



The Seven Deadly Sins of Presenting

Presentations have become the de facto communication tool at conferences. There is an art and a science of creating great presentations. However, many conference presentations are delivered poorly. Here, the BASES Awards Committee share their expertise on how to avoid the Seven Deadly Sins of Presenting.

Too much text

Slides should be like a billboard. Ask yourself whether your message can be processed within three seconds. The audience should be able to quickly work out the meaning before turning its attention back to the presenter. You need to have enough words to ensure you are comfortable delivering the message, but go for a very low word count. Don't use a font size smaller than 28 point.



If you need to reduce your font size lower than this then my guess is that you have created a document, not a slide! If a slide has too many words, highlight one key word per bullet and rehearse the slide until you can remember all the content when you look only at the highlighted word. Then remove all other text leaving just the keywords as mnemonics. Even better, replace the words on the slide with an image.

Tip: Don't over-animate your text. Text flying in from all directions is just distracting and looks like you have just learnt how to use the animation tool on PowerPoint.

Dr Claire Hitchings, British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences

ZZZZslow zzzzstart

Normally, the chair of a session will already have introduced you, named your institution, given the title of your presentation (which will be on the projection screen as well) and might have stated the page number of the conference's abstract booklet on which your abstract starts. Don't then start your talk by saying, "As the chair has just said, my name is Josephine Aznobrain and my talk is entitled..." You have only a short period of time in which to present so don't use some of that valuable time with unnecessary repetition.



Use something like, "Good morning, thank you for that introduction. It is well established that...", and hence, begin with probably the first sentence of your abstract.

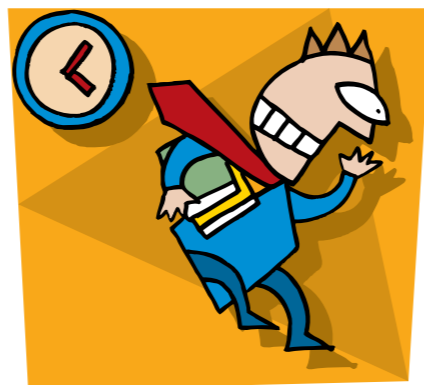
Prof Edward Winter FBASES, Sheffield Hallam University

Terrible time keeping

You have scanned the programme schedule over breakfast and you are excited about the day's conference programme. The only problem is the tricky transition that you've spotted around 11 am. Should be OK though, you can hear the invited speaker talk about training adaptations and still have time to make it to the other room for that free communication that has direct relevance to your own research. The fast walk between rooms will also act as some

additional exercise; it's normally needed after a few nights at a conference.

If only it was that simple. Well, it is if you are not at the mercy of the speaker who cannot tell the time. You know, the individual who insists on taking both their own allocated time in addition to a significant amount of that set aside for others as well.



I think I've lost count of how many presentations I have attended in which the speaker seems to have failed the first rule of presenting; i.e., respect your time. Understanding how long you have sets the framework for all of the major aspects of any presentation in my view (e.g., content, delivery style etc.). If you can't get the timing right, the audience might just not be in a position to effectively listen to what you have to say (especially if they are contemplating rushing off to another session).

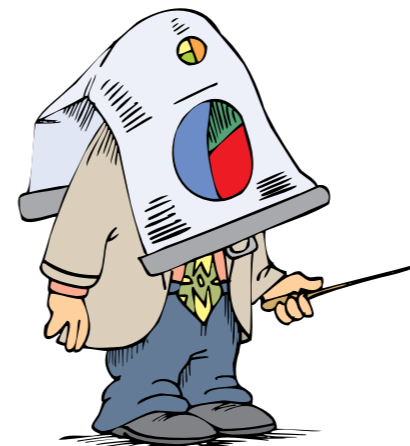
There's a simple rule for time keeping that was passed onto me by the late Prof Reilly that has always served me well: "One slide = approximately one minute". So, if you've got a 10-minute slot then 30 slides just isn't going to work, no matter how quick you talk. Remembering this simple guide should help you to avoid dramatically exceeding your allotted time. This will help ensure that you get across clearly those complicated data that you have spent many hours collecting and analysing.

You'll also make a few new friends in the audience as well, as I've never heard anyone complaining that a session was a little short or ran exactly to time!

Dr Barry Drust, Liverpool John Moores University

Poor presenter presentation

A lot of time and effort is understandably spent on preparing the presentation, the information on the slides and the visual impact, but often the presenter forgets about themselves. Too often presentations suffer from a lack of presenter preparation. How are you going to do it? Where are you going to stand? What messages are you trying to send? What can you do with your hands? Many inexperienced presenters become nervous and start fidgeting. This includes walking around continually, rocking forwards and backwards, and putting hands in pockets/behind the back only to then relocate them almost instantly.



This nervousness is then, unintentionally, transmitted to the audience by the presenter. If the presenter looks/feels uneasy then the audience will feel uneasy, thus affecting how your presentation is received.

Tip: Practise makes perfect. Practice delivering the presentation thinking about how you are going to do it. Good preparation = good performance.

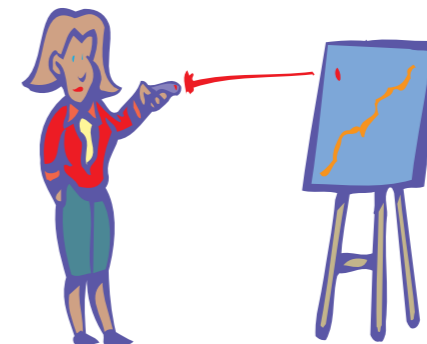
Dr Stewart Cotterill, University of Gloucestershire

Laser pointer love

Imagine my distress at the last BASES Annual Conference when I reached for my laser pointer only to discover that it would not work on an interactive screen. Being forced to revert to a metre rule for highlighting key points in my presentation made me realise that there were few occasions when my laser pointer was necessary.

Time spent on the preparation of your slides should reduce the need for a laser pointer. The overzealous use of

laser pointers can be distracting for the audience rather than useful.



Despite the fact that using a laser pointer on "acupuncture points can stimulate specific memories and innate wisdom" (Gordon, 2010), during scientific presentations the purpose of the laser pointer is to "highlight something of interest" (Wikipedia, 2010), not every word on the slide.

Dr Joanna Scurr, University of Portsmouth

References

- Gordon, S.K. (2010). Body Wisdom. Transpersonal Hypnotherapy Institute.
- Wikipedia (2010). 'Laser Pointer', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laser_pointer (retrieved April 2010).

Death by special effects

Every new version of PowerPoint seems to have yet more special effects (e.g., text flying in, dissolving, changing colour etc.). For some presenters the temptation to use them all is just too great to resist. The effect on the audience is rather like watching a horror film, waiting anxiously for the next surprise.

Having slides where the bullet points appear one at a time is also rarely helpful and usually makes the talk seem slower and more ponderous than it really is.



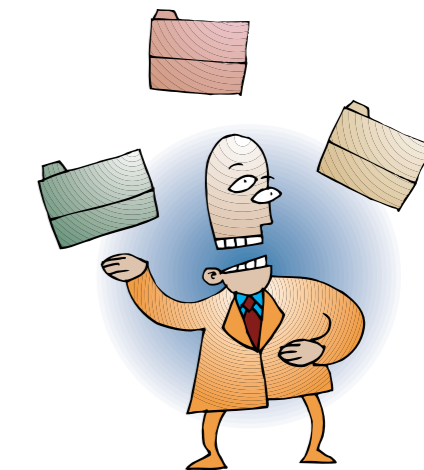
Unless there is some sort of "punchline" that you really do want to keep hidden until the last minute then just set up your slides to show all the points at once. One more thing – don't use any of the super fancy fonts either – they are much harder to read.

Tip: Leave special effects to Steven Spielberg.

Dr Val Cox, Coventry University

Too fast

Over the years, one of the most frequent thoughts I have going through my head when I'm listening to a presentation is, "please slow down so that I can actually understand the story you are trying to tell me". People have chosen to come and listen to your research story and want to get something from it.



My experience is that when you go too fast people lose what you're saying very quickly and, therefore, can lose interest very quickly. Sometimes I end up singing to myself, "slow down, you move too fast, you've got to make the moment last". Finally, I've never ever had anybody give me feedback saying, "That was too slow" except when talking about my running between the wickets in cricket matches.

Prof Ian Campbell, Brunel University

BASES has three brief guideline documents, written by Prof Edward Winter FBASES and Dr Claire Hitchings, to help you with your conference presentation preparation.

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