



Guidelines for preparing for an effective conference presentation

Below are eight things to consider when preparing your presentation. These are based on frequently reoccurring feedback from delegates, and which if a presenter takes into account when preparing their session, whatever type it is, will result in the presentation being a real success! These guidelines are illustrated in more detail in the Webinar on *How to prepare for an effective conference presentation* which is available to view on the IATEFL website. It is very important to remember that conference delegates choose which sessions to go to based on the abstracts in the programme and yours will be one of 16 concurrent sessions which they can choose from.

1 Plan the session in detail

Whilst it is important to adapt what you say in the session to the audience's particular contexts, it is key to know what your framework and content for the presentation is. This will avoid negative feedback along the lines of *"The presenter took a long time to say very little"*. Delegates want to maximise the time that they have at the conference and by planning exactly what you want to cover will allow them to do this during your session.

2 Ensure that what you say matches the information you provide in your abstract in the programme

This is a common theme in feedback from delegates both as a positive and negative. Feedback is very positive when the information in the abstract matches what the presenter says. However, all too often, delegates can find that the content does not do this, which can be very frustrating, particularly when they have chosen to attend your session over another which they are also very interested in. Delegates also find it frustrating when it is not clear from the abstract that you will be focussing on a commercial product, e.g. a publication or public exam. When planning your session, revisit the abstract you submitted in September and start planning the content from there. (You can find a copy of what you submitted in your submission confirmation email.)

3 Ensure that you enable the audience to relate what you say to their own context

Delegates generally want to see how the content, particularly when the session is based on presenting results of research, can apply in practice to their own contexts. A good way to do this is to plan to start your presentation by finding out how the audience are involved in ELT or what experience they have had of the focus of your presentation. Then you can refer to this during your session and so make the content relevant to them.

4 Be realistic about how much content you can cover

This is an aspect of a presentation which often receives negative feedback from delegates. Comments that the speaker covered everything that they said they would within the allocated time are rare and it is more common to receive feedback that there was too much content for the time available. This problem stems from the planning stage and frequently occurs because a speaker spends too long on their introduction and so runs out of time to present the most important part of their talk. The result of this is that sessions are rushed (particularly towards the end), speakers skip slides, speak too quickly and get flustered. Something which presenters might find helpful is to produce a session plan which includes timings for each stage and notes of what can be omitted if time is running short.

5 Include opportunities for discussion

Delegates often attend seven or more presentations a day so it is important to plan to keep the audience engaged throughout your session. One way of doing this (whether you are planning a talk or a workshop) is via the use of focussed discussion stages. Sessions which successfully do this receive feedback such as *"I came away with a lot to think about"* and avoid comments such as *"We spent too long talking to our neighbours and there wasn't enough input in the session"*. Overall, delegates appreciate sessions where they can go away with practical ideas to implement in their own context. If you are planning a workshop, it is essential that it is based on activities and that the plenary stages contain input. This also applies to talks as short discussion stages can allow participants to apply the theory to their own contexts.



6 PowerPoint slides

Post-conference feedback is often negative about the presenters' use of PowerPoint slides with frequent comments that there were too many slides; the presenter relied too heavily on their slides; they read out everything that was on their slides; and the text was too small to read. It is useful to do a dry-run of the presentation in order to establish which slides are essential to the session and which ones are not. They need to be produced in at least font 24, though 30 point should be a maximum.

7 Handouts for the session

It is important to decide if you are going to use handouts or not. They are definitely popular with delegates as they provide an alternative to looking at PowerPoint slides, allow them to digest the content more easily and help make it easier to understand. However, it can be difficult to decide how many copies to make whilst being conscious of the environmental impact of too much printing. A solution to this is to make a minimum number and provide delegates with an email or website address where they can download them from. If you have a LinkedIn account (which is free to set up if not), you can upload your presentation to SlideShare (www.slideshare.net), using the hashtag #iatefl2022.

8 Think about your delivery

It is very important that the session is well delivered and this can be achieved through careful and considered planning of your session. Once you've planned the session, a rehearsal is invaluable.

To conclude, here is a list of key points to remember when preparing your presentation:

- Produce a session plan with estimated timings on it and bring a watch or a clock with you
- Check the content of your session against what you wrote in your abstract
- Begin your presentation by finding out who your audience are
- Plan to ensure that you enable the audience to apply the content to their context
- Be realistic about how much you can cover and decide at the planning stage what you can omit if time is running short
- If your session is a workshop, include plenty of active audience participation based around tasks
- If your session is a talk, include enough time for audience participation / questions
- Plan to use an appropriate number of slides which are going to be visible to the audience
- Plan how you are going to integrate the slides into your presentation
- Decide if you are going to use handouts
- Practise giving your presentation to an audience who can give you feedback.