

# Tips for effective presentation

The role of an engineer is both varied and multifaceted, and whilst technical expertise is undoubtedly important, today's engineers need to be able to communicate this knowledge effectively. Oral presentations are a useful communication tool and allow information to be delivered to an audience in order to share knowledge or to stimulate a discussion. This is a learned skill and one that is frequently called upon in the workplace.

Giving a presentation is not one of the easiest things to do. For many it can be both nerve-racking and stressful. However, with practice the nerves will ease and it may even become enjoyable. Being able to express yourself clearly and convincingly is a skill needed in all kinds of situations. This is why gaining practice at university is so important and will also help you prepare for the workplace. Below are some suggested tips and guidelines to help prepare an effective presentation.

## Preparation

- Preparation is one of the most important parts of delivering an effective presentation and it can also help to control the nerves - you can never over-prepare!
- Consider your audience and their background, this will help you to decide on the content and style of delivery.
- Estimate the time available for your presentation so that you can decide on how much information you can include. Be realistic about how much material you can cover as it is important that you keep within your time limit.
- Before putting your presentation together, you must define the aims, topic and appropriate depth and scope of the information you will be presenting.
- Collate all the information and ideas and organise them in a logical sequence. Remember that the presentation is telling a story and this must be clear and logical to the listener.
- Structure your presentation. Typically, oral presentations have three main stages:
  - The introduction: (what you intend to say)
  - The body (the presentation itself)
  - Conclusions (what you have said)
- Know the subject thoroughly. Check all the work for clarifications and think about what questions the audience might ask. If you are unfamiliar with your subject you will feel uncomfortable with it, and nervousness will increase. Learning as much about the subject as you can will help boost confidence in delivery. It also improves flow and helps with questioning.
- Ensure that your presentation includes definitions, any underlying assumptions, historical background or any other introductory material. The amount of introduction you need will depend on your audience.
- If you are reading from notes in your presentation, be sure to use key words and phrases in your notes rather than sentences. This will prevent you from reading directly from your notes and help you establish eye contact with the audience.

## Preparation of Visual aids

- If used in the correct way, visual aids (such as OHP's or Powerpoint slides) can greatly enhance your presentation. They can be used to highlight key points and display images or diagrams.
- It is important that your visual aids clarify and support your data in an attractive and comprehensive way. They should not detract from your presentation.
- Ensure that you only write down the key points in your slides. Try not to present long and detailed sections of text. Bullet points can often be more effective and the audience will be able to concentrate on what you are saying rather than reading the slide (4-5 bullet points are an acceptable amount per slide). These bullet points can also be used as prompts/cues for your talk. Do not use too many gimmicks such as 'flying text' or noises
- Font size should be large enough to be legible to be seen from all parts of the room (e.g. 22 - 28 for the text and 34-40 for titles.)
- Pictures/diagrams must also be clear, legible and large enough to be seen from all parts of the room.
- Arrange images with plenty of space surrounding each item so as not to clutter your slides/OHP's
- If possible use only one typeface. Too many typefaces can look messy and confusing, particularly if they are in the same sentence or paragraph. Experiment with available styles and find one that you can read from a distance. For emphasis you could always use bold face, italics or colour.
- Use caps and lowercase instead of all caps for easier reading.
- Colour can be used for emphasis, distinction and clarity. Highlighting headings and key points, graphs and charts is a good functional use of colour. However, you must be careful that the colour does not interfere or detract from the visually presented information.
- Be careful with coloured backgrounds as some colours can make black text or figures less distinct. A good tip is to use background and foreground colours that complement each other and have high contrast.
- Prepare visual aids that can be used in the speaking environment. There is no use in preparing a Powerpoint presentation if there is no computer to run it on. Find out in advance what equipment is available to you.

## Practise

- Rehearse the talk as much as you can. It may help to do a 'dry-run' with a friend or colleague who can then give you honest and constructive feedback
- Time the presentation
- If you are using notes/cue cards, practise your delivery. The more familiar you become with them, the less you will need to look at them.
- Anticipate any questions that could be asked and prepare possible responses. Prepare for the questions that you may not be able answer and know how you will respond to them.

## Delivery

- Greet the audience and try to look confident and relaxed - smile!
- Wait for the audience to focus their attention on you before you start
- Begin by introducing yourself (and your colleagues if you worked with others). State the topic clearly and give an outline of what you will cover.
- Use your visual aids to highlight the main ideas as you progress through the presentation.
- Stand to the left or right of the screen; make sure you are not standing between the image and your audience. Face the audience as you speak and take care not to turn your body away from them. Try to maintain eye contact with the audience, but don't just stare at one person!
- If you get nervous, take deep breaths and use natural pauses in the content to regain control. Remember that everyone feels nervous at times and the audience will make allowances.
- Don't rush through the presentation and the series of visuals so fast that the audience becomes confused.

- Use your voice by changing volume, pitch and by using pauses to indicate that you are moving onto a new point. Vary your intonation for statements, questions and emphasis.
- Conclude by summarising the main points of your presentation. Reinforcing the main points, both verbally and by repetition, will help your audience assimilate the information.
- Try to answer questions simply and directly. Virtually no one has all the answers all the time and if you don't have the answer, say so. You can, however, offer a helpful solution such as, 'I'm afraid I'm not familiar with that topic, I'll find out and get back to you'.

## Resources

University of South Australia [www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/learnres/learnrg/](http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/learnres/learnrg/)  
(<http://www.cases.bham.ac.uk/tips/www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/learnres/learnrg/>)

Queens University Belfast [www.qub.ac.uk/cap/studentdevelopment/teamworkbis/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/cap/studentdevelopment/teamworkbis/)  
(<http://www.cases.bham.ac.uk/tips/www.qub.ac.uk/cap/studentdevelopment/teamworkbis/>)

Oklahoma State University Graduate College - Effective Research Presentations  
[www.osu-ours.okstate.edu/gradcoll](http://www.osu-ours.okstate.edu/gradcoll) (<http://www.cases.bham.ac.uk/tips/www.osu-ours.okstate.edu/gradcoll>)

The 4S Programme  
<http://www.is.bham.ac.uk/4s/ss0300.htm> (<http://www.is.bham.ac.uk/4s/ss0300.htm>) (Access restricted to the University of Birmingham)