

Designing personalized, interactive materials for presentation skills

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The course: 'Conference skills'

Aims and format

Honing presentation skills + efficient preparation

Not a language course

18 hours; 3 days over 3 weeks

12 PhD students max

Heterogeneous:

B1-C2; mixed discipline; varying presentation experience

Syllabus

Day 1

Choosing your conference, topic, scope and depth

Adapting your talk to the context

2-minute presentations

Day 2

Structuring your talk

Managing your time

Managing mishaps

Using your voice and body

Day 3

Designing effective slides

Managing attention

Dealing with questions

Working with nervousness

Writing successful abstracts

Networking

Assessed presentations

Finding out about the participants

Precourse questionnaire (Qualtrics)

Discipline

Language profile

Presentation experience

Strengths

Wants

Materials available

Personalizing the course

If they have it, use it.

Conferences

Research

Texts

Visuals

Experiences

Presentations

Their conferences

Example: Choosing your conference, topic, scope and depth

Recently, I attended a NASA presentation entitled “Eight Technology Innovations for Space Applications.” [...] The first twenty minutes were interesting. During this time, the speaker discussed high-temperature superconductors, which was the first innovation on the list. Unfortunately, in the remaining forty minutes, the speaker tried in vain to cover the other seven innovations. [...]
(Account taken from Alley, 2003, p. 63)

HANDOUT

The following questions will help you decide on the appropriate topic, scope and depth:

What does the conference call ask for; what is its theme; what track would my presentation fit into?

What can I expect this audience to be most interested in from among the many things I could say about my topic?

What will be my key message: 'After this presentation, my audience will ...'.

[...]

PERSONALIZED TASK

Precourse: bring in a conference call

- a) For your target conference, answer as many of the above questions as possible.
- b) How will this affect your topic choice, scope and depth?

Their research

Example: Structuring your talk

PERSONALIZED TASK

Write a coherent mini-research story by writing one sentence maximum per question. Insert pauses (/) strategically.

Present it to your partner, who can ask you to clarify and elaborate.

PERSONALIZED TASK

Take the first three sentences of a research article you've written/read.

- a) Adapt them to facilitate processing and engage the audience.
- b) Read out the original and adapted version to your neighbour.
Explain how you've adapted the original.

PERSONALIZED TASK

Revise three of your slides using the guidelines. Show the original and revised slides to your partner and explain your changes.

Their experiences

Example: Working with nervousness

PERSONALIZED TASK

When are you most nervous? What causes your nervousness (mild, moderate or severe)? Reflect and share with your group.

Discuss possible ways of reducing the cause(s) of your nervousness with the help of the stress-busting techniques below.

Add other techniques you've used successfully to the list.

Their presentations

Example: Body language and voice use

Session 1: filmed 2-minute presentation in class; sent to students via We Transfer.

PERSONALIZED TASK (session 2)

- a) Analyse your presentation by answering the following questions.
- b) Listen to your partner's presentations and discuss his/her non-verbal behaviour using the questions above.
- c) What are the main things you've learnt from this for future presentations?

Their presentations

Example: Reflection

Assessed 15-minute presentation; post-course reflection

PRESENTATION-REFLECTION-FORM¶

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Name:¶

¶

Content¶

1. → In one sentence, state the key message of your presentation.¶
2. → How many members of your audience managed to identify your key message?¶
3. → How did you adapt your talk to your audience (interest, expertise, English as a lingua franca)?¶
4. → What does audience feedback tell you about the extent to which this adaptation was successful?¶
5. → Was the amount of information appropriate for this context?¶
6. → Having reflected on the above points, what things will you work on for future presentations?¶

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Introduction¶

7. → What did you do to provide a roadmap of your talk?¶
8. → How successful were you in providing a clear roadmap? Consider audience feedback.¶
9. → Did you look at your audience and smile when introducing yourself and your title?¶
10. → Did your hook work? Consider audience feedback.¶
11. → What else did you say/do to try to establish rapport with the audience from the beginning?¶
12. → Having reflected on the above points, what things will you work on for future-

[...]

Creating interactivity

Eliciting information

Example: Remembering what to say

INTERACTIVE TASK

Which of these methods work(s) best for you? Why? Which ones do you think are not a good idea? Why? Discuss in groups of 4.

Memorization

Full script

Skeletal script with full sentences

Hand-held note cards with bullet points and phrases

Slides only

Slides with slide notes (Presenter View)

Tablet

Other:

Discussing

Example: Writing successful abstracts

INTERACTIVE TASK

High-rated abstracts

Topics were of current interest to experienced members of the community.

A problem was clearly defined.

The problem was addressed in a novel way.

Special terminology was current or 'buzzy'.

Several explicit and implicit references to the scholarly literature.

Low-rated abstracts

Topics were of lesser interest.

No clear problem was defined.

The problem, if defined, received less interesting treatment.

Terminology was standard.

Fewer citations and allusions were used.

Differences between high- and low-rated conference abstracts (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, as cited in Swales & Feak, 2009, p. 51)

39) Which of these features of high-rated abstracts do you think apply in your field? Do you know of any other important features to ensure your conference abstract (paper) gets accepted?

Working with peer feedback

Filmed presentations

Session 3: Assessed presentation: oral & written peer feedback

- 1) Presentation
- 2) Questions
- 3) Reflection on own presentation & request for feedback
- 4) Feedback (appointed person → all)

1. → In one sentence, state the key message of this presentation. Complete: *From this talk I've learnt that...* ¶

2. → Did something make the talk difficult to understand (insufficient explanation, language errors, word choice, sentence structure/length, jargon, articulation, pronunciation, pace, slides, something else)? ¶

Yes (state what) ¶

No ¶

3. → Rate the following. ¶

¶

☐	+++	++	+/-	-	---	☐
The speaker captured my attention right from the beginning. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I paid attention throughout the presentation. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt the speaker was talking to me rather than at me. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt the speaker cared about whether I was interested and understood the talk. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The amount of information presented to this audience and in this time was just right. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The introduction made clear what I could expect from the talk. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transitions between major parts of the talk and main points were clear. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It was easy to distinguish between important and less important information. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The conclusion delivered the key message in a memorable way. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The speaker's pace of delivery was just right. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The speaker's intonation was natural and varied. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The speaker appeared confident and enthusiastic. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The speaker had enough eye contact with me. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The speaker did not use any distracting non-verbal behaviours/words/sounds. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
All slides were needed. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The slides helped me understand the talk. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The slides were easy to read. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The slides did not distract me from what the speaker was saying. ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

[...]

What I've learnt from this course

Day-long sessions need to be designed in an especially varied & interactive way.

Students underestimate the importance of catering to audience needs.

Student presentation films are feared but fantastic

Short presentation at beginning is instructive & constructive

Peer feedback:

- Framework needed

- Greatly appreciated but teacher feedback wanted also

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Academia edu; ResearchGate

References

Alley, M. (2003). *The craft of scientific presentations: critical steps to succeed and critical errors to avoid* (2 ed.). New York: Springer.

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. (2009). *Abstracts and the writing of abstracts*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.