coming along and for their attention. Thank the chairperson.
- A last very brief statement, slide, quotation, poem or farewell in the local language can be effective. Look at the chairperson. Don't rush off; stay for questions then walk off slowly.

***Practise***

- All good speakers were bad speakers at first.
- Practise your presentation with a respected friend, someone who will give you honest feedback. Be prepared to make changes to the way you present.

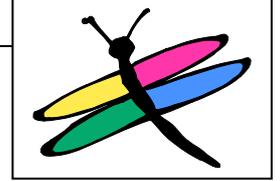
***Watch other people's presentations with fresh eyes***

- Be on the alert for good and bad styles of speaking.
- Note what annoys you and what grabs your attention. Try the good things next time.



# Presenting at Scientific & Other Meetings

## Part 4. Conversation: question time & the role of the chairperson



### ***The Aim***

- To get the most out of question time and appreciate the role of the chairperson.

### ***Key Points***

- Question time can be the most valuable aspect of a presentation; leave enough time for plenty of questions.
- Many speakers are frightened of question time. Stay cool and follow a few rules it won't turn out badly; it may turn out really well.
- The chairperson is there to run the meeting and look after the speaker[s]. A good chairperson can make a big difference to how well everything goes; a bad chairperson is a menace.

### ***Set guidelines [if the chairperson hasn't already done so].***

- During your introduction, you can either tell the audience
  - a) You are happy to answer questions during the talk OR
  - b) You want to wait until the end before answering questions.
  - c) At a conference you won't have a choice.

### ***Anticipate questions.***

- Think of the most likely question you'll get and prepare some answers [don't read them].
- When you practise your talk, get your friend[s] to ask questions so you can get practice.
- If it's before a big conference, try to present to your department first.

### ***Step forward, listen carefully to each question and repeat it back.***

- Move out from behind the desk or podium, step forward, smile & pause for few moments.
- If there is a chairperson, he/she will ask for any questions; if not, ask the audience yourself.
- Listening carefully to the question is the most important thing you can do. Repeat it back ..... this makes sure everyone has heard it and it also gives you time to think.
- If you're unsure what the question means ask the chairperson [or questioner] for it to be repeated or made clear "I'm sorry, but I don't understand the question."

### ***Acknowledge good questions.***

- "That's a good question!" "That's an interesting question." "I'm glad you brought that up!"

### ***Answer the question as best you can.***

- Answer what has been asked and answer as simply as possible. You can only do your best. Don't drift off the point. Don't ramble. Don't bluff.

### ***If the question is too hard.***

- Tell the audience you don't know the answer. If there's a chairperson, turn and ask for assistance from him/her; if not, ask the audience if anyone knows the answer.
- You can also offer to look up the answer and get back to the questioner later.

### ***Don't get angry at stupid questions or irritating questioners; never put the questioner down.***

- If you get upset, say "I would prefer to discuss that later." Then leave it alone.

### ***At the end of question time, thank the audience for their interest.***

- Don't rush off, people may still want to come up and ask questions privately.

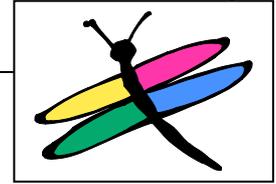
***A good chairperson:***

- Contacts the speaker several days before the presentation to tell him/her what the program will be, asks if there are any special requirements, checks the topic of the presentation and asks the speaker for some personal & professional details to use in the introduction. Also indicates to the speaker that there will be a time limit.
- *Arrives early to help the speaker set up, making sure everything works and the speaker is comfortable.*
- Starts the meeting on time.
- *Calls the audience to attention and welcomes everyone; then asks people to turn off mobile phones, beepers and other distracting devices; then acknowledges Traditional Owners.*
- Introduces the speaker and tells the audience something about his/her background and why he/she has been asked to speak.
- *Stays at the front to greet the speaker warmly when he/she gets up to present.*
- Then sits close to speaker during the presentation in case he/she needs assistance.
- *Comes to the speaker's aid immediately if there are any problems.*
- Keeps an eye on the time and indicates to the speaker when there's just 5 minutes left.
- *Listens to the presentation carefully and doesn't appear distracted by other matters.*
- Protects the speaker from any difficult members of the audience, but is courteous at all times.
- *Does not let the presentation run over time; he/she may need to politely stop the speaker.*
- Gets up and conducts question time. The chairperson should have a question ready that shows the speaker in a good light and use it if there are no initial questions from the audience.
- *Does not grandstand or promote him/herself [sometimes a temptation].*
- In a few words only, may briefly repeat and reinforce the 'main message' of the presentation before thanking the speaker for making the time & effort to speak to them; then calls the meeting to an end.
- *Goes up to the speaker immediately afterwards to personally congratulate and thank him/her for the presentation; then stays by the speaker's side to introduce him/her to any 'elders' who have come along to hear the talk.*
- Stays on to help the speaker gather up his/her things and then escorts the speaker out of the room and/or building.
- Writes a short note of thanks to the speaker the next day.



# Presenting at Scientific & Other Meetings

## Part 5. Cultural issues & gaining confidence



### *The aim*

- To consider cultural differences related to speaking in public.
- To look at ways of gaining confidence as a speaker.

### *Key points*

- Cultural differences in ways of communicating should be respected by speakers and audiences alike.
- Gaining confidence requires practice and experience, plus a willingness to listen to advice from the people who support you. It doesn't come quickly. Neither should one bad experience deter you from getting back on your feet to speak again.

### *Issues of respect*

- When a presentation is carefully prepared it is obvious to the audience; it also shows that the speaker respects the audience. Careless preparation and lazy delivery shows disrespect.
- Respectful addressing of elders [of any culture] is important and protocols must be followed. Failure to appreciate the significance of respect leaves a bad impression.
- In some circumstances it may be useful to start a presentation with, "I'm going to talk to you in a way that is proper for my culture. I'm sure you will appreciate that."

### *Eye contact & speaking loudly*

- In some cultures, eye contact with audience members is regarded as important. In other cultures, deliberate eye contact is regarded as aggressive and disrespectful.
- Likewise, some people speak softly rather than loudly, especially when there's something important to say. Loudness may be regarded as disrespectful.

### *Pace of the presentation and constraints of time*

- Many scientific presentations are characterised by a rush to get through a large amount of material in the shortest possible time.
- This is contrary to accepted behaviour in cultural settings where taking time is essential, especially when there's something important to discuss.
- Most scientific presentations have time limits. This can also be difficult for people who are used to open-ended discussions of issues.

### *Silence versus noise*

- Likewise, some people find it necessary to 'fill the air with words'. Silences, even brief ones, are uncomfortable.
- Other people are quite comfortable with silence. It may indicate that people are properly considering what is being said rather than rushing on to the next piece of information. Silent pauses can have a great impact.

**Answering questions** [see Session 4]

- Sometimes questions are difficult to understand [whatever the language or culture]; take time to find out what the questioner is really asking.
- Slow thoughtful answering of questions is expected in some cultures, but not others.

**Out on a limb**

- When an Aboriginal person is called upon to speak to a predominantly or exclusively non-Aboriginal audience it can sometimes be very confronting [and visa versa].
- There is no easy answer for this, but a well-prepared and thoughtful presentation will usually be appreciated across all cultural boundaries.
- You don't have to answer rude or 'put down' type questions or comments. Maintain your dignity, respectfully decline and move on to the next question.

**Gaining confidence**

- Find a mentor or 'elder' who will give you wise and constructive feedback.
- Practise speaking to an open room or a hall and in front of your mentor and/or friends.
- It may be helpful to record your practice session [video or audio] and listen to how you sound. Don't despair if it sounds bad at first; it always does. Think of how it can be improved.
- Confidence only comes with experience; most people improve as time goes on. A few people remain poor speakers all their lives, mainly because they make no effort to improve.

**Review of sessions:**

## Part 1. Content: choosing and organizing the material

- Getting your story across.

## Part 2. The tools &amp; the environment

- Getting your story across effectively - without technical stuff-ups.

## Part 3. Delivery styles &amp; techniques

- Connecting to the audience and enjoying yourself.

## Part 4. Question time &amp; the role of the chairperson

- Getting the most out of question time and appreciating the role of the chairperson

## Part 5. Reflections on cultural issues &amp; gaining confidence

*Good luck!*

