



The network for women studying Science, Engineering,  
Technology and the Built Environment in Scotland

## Presentation Skills

So you've been invited for an interview – your first thought is “this is fantastic news” and then you read “you’ll be required to prepare a presentation and deliver it to the interviewing panel” – your heart sinks, you feel ill, you think how am I going to get through this?

Well, the first step is to read this newsletter – packed full of useful hints and tips from an experienced presenter, who still gets butterflies every time she has to stand up and talk.

Let's begin by breaking this down into three useful steps:

### 1) **Prepare, prepare, prepare**

- ⇒ Think about your audience, your aims, their expectations, the time allocated, the facilities available and the surroundings.
- ⇒ Don't be scared to ask questions beforehand – how many people will you be presenting to, what is their role within the company? Any questions that you feel will help your preparation are worth asking.
- ⇒ Work out the key points you wish to make during the presentation and build your content around these.
- ⇒ Consider what you want the audience to get out of this. Is it to persuade, inform, challenge?
- ⇒ Think about your structure. All good presentations, in the words of George Bernard Shaw, should “Tell'em what you're gonna tell'em. Tell'em. Then tell'em what you told'em.”
- ⇒ Don't rush over this preparation phase, it is invaluable

### 2) **Creating a Powerpoint slideshow**

- ⇒ Your slideshow should be used as a prop and not a crutch. In other words use the presentation to complement your key points as you speak. Don't be tempted to sacrifice your key points in favour of creating a flashy, all-singing, all-dancing presentation. The audience will see through this in seconds.
- ⇒ Don't cram too much into the slides. A good rule of thumb is no more than 3 bullet points per slide and a maximum of 7 words per bullet point
- ⇒ Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. The more familiar you are with the presentation – the less likely you are to rely on prompt cards or notes.
- ⇒ Check your timings. If you have a 10 minute presentation – 9 minutes plus is acceptable but ideally don't go over 10 minutes.
- ⇒ Remember, when you are rehearsing you are likely to speak slower than you will when you're presenting it for real, so factor this into your timings.
- ⇒ Practise with your friends, your family or even in the mirror

### 3) **Presenting on the day**

- ⇒ My advice would be don't start changing anything on the day of the interview – this may well unsettle you and will be picked up on by the audience
- ⇒ Remind yourself of all the work you have put into this and how confident and knowledgeable you are on the

subject

- ⇒ Nerves are good – you need them to put on a good performance – just channel them positively
- ⇒ Establish eye contact with your audience. If the thought of this makes you nervous, find techniques to help you overcome the nerves. One I use is to wear my reading glasses – they make the people I’m presenting to look blurred but the audience thinks I’m looking straight at them.
- ⇒ Breathe deeply and project your voice – you’ve got information you want to impart and you want your audience to listen
- ⇒ Don’t fidget – identify any nervous habits you have beforehand and how best to mitigate them ie. shaky hands – hold the lectern or clasp them behind your back
- ⇒ Remember to smile – you’re a performer!

Developing good presentation skills is like anything else – they get better with practice. While you’re at university, make the most of any opportunities you have to present – even if it is taking you out with your comfort zone. Doing this early on will stand you in good stead for the rest of your working life.

So, in summary:

1. define purpose
2. gather content and presentation ideas
3. structure the subject matter
4. decide how you are going to present it
5. prepare presentation
6. practice
7. present

All that remains for me to say is good luck and enjoy!

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