

Tips for presenting

*Workshop held at PILAS lunch during the 2011 SLAS conference.
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Presenting is one of the most important skills we have to learn as postgraduate students. We have all seen very engaging conference papers and others that are less so, and therefore in this session we asked postgraduates to share ideas on what might make a good presentation (particularly in a conference situation). The workshop focused on three main areas of presenting: preparation, delivery and use of visual support. This document is based on the ideas that were generated; we hope you find them useful!

Preparation:

Some useful questions to ask yourself before starting:

- **Who is my audience?** The prior knowledge you expect the audience to have and the situation in which you will present should affect the way you approach your talk.
- **What is my message? What do I want my audience to remember at the end?** A clear focus is key to giving an effective presentation or conference paper.
- **Will I read or give a freer talk?** This will affect the way you prepare (see below).
- **What do I find most interesting about the topic?** Communicating your own passion for a subject is a great way to engage your audience.

If you are reading:

- **Remember a conference paper is not an academic article.** Long, complex sentences are more difficult to understand when you are listening.
- **Make sure you know what point each paragraph is making.** This will help you to be clearer in your delivery and streamline your presentation; if you can't identify your argument at each stage then it's unlikely your audience will be able to.

If you are speaking from notes:

- **Practise timings.** It can be easy to overrun when speaking from notes so make sure you practise. You can deliver the presentation to another person, rehearse in front of the mirror, or even film yourself...
- **Structure your ideas carefully.** Speaking 'off-script' can be engaging but it can be easy to lose clarity.

Delivery:

- **Body language.** You should aim to look (and sound) confident and composed. Making eye contact with your audience is also a good way to keep them engaged.

- **Tone of voice.** Vary the expression in your voice and aim for an engaging and interesting delivery.
- **Signposting.** Let the audience know how you will structure your presentation so they can follow the progression of your ideas.
- **Well-timed.** Presentations that overrun lose the audience's interest and can leave them with a negative impression.

Visual Support

We asked workshop participants if they felt PowerPoint presentations were always necessary and received very mixed views. Here are some of the general points that were highlighted for using PowerPoint:

- **Consider the purpose.** Think about the function of your PowerPoint: what does it contribute to your presentation? Will it distract from you as the central focus?
- **Useful for quotations.** It is often easier for your audience to follow quotations when they can see them written down. References can also be easily included.
- **Avoid too much text.** This can be difficult to read, especially if the presenter is speaking at the same time.
- **Spell-check.** Self-explanatory!

The session highlighted the importance of personal preference regarding presentation style, so these points are intended as general guidance. If you'd like to contribute any tips or comment on how these suggestions have worked for you, please write to us at pilasconference@gmail.com. Good luck with your next presentation!