

The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences

Guidelines on Free Communication Presentations

At BASES Conferences 10 minutes are allowed for a free communication presentation with five minutes for follow-up questions.

I know of few - if any - who are not nervous and experience feelings of trepidation. I also know some who are particularly able and part of this ability - apart from natural talent - is attributable to three factors: preparation, practise and experience. Say what you are going to say, say it and then say what you have said.

Guide the audience gently and take them through the background to your work, state the purpose, your methods, your findings and finally the implications. Above all, keep your slides simple and don't cram them full of information. Use fonts large enough for people to read from the back of the room and make sure the typeface is dyslexia-friendly. A good illustration or picture can explain an idea more quickly than spoken or written words. Use illustrations to show for example, apparatus and rigs. Digital cameras make such pictures ever so easy to generate.

Give your audience time to take in your points and make use of a laser pointer or simply the mouse cursor to emphasise key features. Attempts at jokes and witticisms can backfire. That's not to say they don't have a place - just think carefully before trying.

Try to look at the audience most of the time - not at the screen or projector. Don't read from a script; if necessary use prompt cards but better still, use your slides as prompts and memorise their content. If you are worried that you will forget what you will say with each slide, write notes on the paper that goes with the slide.

Rehearse in front of colleagues to polish your delivery and have back-up plans to deal with failures of equipment or incompatibility in software. Also, if you don't already, consider listening to Radio 4's Just a Minute and see if you can develop an ability to speak on a topic for one minute without hesitation, repetition or deviation - you have 10 minutes to occupy. Allow 1-2 minutes per slide (so about 6 - 10 slides for a 10-minute presentation). If you have fewer than this, you might bore the audience. If you have more, the audience might not have time to read and think about the slides.

Questions can be troublesome and it is surprising how often a key point is raised that you had not previously considered. Also, if you don't know the answer to a question, say so! Don't waffle. You could strengthen your response by recourse to conflicting views to show that your "don't know" is from a position of strength, not weakness. The chair should protect you from aggressive or malevolent interrogation but such questioning can occur so try to be prepared. Unless you are experienced, avoid the prefix to an answer, "That is a good question". In legal circles, advocates rarely ask a question to which they don't already know the answer and they have a good reason for its use. Beware!

Above all, take satisfaction from a well-presented outcome to a useful investigation and then enjoy the acclaim and post-presentation discussions with others who share your interest.

Written by Prof Edward Winter on behalf of BASES
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