

Developing oral skills in academia

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Outline

- Structure of a presentation
- Q&A Session
- Audience
- Verbal communication
- Non-verbal communication
- Visual aids
- Assertive language

Introduction

Templeton & Sparks (1999)

- Fear of looking foolish
- Self-consciousness in front of large groups
- Fear of the unknown
- Negative past experiences
- Poor or insufficient preparation

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Structure of a presentation

- **Introduction:** Tell the audience what we're going to talk about
- **Body:** Tell the actual research
- **Conclusion:** Tell them again what you've already told them

(Language Services Centre, 2001)

Structure: Introduction

- Engage your audience by telling an anecdote, stating facts, or asking a rhetorical question

Statistics show that in the last ten years, more people have legally emigrated to the United States than to the rest of the world put together – about half a million of them a year, in fact. Now, over ten years, that's roughly equivalent to the population of Greece (Language Services Centre, 2001).

Structure: Body

- Signpost your audience
 - The next/following section is ...
 - I will now move on to ...
 - Turning now to ...

Structure: Conclusion

- Review what you've said before
- Give a concise summary of what you've said
- Restate initial objectives and relate them to the outcomes
- Signal the end and thank the audience

Q&A session

- You do not know the answer to the question

Do not fake it

- Defer the question to an audience member with greater expertise
- Promise to check up on the answer

Q&A session

- You do not know the answer to the question
 - *That's a good point. Since our expert on the subject, Mr./Ms./Dr. ****, is here today, perhaps (s)he would like to comment.*
 - *That's a subject that's still open to question. Does anyone here have any opinions on that matter?*
 - *Perhaps that's a question better answered by somebody from the *** department. Mr./Ms./Dr. ***?*

Q&A session

- You do not understand the question

Ask for clarification or repeat what you have understood

Q&A session

- You do not understand the question

→ *Excuse me. Just to be clear – I think you mentioned something about Could you specify exactly what aspect of this issue you would like me to address?*

Q&A session

- The question is complex or includes several questions in one

Take notes (if possible) and answer one by one

Q&A session

- The question is complex or includes several questions in one
 - *Well, let me take your questions one by one ...*
 - *Well, in answer to your first question, ...*
 - *If I may, I'll begin with your second question ...*

Q&A session

- The question is hostile or confusing

Use a neutral tone to rephrase it in an unbiased way

- Show polite understanding
- Support your argument

Q&A session

- The question is hostile or confusing

→ *That's an interesting question. What are your views on the subject?*

→ *Well, you've obviously given this a lot of thought. Perhaps we could hear your ideas. I understand your reservations.*

→ *May I ask what alternatives you see?*

Q&A session

- The question is rambling and is dominating your time

Wait, interrupt, and ask

Q&A session

- The question is rambling and is dominating your time

→ *That's an interesting question, but I am afraid we are running out of time. Could you specify what question you want me to address?*

Q&A session

- The question makes an incorrect presupposition

Indicate the mistake

Q&A session

- The question makes an incorrect presupposition

→ *With respect, your question is based on wrong information. The truth/true figures are ...*

Q&A session

- The question is a hypothetical one

If an answer is in order, state it refers to a hypothetical situation

Q&A session

- The question is a hypothetical one

→ *That's an interesting question, but it is an issue I haven't addressed in my research.*

Q&A session

- You don't want to answer the question

Bring the question to your turf

Q&A session

- You don't want to answer the question

→ *That's a good point. I'd like to expand on that by saying ...*

→ *Well, before I could really address that question, we have to consider ...*

→ *Well, there's no easy answer to your question, but I would like to say ...*

→ *Well, your question brings up another question, and that is ...*

Q&A session

- You don't want to answer the question

Evade or block the question

Q&A session

- You don't want to answer the question
 - *I'm afraid I'm not in a position to answer that.*
 - *I don't really think that's an appropriate question for this forum.*
 - *I don't think we should get into that right now.*
 - *An interesting question. Let's talk about it later.*

Audience

- What is their education level?
- What is their level of knowledge on the topic?
- Why are they there?
- What do the audience members want or need to know about the topic?
- Do you know each other?

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015, p. 141)

Audience

- Interact with your audience:
 - **Eye contact**
- 1. The audience looks confused
 - Slow down and explain a specific point
- 2. The audience looks distracted or disinterested
 - Use pauses, silence, rhetorical questions
 - Visual aids

Verbal and non-verbal communication

Verbal communication

- **Pitch:** highness or lowness of your voice (Language Services Centre, 2001)
- **Volume:** loudness of your voice (Templeton & Sparks, 2015)
- **Rate:** Speed or tempo of your vocal delivery (Templeton & Sparks, 1999)
- **Enunciation and pronunciation:** ensure that your audience understands what you're saying

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015)

Verbal communication

- **Ear-friendly language:**
 - Try to sound natural, do not make long sentences and complicated structures
 - Be effective, clear, concise, and simple
- **Non-words and fillers**

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015)

Verbal communication

- **Discourse markers**
 - Organise our speech
 - Connect ideas
 - Guide the audience through the presentation and your arguments
 - Might also include non-words and fillers

Verbal communication

- **Discourse markers**

- Firstly, ... / Secondly, ... / Finally, ...
- The first thing, ... / Then, / Next, ...
- I'm going to start by outlining...
- On the one hand, ... / On the other hand, ...
- Let me think about that for a minute...
- What was I saying?

Non-verbal communication

“[O]nly 7% of what is communicated is done by means of the actual words we use, while as much as 55% is communicated bodily and 38%, through our tone of voice”

(Pérez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015, p. 145)

Non-verbal communication

- **Kinesics:**

- **Facial, body and gestural movements**
- Maintain a friendly face – not hostile, show enthusiasm
- Gestures
- Posture

- **Oculesics:**

- **Eye contact:** creates the illusion that you're comfortable with your audience

Non-verbal communication

- **Mannerisms:**
 - Might reflect nervousness
 - Bad mannerism
- **Grooming and clothes:**

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015)



Will Mason
@willmasonmusic



the four different ways academics dress at conferences:



Non-verbal communication

- **Nervousness:**

- Affects non-verbal and verbal communication

→ What things can we do to fight nervousness?

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015)

Non-verbal communication

- What things can we do to fight nervousness?
 - Rehearse
 - Do not memorize it
 - Prepare speaker notes or keywords
 - Do not read from the paper

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015)

Non-verbal communication

- What things can we do to fight nervousness?
 - Visualize yourself doing it well in front of the audience
 - Relaxation techniques

(Perez Cañado & Almagro Esteban, 2015)

Visual aids:

PowerPoint presentation

Visual aids

“[W]hat you show an audience has about three times as much impact as what you tell them”

(Templeton & Sparks, 1999, p. 121)

PowerPoint presentation

- Prepare it in advance
 - Make sure you have no spelling or grammar mistakes

PowerPoint presentation

- **Do not overcrowd your slides**

This is important because people tend to put every word they are going to say on their PowerPoint slides. Although this eliminates the need to memorize your talk, ultimately this makes your slides crowded, wordy, and boring. You will lose your audience attention before you even reach the bottom of your...

(Don McMillan, 2009)

PowerPoint presentation

(continued) ...first slide

(McMillan, 2009)

PowerPoint presentation

Online intimidation and harassment against women have existed since the very emergence of the Internet (Herring, 2004). Jane (2016) points out that almost 75% of women, especially young women, have experienced online abuse and harassment, and that gender-related comments published in response to online news are more likely to receive negative comments and support (cyber)violence against women (see also Bou-Franch, 2013). However, it was not until the early 2010s that under-represented groups like women and LGBTQIA+ individuals started using platforms, especially Twitter, to publicly voice both their online and offline experiences of sexual harassment and violence (Jane, 2016). Indeed, research has shown that online communication reproduces patterns of dominance already present in the offline world, which make it possible for scholars to examine ideologies of gender (in)equality in society (Bou-Franch, 2016; Herring et al., 1995; Tagg, 2015).

PowerPoint presentation

- Twitter as **the most influential digital platform**
- Twitter as a **(sexually) abusive and sexist service**
 - Victimization of women
 - Men as victims of feminism



- **Great Depression**
- The rise of fascism
- Appeasement
- The Treaty of Versailles
- Failure of the League of Nations



PowerPoint presentation

- Use bullet points
- But
- Not
- Too
- Many
- Or

PowerPoint presentation

- Your
- Main
- Message
- Will
- Be
- Lost

PowerPoint presentation

- Do not use too many acronyms
- Use an adequate font and size

Not too small.

Not too big

PowerPoint presentation

- Do not use too many acronyms
- Use an adequate font and size

Comic Sans?

Papyrus?

Old English?

Times New Roman?

PowerPoint presentation

- Do not use too many acronyms
- Use an adequate font and size
 - NO CAPITAL LETTERS

PowerPoint presentation

- Be careful with colour schemes

PowerPoint presentation

- Be careful with colour schemes

PowerPoint presentation

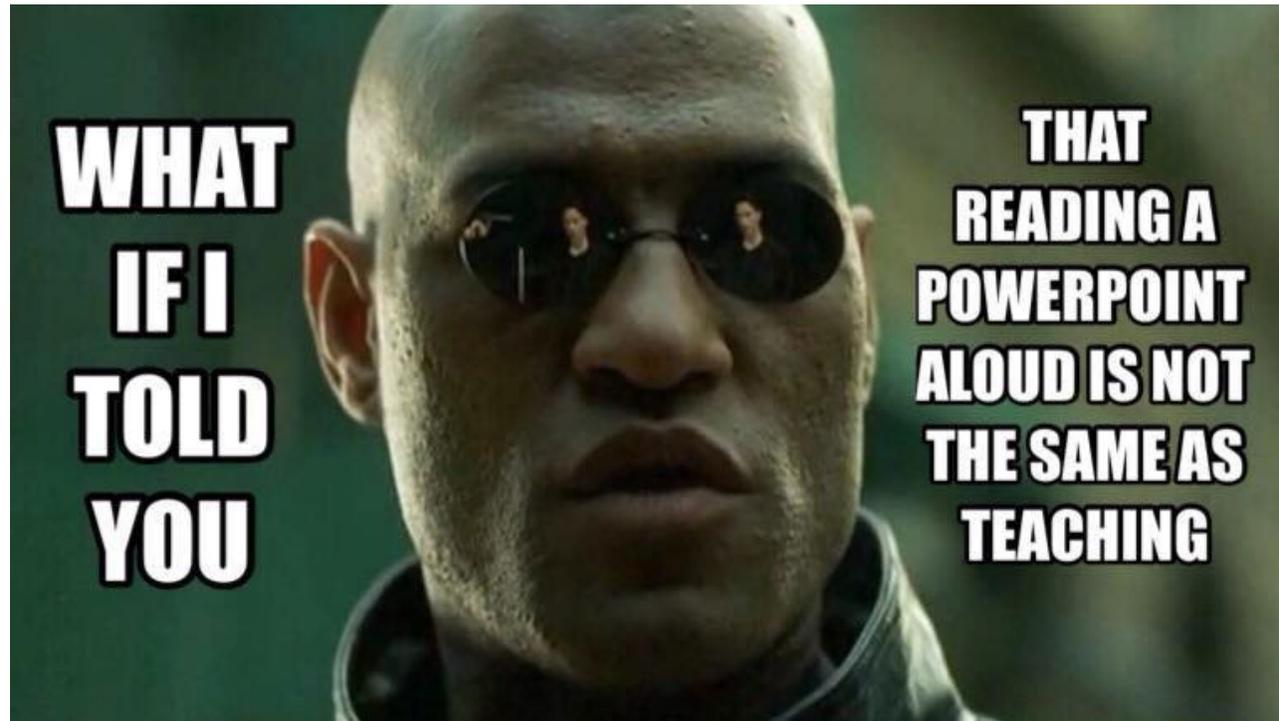
- Animations
 - Keep them in check
 - Too many
 - Will distract
 - The audience

PowerPoint presentation

- Make your slides meaningful
 - Only information which backs up or brings out your message

Presentation

- DO NOT read



Presentation

- DO NOT read
- Time yourself

Activity

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoD8RMq2OkU
&ab_channel=TEDxTalks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoD8RMq2OkU&ab_channel=TEDxTalks)

Using assertive language in academia

Assertive language

- Asking your supervisor/PI for a favor
- Setting limits to a behavior
- Saying NO
- Asking for space after feeling overwhelmed
- Confronting someone who questions your research

→ **Passive Communication**

(Assertive Communication, n.d.)

Assertive language

“Assertiveness means expressing your point of view in a way that is clear and direct, while still respecting others” (Assertive Communication, n.d.)

Assertive language

- Minimises conflict
- Controls anger
- Helps maintain positive relationships

Assertive language

AGGRESSION	ASSERTIVENESS
Force your needs or opinions on others.	Express your needs clearly but respectfully.
Often involves bullying or pushing other around.	Others are treated with respect.
No compromise.	Often compromise.

Assertive language

AGGRESSION	ASSERTIVENESS
Only your needs matter.	Consider the needs of others as well as yours.
Damages relationships.	Strengthens relationships.
May lead to shouting or physical aggression.	Using clear language to get point across.
Damages self-esteem.	Builds self-esteem.

(Assertive Communication, n.d.)

Assertive language

- “Hey! What makes you so important that you don’t have to wait in line like the rest of us?”

→ *Excuse me; there is actually a line here. It would be better if you could wait your turn like the rest of us*

Assertive language

- “You have done a bad job again”

→ *This report has important information missing*

Assertive language

- “I would like for you to stop bossing me around”

→ *I would like to make my own decision about this issue*

Assertive language

- You receive a bad review from a reviewer, or they are asking you to change content that you feel essential to your research
 - *Thanks for your feedback. However, the author decided to keep this section because ... (justification + back up with some references)*

Assertive language

- You receive a proposal you are not interested in/you don't have time for it

→ *Unfortunately, I can't take on any more tasks at the moment*

→ *Thanks for thinking of me, but I'm going to say no this time.*

Assertive language

- Your supervisor doesn't agree with your approach or shows dissatisfaction, but you actually do not want to change it.

→ *I disagree with that. I see it this way...*

Assertive language

- Tips for practicing being assertive (Assertive Communication, n.d.)
 - State your point of view or request clearly
 - Tell & listen
 - Volume and voice
 - Body Language

Assertive language

- Tips for practicing being assertive (Department of Health – Government of Western Australia, n.d.)
 - Avoid using words such as *always* and *never*
 - Speak with facts rather than judgements
 - I statements – talk about yourself
 - Practice assertiveness

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