

DELIVERY

Anyone can give a talk to an audience, and you are already at an advantage as a researcher because you have something interesting and new to tell people about.

FIND YOUR FOCUS

Skip the panel before you're due to speak (or grab lunch to-go and head for somewhere quiet) to give yourself **time** to load your presentation and read your notes so you feel ready.

CREATE CONNECTIONS

If you're not the first to speak, **listen** to the other speakers. Consider adding a note to your prompt sheet on any links between your work and calling attention to links at the relevant moment in your presentation. Paying attention to others has the added bonus of distracting you from any nerves!

SPEAKING

Take a breath and a sip of water before you begin, and then talk! Rather than introduce yourself again (a good Chair should have already done this for you), explain how your talk links with your bigger project. This gives the audience the chance to ask about it later (a nice easy topic for you to answer on!).

You know your stuff, so **look toward your audience** rather than your notes: it helps them to engage with you. You don't have to actually look *at* them (especially if the idea of it feels intimidating!): just glance around forehead height, it has the same effect.

Speak slowly and take a sip of water if you need to. You have planned to be 5 minutes within your time, so you can **relax**.

If you lose your train of thought, take a breath and a sip of water, look at your notes, and start your sentence again. Making a fresh start will be clearer and you'll get your **flow** back.

In the absolute worst case, all that will happen is that your ideas won't be expressed quite as clearly as you'd like. That's okay: a) you've mentioned your PhD, which is like having "L" plates; people will know you're learning and understand, and b) that's why there is time for questions!

Q&A

Many people's biggest fear about giving an academic talk (and teaching, and speaking to their supervisor, and having their viva...) is that they'll be asked a question they can't answer. In all these situations, questioners are asking because they are interested in your work: they're trying to learn more and/or to prompt you to think more. **You'll always be able to answer.**

HELP YOURSELF

To set yourself up well to answer, have a pen handy to make a note of key words from the question. Writing helps:

- to give you **thinking** time (make a note of any answer ideas that pop into your mind).
- to make sense of questions that come in multiple parts.
- so that after you've given answer part 1, you can remember question part 2 and answer that.
- as you can then **remember** useful ideas when you get home!

HUH?!

If you've written a note but still aren't exactly sure what the question is about after a moment (take a sip of water to buy time!), ask for clarification. It's common for speakers to politely ask for questions to be rephrased, the questioner won't mind. If you're still not sure what they want after they've rephrased, give the most relevant answer you can, and end by saying something like "I hope I've addressed your question, but **I'd be happy to talk more about this in the break.**"

SOMETIMES, THE ANSWER IS "NO."

People's questions often reflect their own research or interests, so sometimes you'll be asked questions that just don't reflect your findings, or are about an approach or theory that you are not using for your research. It's okay to (politely!) explain this. Questions like this give a great chance for you to explain your research more broadly, why you take the approach you do, and why that's great.

Most importantly: enjoy all the interest & feedback!

HOW TO DO AN ACADEMIC TALK



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ABSTRACT

Before you create a conference paper, you decide roughly what you'll talk about and write an abstract.

STICK TO THE RULES

Conference organisers have a *lot* to juggle, so keep on their good side by submitting in time (even if this is half an hour before the deadline!) and keeping to the usually brief word limit. It's better to be 100 words under than 100 words over.

KISS

It's important to KISS at conferences. Don't worry, no lips - it's an acronym commonly used to remind you to **Keep It Simple, Stupid!** Here are some ways to do that:

- Use give-away titles: often, delegates will make decisions about which talks to attend based on just the title. Key words and dates help them to figure out how relevant and interesting your talk will be to them.
- Get to the point: write for clarity with short sentences, and no jargon. State your argument or topic clearly and early.
- Choose one topic to talk about, and three things within that to flesh it out. The simpler you keep your abstract, the more wiggle-room you have to talk about something slightly different by the time the conference actually rolls around.
- Speak for yourself: it's your talk so tell people what *you* will talk about; keep quotes & footnotes to a minimum.

MAKE THEM FEEL SPECIAL

Think about *why* you want to talk at *this* conference and ensure this shines through in your abstract. Address the conference theme to show how relevant your talk will be for the people attracted to that conference. An easy way to do this is to incorporate key words from the list of topics advertised in the call.

MORE

There are fuller guides on how to write an abstract online, e.g. <http://ow.ly/10s1zm>

PRESENTATION

There's no "right way" to create a presentation, but these tips are a useful starting point.

START FROM SCRATCH

A conference paper will be spoken rather than read. To make it ideally suited for purpose, write in Powerpoint rather than adapting an existing piece of writing. This helps to produce a good talk because:

- If you can remember the key bits without leaning too heavily on something you already wrote, that's a good indicator that your topic is **memorable** and your argument is **straight-forward** enough for listeners to follow.
- All your phrases will be written to be **spoken**, and you won't be distracted by multiple clauses or footnotes.

BASIC IS BEAUTIFUL

Design your presentation to help the audience to pay attention to you and to focus. Accommodate as many needs as you can.

- Aim for about **one** simple slide for every 2-3 minutes you have.
- Use **one** quote, picture, or diagram per slide.
- Keep backgrounds **simple** & use a light colour rather than stark white: this is often easier for those with dyslexia to read.
- Avoid swirly motion-sickness-inducing transitions.
- Ensure everything's **legible** (e.g. 36pt text for headings & 24pt minimum for text).



If you can read your slides when they're shrunk this small, that's a good sign!

PROMOTE CONVERSATION

Give people opportunities to give you feedback on your ideas: put your **name**, **email**, & **twitter** handle on the first page

MORE KISS-ING

Stay streamlined and keep the key points of your argument in sight all the time. Use your slides to help you:

- To help both you and your listeners to stay on track, use introduction and conclusion slides to **summarise** your argument.
- Create slides for your main **argument** and add notes below on key **details** & **analysis**. You can then print slides & notes to use as prompts when delivering your talk.
- Keep the same number of points no matter how much time you have. Add more explanation, analysis and detail instead.
- Put in duplicate slides if you want to go back to a point, as this is more reliable and professional than flicking about on the day.

ASSESS YOUR AUDIENCE

Think about who you're speaking to. If in doubt about whether people will understand a term or theory:

- if it's not essential, axe it! Use **simple** language instead.
- if it's essential, explain it as simply as possible (try your version on a friend / relative: if a non-historian gets it, it's probably ok!).

DON'T TRUST TECH

Firstly, **save copies** multiple copies of your presentation! (e.g. email, USB, cloud). Secondly, Your topic is fascinating so be prepared to tell people about it without Powerpoint or audio or video clips *just in case.* Then you'll stay **calm** and **confident** in all circumstances. Keeping multimedia to a minimum also keeps your talk tightly focussed and ensures that you'll have a good balance of examples and explanation - after all, your audience want to hear your ideas on the primary sources, not just see the primary sources.

TAILOR TO TIME

To make sure you'll stick to the time allotted, have a **practice** read-through once you've written your first draft (it's easier to cut things at this stage). **Less is more**: work on the basis of 5 minutes less than allotted time to allow for a late session start, or a previous speaker overrunning. Keeping it brief is good as:

- If you know you have plenty of time, then you'll speak more slowly, which is much clearer and helps you appear confident.
- More time for questions (or for beating other panels to the coffee!) will be welcomed by your audience.