

Guidance for presenters of short papers

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Short paper presentations are now a major feature of most medical conferences. While the exact timing varies it is not unusual to have only 10–15 minutes to present the results of research which may have taken years to plan, collect and analyse. Many doctors have not had any training in teaching or presentational skills, a fact which becomes readily apparent to those who have to hear them present at conferences.

In an attempt to improve the quality of presentations at the annual Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Section residential conference the following guidance has been made available to all speakers. Initial feedback suggests that it has been helpful. Results of a structured evaluation of the conference presentations before and after the issue of these guidelines are still being analysed.

The guidance was prepared on the assumption that 10-minute slots were available for speakers but that two minutes should be left free for questions.

Preparation

Establish your objectives and content

What are the key facts which you wish to get across in the course of your presentation. Remember that it is difficult to impart more than a few key facts in a presentation covering just eight minutes. Don't overload the audience with information and don't assume that the audience will necessarily have relevant knowledge.

Timing

Get it right, when you only have eight minutes, timing is vital. Reading a presentation to yourself in rehearsal always goes quicker than the real thing – take this into account. You will need approximately: one minute for introductions/scene setting; one minute for conclusions/summary; and one minute for emergencies (picking up your slides after you've dropped them, etc). This only leaves five minutes for your presentation. Chairs of sessions will not allow you to overrun. Better to finish early than have to finish halfway through.

Decide on a structure

Help the audience to understand your structure during the presentation by providing 'verbal sub-headings'. Use statements such as: "First I want to talk about X then I will go on to discuss Y", "So the three main points I want to make are . . .", and "That concludes our discussion of X".

Prepare the audience for important points in advance, thus: "Our three main conclusions are . . .", "Not . . . and those were our three main conclusions". Use linking statements to carry the audience from one argument to the next. Summarise during the talk as well as at the end.

Audio-visual aids

Think about what audio-visual aids you might use and prepare them carefully (see below) *but be prepared to work without them*.

Set out your presentation

Make written notes of what you want to say and indicate when you will use audio-visual aids in your notes. *Do not* write out a verbatim account of what you want to say. A paper which is brilliant when read can sound awful when spoken aloud. Reading from notes rarely comes over well. Instead make brief notes which you can refer to during your lecture – this allows you to look at the audience and modify your delivery according to their mood.

Rehearse

If you are very worried consider delivering the lecture to a friend and asking for feedback.

Presentation

Set the right mood by looking at the audience, introducing yourself and saying hello. Gain attention early on by letting the audience know what is going to happen and why it is of relevance to them. Speak up and speak slowly – the most stimulating of presentations is wasted if the audience cannot hear it!

Think about your non-verbal communication. Vary the pace and pitch of your voice (easiest if

you are not reading from verbatim notes). Look at the audience – all of them, not just one or two in the front row. Don't move around too much.

Maintain interest. Use examples to illustrate points. Use metaphor and analogy. Use audio-visual aids (see below) and leave the audience time to look at them.

Use your audio-visual aids sparingly. Do not deliver your entire presentation in semi-darkness.

Try not to start your presentation with 'Can I have the first slide please . . .'

End your presentation properly, many just fade away or stop mid sentence because of time constraints. Indicate that you are coming to the end, provide a brief summary, highlight the need for further work as necessary and stop.

Audio-visual aids

Slides and acetates should be:

- **BIG** and **BOLD** (this is 24 pt and about right for acetates)
- *Legible:*
 - Print if possible, remember you can photocopy onto acetates
 - People read lower case more easily
 - Avoid full stops and other punctuation
 - Systematic use of capitals and spaces
- *Clear, concise and comprehensible:*
 - One idea at a time, 20 words per slide/acetate at most
- *Appropriate:*
 - Not photocopies of long/complex graphs or tables from journals. If you have to present such data recreate the tables with only the key figures shown.
- *Accurate:*
 - Check spelling and facts
- *Well executed:*
 - Balanced, writing same way on graphs etc.
- *Interesting and memorable:*
 - Perfectly produced acetates can still be boring!

Some notes on using the overhead projector (OHP)

The major advantage of OHPs is that you can face the audience while using them, and do not have to turn your back to look up at a screen. Make use of this advantage and point at the acetate itself not at the screen.

Acetates are not supposed to be an *aide mémoire* for the teacher – don't read them.

Always be prepared to work without the OHP. In dire straits developed X-ray film or a polythene bag can be used as a replacement for acetates.

Think about using different techniques with the OHP, e.g. masking, overlaying, using a pen as pointer or underliner.

Adjusting the OHP

If picture blurred adjust height of lens over acetate.

If picture not on screen adjust mirror for up or down and angle of whole OHP for left/right.

If picture too small, move OHP away from screen.

If too big, towards screen.

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