

Presentations

Presentation skills

Delivering effective presentations is one of the most important skills you can develop at university. Communicating your knowledge well and presenting your work effectively will not only boost your class performance but will also be highly valued by your future employers and work colleagues. If you see giving presentations as a challenge and would like to get better at delivering them, try our simple CDE model explained in this study guide.

Note: Presentation styles vary across disciplines. Always check the requirements specified in the brief.

Preparation

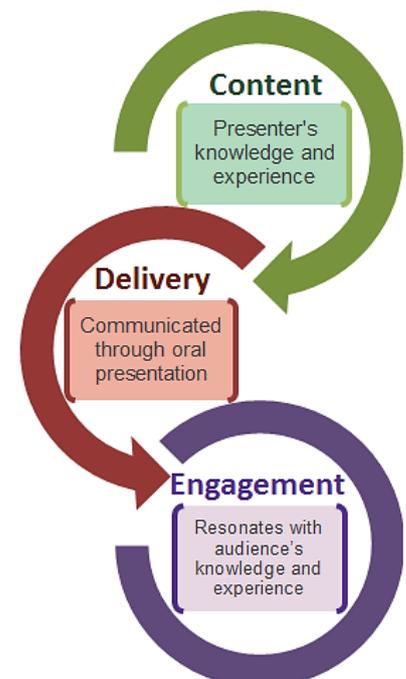
Planning and practising are crucial to turning nervousness into positive energy and delivering a successful presentation. Allocate as much time for practising your presentation as you need to prepare it. Use the checklists on page 4 of this study guide while preparing.

What are your tutors looking for?

- ↪ evidence of planning and preparation
- ↪ appropriate choice of topic and presentation style
- ↪ confidence and energy in delivery
- ↪ attempts to engage your audience

The CDE model

Our **CDE model** will help you to focus on the three key areas to consider when giving any type of presentation. It is based on the classic understanding of effective rhetoric by Aristotle, who identified the three most important elements of an oral presentation: **Content** (what to talk about), **Delivery** (how to talk about it), and **Engagement** (how to engage your audience).



Recommended resources

Levin, P. and Topping, G. (2006) *Perfect Presentations*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Lynda.com

Mehrabian, A. (1981) *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The CDE model explained

In order to give a focused, engaging and effective presentation, you need to have a good plan and carry it out. When planning, consider three elements: **content**, **delivery** and **engagement**.

Content: what will you talk about?

It is important to gain as much clarity as possible on what is expected from the presentation, so your first move should be to carefully consult the **assignment brief**. It will help you to establish the parameters of the task, such as time allowed, limits of the topic and subject-specific requirements, such as including primary sources or specific types of data.

Researching the topic that will provide material for your presentation can open up many fascinating ideas so choose carefully what to put in and what to leave out. Your presentation should have a clear **purpose** – what is that **one central message** you would like your audience to learn and remember? Make sure that it comes through. Narrowing down the topic helps; do a little bit well, rather than take on too much.

Supporting your ideas with **evidence** (visual, numerical, qualitative, etc.) will strengthen your points. Provide examples that illustrate your ideas in a compelling way. Include **references** to your sources.

Plan a clear **structure**, with an interesting introduction and a strong, memorable summary. Organise your ideas into a **story**. It often helps to divide the presentation into sections (3 is a good number!) in order to keep your ideas clear and stay in control of the delivery.

Delivery: how will you talk about it?

Depending on the topic, you might want to choose a different **form** of presentation. While PowerPoint seems to be most popular, there are other, more adventurous formats, such as Prezi, SlideDog and Google Docs, or simpler methods, such as show-and-tell or quiz. If you prepare a script to accompany the slides, never just read it. Use cue cards and **practise** enough to achieve some flow in delivery.

Be creative with your presentation of ideas – use **visuals** such as photographs, video clips, diagrams, etc., but avoid overwhelming your audience. Always be clear about the purpose of the visuals and comment on them. If using slides, keep text to the minimum (min font 24pt); include important data or quotes, but discard overly descriptive statements – nobody will read them! Keep it **simple and clear**.

Your presentation will be much more effective if you deliver it with some enthusiasm. **Believe** in your message – you are sharing it with others because it matters. You can convey the importance of the content by using your **voice** with purpose and keeping your **body language** in sync with the words. Have an **open**, confident body posture, and resist fidgeting and too much gesticulation. **Smile** occasionally, **look at the audience**, and keep your hands out of your pockets. A solid opening will help you grow your confidence so don't rush it. Be positive.

It's natural to be nervous but nerves can be harnessed to your advantage with a few tricks involving breath, speech and your mind's focus. Firstly, slow down your **breath** and watch it; try to keep it as slow and even as possible – breathe in and count to three, breath out and count to three – it will help slow down your heartrate and calm the nerves. Secondly, **speak slowly** and pause for effect; silence

can be powerful so resist the temptation to fill every space with words. And finally, **focus on the outcome**, the message you want to deliver. If you achieve the purpose of your presentation, it will be successful. Focus on this success.

Most importantly, **practise**. Rehearse your presentation as many times as it takes to make you feel that you're in full control. You're the expert on your material and nothing helps the nerves more than knowing your stuff.

Engagement: how will you involve or persuade your audience?

While most people dread giving presentations, most audiences are actually very supportive and interested in what you have to say. Put yourself in their shoes – what would you like to share with your listeners? What's in it for them? Tap into this curiosity and use the constructive mood as support.

Your message will resonate with your audience much more effectively if you engage them. Get their attention from the start by using **interactive** techniques. You can pose a close-ended question, ask for a quick show of hands, take a short survey or quiz, even make a joke (just keep it appropriate to the context!). At the least, try to keep **eye contact** with everyone, especially if you're in a small room, or locate a few friendly faces and look at them (but don't stare!) to maintain **rapport** with the audience.

Knowing who your listeners are will allow you to adjust the content of your presentation, but don't just deliver what's safe and obvious; **challenge** your audience. They want to learn from you, so **teach** them. Share surprising facts or conclusions that will keep them on their toes.

Once finished, **thank** your audience for listening and encourage **questions**. Your audience may be too shy to ask any, so consider asking them instead – perhaps a clarifying question or something you grappled with yourself while preparing. Later on, ask your friends and tutor for some **feedback**. Make notes on what went well and what you can do to improve in the future. The more presentations you make, the better you'll get at it!

Summary:

Content: Plan a logical structure and deliver a clear message.

Delivery: Be positive and use the adrenaline to keep you on your feet.

Engagement: Connect with your audience and make your message resonate.

And remember...

Giving presentations is a skill that adds to your employability. By practising it at university you have opportunities to stumble in a safe environment – this is the best time to make mistakes and learn from them. And you will get better, because – as the old adage says – practice makes perfect.

For more tips on presentations and why you should always keep your thumbs visible, check out our workshops on presentation skills. Go to www.plymouth.ac.uk/learn for details.

The CDE model

CHECKLIST

Delivery checklist:

Presentation method

Think of the best way to deliver your presentation, e.g. PowerPoint, Prezi, show and tell, quiz, etc. Remember: never just read the script.

Audio-visuals

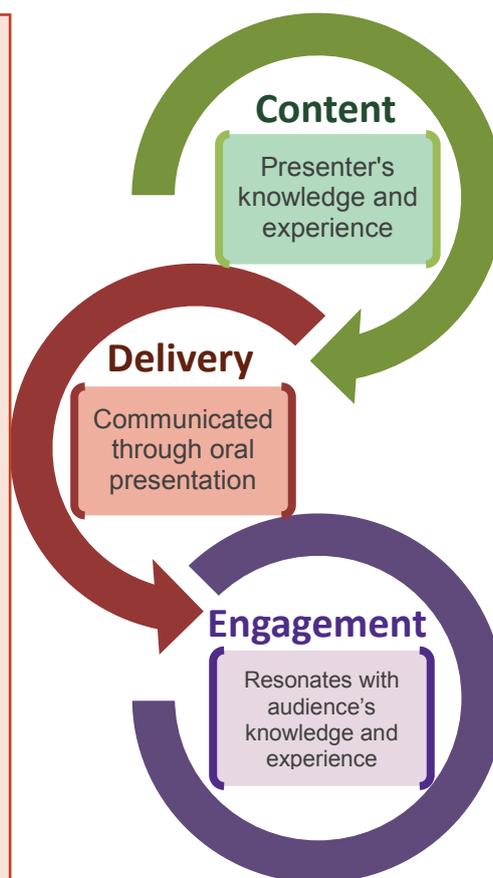
Find visuals that best represent the key messages. If using slides, keep them simple and avoid too much text. Don't overwhelm the audience.

Body language

Try to get your spoken words and your body language in sync. Your body language affects your attitude so show energy and enthusiasm. Keep eye contact, project your voice. Try to be yourself.

Nerves

Acknowledge your nerves and replace 'I'm nervous!' with 'I'm excited!' Breathe deeply, speak slowly and focus on friendly faces. Practice makes perfect.



Content checklist:

Assignment brief

Look carefully at the brief and find out what exactly you're asked to do. Address the **topic**.

Purpose

Do the research and choose what to put in and what to leave out; it often helps to narrow down the topic. Decide what the **one key message** you want your audience to remember is and make it prominent.

Evidence

Find evidence for your claims and don't forget to reference your sources. Include interesting **examples**.

Structure

Make connections between your ideas and arrange them in a logical order. Tell a **story**, with a strong, engaging opening and a compelling close.

Engagement checklist:

Appreciate your audience

Put yourself in the place of your audience ('What's in it for me?'). Make your presentation **relevant** to them.

Engage your audience

Get everyone's attention from the start. Use easy **active** learning strategies, e.g. closed questions, waiting for confirmation, turn and talk, quiz, etc.

Challenge them

Help them process new information while challenging their existing understanding.

Get feedback

Feed off your audience and try to learn from the experience.

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

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Learning Gateway, RLB 011

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