Presentation Skills

Presentations are an essential part of university, but they can also be daunting. Many students struggle through giving successful presentations. The good news is that public speaking can be learned and improved upon. In this video, we will be exploring some tools to present like a pro!

1. Content

The first step in delivering an effective presentation is developing content. In my first years at UBC, I used to make the visual aids for my presentations based solely on what I wanted to convey during my presentation. I soon realized that my presentations, while informative, oftentimes left the audience confused. The key to making my presentations more effective was developing audience-centric content and graphics, meaning that instead of focusing on everything I would like to convey, the focus should be on what key things I would like the audience to take away from the presentation.

- **Adjust your language** to your audience and speak to their level. Presentations to fellow classmates or at a professional conference, should use scientific language. Presentations to a more general audience should avoid scientific jargon that could leave the audience confused.
- **Think of your presentations like a story.** Plan content, and make sure to get the main points across. Consider the flow of ideas and the questions the audience will likely have at different points of the presentation.
- Finally, have **3-4 points per slide and recap your presentation often**. Include no more than 2 sentences or 50 words on a slide as wordy slides will make it harder for your audience to follow along.

2. Engage Your Audience through Participation

The second step in delivering an effective presentation is encouraging audience participation. I know the audience can seem scary, but think of them as allies during presentations. They want to learn from you as much as you want to teach them. Think of how you learn best and use those strategies in your presentation. Try including learning activities such as Slido, Kahoot or Mentimeter in presentations to capture your audience's attention. The most effective presentation I attended at university used kahoot intermittently throughout the presentation, and made us compete in teams. Though I was initially bored of the topic, the presenters' competitive learning activity made me pay attention and learn something.

3. Be Deliberate in Your Non-Verbal Communication

The third step in delivering an effective presentation is to be deliberate with body language. Non-verbal communication matters as much as the words we say. It communicates enthusiasm and engagement with the material.

- Stand straight and tall with shoulders back. Avoid hunching or turning away from the audience.
- Smile. This will put the audience at ease.
- Maintain good eye-contact. Aim to look just over the heads of the audience and scan the room often; This avoids stares while still giving the illusion of talking to everyone individually.
- Fidgeting or nervous laughter can be distracting. Pause the video for some tips to relieve the tension and nervousness of presentations.
- Lastly, make sure to show up in appropriate attire. Dressing professionally looks and often makes us feel more confident.

4. Maximize Verbal Communication

The fourth step in delivering an effective presentation is maximizing verbal communication.

- I like to prepare a presentation script in advance so I can organize my thoughts prior to the actual presentation. I find it makes the difference between a confident delivery and a doubtful one.
- Slow your roll. Be intentional about speaking at a normal pace. Include pauses where necessary. This helps to enunciate words clearly.
- Practicing your presentation multiple times will help you become more familiar with your script and avoid vocal fillers such as "hum" and "errr". Make notes, but practice enough that you don't need them. Additionally, practicing in front of a friend, pet or mirror is a good way to "fake" an audience.

Whether you're presenting an abstract at your first conference or preparing a class presentation, making audience-centric content, engaging your audience, and maximizing both non-verbal and verbal communication will result in effective presentations.

This video is one of many student toolkits created by the Chapman Learning Commons at the University of British Columbia. To learn more about ways to excel at university take a look through the Learning Commons website at learningcommons.ubc.ca or come visit our Chapman Learning Commons Help Desk on the third floor of the Irving K. Barber Learning Center.