Conference presentations: the basics *updated*

There are **three** basic elements to any successful presentation. *Everyone* in the audience should be able to:

- **hear what the speaker is saying**
- **read and understand any visual aids (e.g. PowerPoint® slides)**
- **rely on the speaker keeping to time**

These may be 'statements of the blindingly obvious' but, all too often, speakers fail to achieve these fundamentals.

Recent, enforced changes in working practices have resulted in greater use of 'online only' (e.g. Zoom®/MS Teams®) or 'hybrid' meetings, in place of the traditional 'in person' group meetings. *Consider the format of the meeting when visual aids are prepared.* Slides that are readable when participants watch on their own monitors are often totally unreadable at 'in person' meetings where images are projected onto large screens or monitors.

Moral: *Don't assume presentations prepared for 'online only' use are suitable for 'in person' or 'hybrid' meetings.*

How do I ensure everyone can <u>hear</u> me?

1. Speak **clearly** and **slowly** throughout your entire presentation. Don't gabble or speak less audibly as your talk progresses. At 'in person' meetings, face the audience, not the screen. Don't simply read text from the screen.
2. Use a microphone, if available, at 'in person' meetings. With online presentations, ensure your microphone works properly and, if in doubt, check with meeting organiser prior to the start of your talk.
3. Highlighting specific points with a pointer helps the audience follow your talk. Ensure the pointer is clearly visible and don't move it around aimlessly. Green laser pointers are better than red ones for 'in person' talks. However, it is important to remember that with a 'hybrid' event, online delegates usually cannot see the in-venue laser pointer, so don't be too reliant on its use. Instead, consider highlighting relevant sections on your slides with arrows or different colours.

How do I ensure everyone can <u>read</u> my slides?

1. Check whether slides should be widescreen (16:9; best for monitors) or standard format (4:3; best for projection onto a screen). (Change using the 'Design' tab and 'Slide Size' drop-down menu in Powerpoint®).
2. **Follow the 'rules' on the sample PowerPoint® on the next page.** Being easy to read on your computer screen is **not** an adequate indicator of readability when projected onto a screen or monitor at 'in person' meetings.
3. These 'rules' are also relevant to tables and figures. Ensure text and numbers on axes are legible.
4. **Keep slides simple.** Avoid multiple tables or figures on a single slide – they are unlikely to be legible.
5. Choose colours carefully to ensure good contrast. Be aware that people with colour blindness (8% of men) have difficulty differentiating different shades of the same colour.
6. Use colours consistently to prevent confusion. Don't over-use distracting animations.
7. **Print out your slides on A4 paper (1 per sheet) and place these on the floor at your feet – if you can read them while standing, the slides should be readable when projected.**

Beware of including too much information on slides for 'online only' meetings. The content may be legible, but *should* you be including so much detail? The 'rules' overleaf are relevant to <u>all</u> types of meeting.

How do I ensure I keep to time?

1. Practice – several times. Actual presentations nearly always take slightly longer than they do when practicing. Factor this in and allow time for questions. Few people object to talks being shorter than scheduled; many people object to over-running which is also unfair on the following speakers. Ensure you can see a clock or watch.
2. Don't have too many slides – **1 to 2 minutes per slide** is about right unless the content is very simple. If some slides are 'data heavy' try to intersperse with less 'demanding' slides, such as photos that emphasise a point.

Remember:

- If the audience cannot hear or read your presentation, you have wasted their, as well as your own, time.
- The audience may associate the quality of your presentation with the quality of your research – good or bad.
- If you say, "**you probably can't read this**" you are admitting your preparation is at fault.
- Simply asking people what they thought of your talk will not provide reliable feedback. People lie.
- If you are an inexperienced speaker, rehearse your talk and ask a trusted colleague to give honest feedback.

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PowerPoint® rules. OK?

(Arial 44 font a good size for titles, but slightly smaller is OK too)

- **Arial** works well. Avoid Times Roman as too 'thin'. Other fonts may be OK but check they project well

- **28 font** should be the **minimum** font size for text

- Use a maximum of **50 characters and spaces** across width of slide, preferably less

- **10 lines** of text should be the maximum per slide

- Use **all of the slide area**, but avoid extreme edges as these may project off-screen

- Use a **maximum of 6 bullet points** per slide – if you need more, place on additional slides