

Tips for a Successful Oral Presentation

Dynamics enables critical care nurses to share important knowledge and practice strategies with their colleagues. It also provides nurses with opportunities to enhance their presentation skills. The following tips have been included in all speaker kits to provide suggestions/support for presenters who are developing their public speaking skills. If you are an experienced speaker, you may wish to pass these tips along to colleagues who are interested in developing their own presentation skills. You might encourage them to submit abstracts for next year!

THE PRESENTATION:

- Aim to make complex ideas simple, instead of simple ideas complex
- Focus on a manageable amount of information and avoid cramming too much information into your presentation
- Consider incorporating case scenarios or pose clinical queries that help to engage the audience and maintain their interest
- Know your subject material well; the more confident you are with your material the easier it is to discuss and present
- Practice your presentation with a critical audience who will be willing to give you honest and constructive suggestions
- Practice until you are comfortable and need minimal notes
- Concentrate on pacing your presentation; most presenters speak faster when they are nervous - you have to consciously slow your rate of speech down
- Structure your presentation by telling the audience what you plan to discuss (review your objectives), present your content, then summarize the key “take home points” at the end of your presentation
- Avoid excessive use of jargon or large polysyllable words; language should be simple and easy to follow
- Dress in business attire; wild colours, prints or fashion fads can distract the audience away from your presentation or cause them to pre-judge your credibility as an expert role model
- Avoid dangling jewellery or bracelets that may be noisy or distracting
- Don't chew gum
- Keep a glass of water handy in case you are overcome with a tickle in your throat or dry mouth; avoid drinking carbonated drinks immediately prior to speaking
- Inspect the room before your presentation and arrive well in advance of presentation time to avoid last minute rushing



- Bring business cards to allow interested delegates to contact you at a later date
- Handout material can augment your presentation and increase the satisfaction of participants
- Practice, edit, practice and edit!

Handling Questions:

- Anticipate the types of questions your presentation might generate and be prepared to respond to them
- Always repeat a question into the microphone to confirm that you understood it correctly and ensure that other members of the audience heard it
- Keep answers brief; participants wanting extensive responses should be encouraged to come and speak to you after the presentation
- Always recognize delegate's questions and respect their participation
- Never display indifference or disrespect for a question; even if you think it is very inappropriate
- If you are unable to answer a question, don't be afraid to admit it
- For questions you are unable to respond to, it may be appropriate to ask the audience; often, questions that speakers are unable to answer have either deviated from the topic presented or are rhetorical
- Never make a participant feel foolish for not knowing an answer
- When you ask the audience if they have questions, be sure that you pause long enough for questions to come in before concluding your presentation
- Time remaining in the presentation will limit the number of questions; if several questions are still unaddressed, identify where the next 2 or 3 questions will be taken from and indicate that they will be the last
- Let participants know that you will be glad to answer remaining questions after the session

Visual Presentations

- Slides and visuals should be used to emphasize, reinforce and highlight a presentation; they should never **be** the presentation
- Use minimal information on slides
- Visuals are useful to help organize your presentation and provide "prompts" for what you want to say



- The quality of your visuals provide the "first impression"; well organized, clear, visually appealing, and professional looking slides lead the audience to a first impression of a presenter "who has it together"
- The audience should be able to tell at a quick glance the intended message on a given slide
- Slides must be typed using a font of at least 18 point size
- Courier font is too small for slide visibility
- Use no more than 2 styles of font per slide
- Leave space between lines of at least the height of one upper case letter
- Keep text to top half of slide; often participants at back of room are unable to see the bottom half of the screen
- Restrict slides to 10 words per visual
- Aim to allow each slide on the screen for 45 - 60 seconds
- Avoid vertical lettering; it is too hard to read
- Colour can improve the visual appeal of a slide
- Restrict use of color to not more than 3 per slide; colors should be complimentary when combined together on one visual
- Avoid using red or green for critical points - a significant number of people are red green color-blind
- Restrict slide's content to one idea or concept per visual
- Use bullets and point forms rather than full sentences on slides
- Use lower case letters with capitals at start of words only; it is much easier to read than all upper case
- Eliminate overly complicated data and concepts that offer little importance to the overall presentation
- Do not show slides or data unless they are valuable to the presentation; audiences get annoyed if told to ignore a slide because it is "complicated" or not important
- When presenting research data, use graphs and charts only to highlight critical data; overuse of graphs and irrelevant statistics will lose your audience's attention



- Cartoons, scenery, pictures or quotes can be used to add variation to your presentation and emphasize points
- Humour must be used carefully; do not use jokes that have racial or gender overtones or are insensitive to audience's values
- When using cartoons or humour slides, be sure to pause long enough to allow participants to interpret and read jokes (you can read punch lines out loud to ensure adequate time has passed and give everyone a chance to enjoy the caption)
- Jokes must be relevant to the presentation; identify how the joke "theme" emphasizes key points of a talk
- Be sure to reference any quotes or research findings
- If using slides, run through any slides in the speaker room prior to presenting to ensure that none are upside down etc.
- Slides used in rooms with rear projection (usually large plenary rooms) must be reversed and inserted backwards into carousels
- Prepare in advance for possible adverse scenarios (e.g. audience larger or smaller than planned, audio-visual problems)
- Have a contingency plan prepared in advance in case your visuals fail
- Carry your presentation in your carry-on luggage
- Ensure that all visuals/handouts are free from grammatical or spelling errors

***most hospitals have an audio-visual department that can offer excellent suggestions to help make your visuals interesting and professional

