

# Presentations

Fear of public speaking is very common. However, let's be rational—what is actually the worst outcome? If you're well-prepared, chances are your presentation will be sensational!

## Your role and your audience

When presenting in an academic context, your role could be quite diverse. An academic presentation may require you to be:

- A researcher who is interested, inquisitive and critical
- A future academic who is professional and scholarly
- An expert who is knowledgeable and confident
- An enthusiast sharing their ideas and whose ideas have the potential to contribute to the field

You will also have a diverse audience who may be:

- Academics, who are experienced colleagues and who have made several presentations themselves (so they'll know what you're going through)
- Supervisors and mentors who have an interest in your research
- Students who are interested peers and possibly feeling the same as you

Your audience at an academic presentation will be there to understand your work. They want to support you and help you succeed in your research journey. If your presentation is part of the PhD confirmation process, your audience may ask questions to challenge you or prompt you to defend your research, but they are there to guide you to get the most from your research.

## The benefits of presenting

Presenting is a great opportunity to show your potential. A presentation gives you the opportunity to communicate, educate and impress! Benefits include:

- A space for you to test your ideas
- A chance to confirm that your research is feasible
- An opportunity to receive feedback to refine and modify your plan if needed
- Making contacts in the field
- Making a name for yourself

## The PowerPoint slides

You need to begin with a well-developed paper to work from. Then you can:

- Highlight the main points from your paper
- Synthesise your information into logical order
- Incorporate your information into diagrams or tables where possible
- Use as little text as possible on your slides
- Choose simple colours and font
- Ensure that your slides are not overcrowded and too busy—they are there to complement your speaking

Think about your timing. The time you take to display each slide may vary, depending on how much you have to say. Keep written notes with you in case you need to refer to them as you speak, but you may not even need them once you get going! Practise your presentation in front of friends, family or other students to perfect the timing and become more confident in speaking without looking at your notes.

## Body language

Ensure you stand comfortably with your feet flat. Avoid swaying and bouncing—you may catch yourself doing this automatically due to nerves, so try to make a conscious effort to stand naturally still.

Make frequent eye contact and constantly scan your eyes around the room—avoid staring at one person!

It is natural to make hand gestures during a presentation; often these can help emphasise your point. Remember to make these deliberate and avoid fiddling absentmindedly with things.

When people are nervous, they often speak too quickly. Make a conscious effort to pause—your pause may feel lengthy to you, but for your listener, it provides time to process the information you've given them. Pausing will also help you slow your breathing or catch your breath if you are very nervous. It gives you a chance to regather your thoughts and ensure you have mentioned everything you want to cover.

Be prepared, practise, be aware of your body language and remember... your presentation will probably go much better than you think!

Academic Learning Support offer free individual consultations and group workshops for HDR students. For more writing, study, and academic support contact [learningsupport@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:learningsupport@newcastle.edu.au) or call 02 4921 5350.