Giving a presentation at an international conference

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General comments
- Public speaking can be rewarding and empowering, but also traumatic. It will be less traumatic if you prepare well.
- You have something to say. You want to say it with calm confidence in a way that is accessible and interesting, using appropriate resources.

Preparing
- Know the audience. If you don't know, find out – especially in cultures with which you are unfamiliar.
- Make sure you know how much time you have got, and don't try to cram too much in. A guideline is about three important ideas in ten minutes – fewer if your presentation is longer than twenty minutes.
- Try to put yourself in your audience's place. How specialised is this conference? Where will they be starting from – linguistically, conceptually, etc? What might their expectations be?
- Remember that your audience will be listening, not reading. The newer an idea is to the audience, the more careful you must be in introducing and exemplifying it.
- Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you've told them - probably more than once.
- Recreate what would be variety of interaction in a classroom with variety of presentation: visual support, variation of pace, illustrative anecdotes, etc. Mark the places on your notes where you're going to show a visual or stop to recapitulate, explain or tell an anecdote.
- Be clear about whether, and when, you wish to ask for audience questions and comments. Plan for this and make it clear at the beginning of your presentation.
- The *beginning* is very important. Use a joke, an anecdote, a challenge, a topical reference, a striking visual… at least give a clear statement of why your presentation is significant.
- *The end* is quite important, too: at least they must have a cue for applause or leave-taking.
- People use different sorts of prompts, ranging from small cue cards to A4 notes. Use whatever suits you, but remember not to bury your head in your notes and just read. If you are using cards, punch a hole in the corner and use a treasury tag or a bit of yarn: that way if you drop them, you won't lose the order.
- You may well be nervous on the day. Make your notes clear for yourself, e.g. highlight key points. Mark clearly for yourself where you will use handouts, change slides, etc.

Before you go
- Rehearse the talk as realistically as possible beforehand, and time it. Remember not to rush, and to pause between clauses (important for cognitive processing!). Leave an extra two minutes per twenty minutes anyway. Don't just read from your paper/cards. Stop from time to time to recap or illustrate with an anecdote. It is vital that you leave time for questions, because this may be the most profitable part of the session.
- If you are talking about concepts you have only read about, check your pronunciation of any key term you are going to use.
- Think in advance about what can be reduced if you start late, or start running out of time; and mark it on your notes. This puts you in charge of what gets dropped, instead of the clock's being in charge.
- Mark times on your notes so you'll know on the day if your schedule is slipping.
- Say a little about yourself at the start.
- Find out maximum audience numbers and make handouts before you go: it won't always be easy to do this at the conference. Photocopiers can suddenly malfunction, paper can run out, or there can be queues.
- Check you have everything with you: laptop, materials, etc. Check particularly your PowerPoint presentation, well in advance. Back up as possible, e.g. email your presentation to yourself, save it on your laptop and on a flash drive.
- If you're flying, put your presentation materials in your carry-on luggage!

When you arrive at the conference

- As soon as you get to the venue, check that your name, title, room and time are correct in the programme. If not, take action: there will need to be announcements, notices, etc., including something on the door of the room where you're presenting.
- Get to the room early and make sure things are OK, especially the technology.
- Make sure your visuals are visible from the back of the room. Make sure the laptop and your PowerPoint presentation are functioning properly and are compatible; save your presentation onto the desktop of the computer (it runs faster that way and you can take your flash drive out of the computer then). If you're using a microphone, test it for feedback and for how far to hold it from your mouth. Arrange notes and resources.

During

- Don't get upset if there aren't very many people. Everybody has had the experience of talking to a small audience. It is disappointing, but just give them your best performance. The show must go on.
- If you're not introduced, start by saying who you are and what the talk's about (in case some people are in the wrong room). A PowerPoint slide can be good to reinforce this.
- Remember to speak slowly and PAUSE. This gives people time to process what you've just said.
- If possible, bring a presenter aid for clicking slides forward. This allows you to move around as you speak and to create variety for your audience.
- Leave slides up long enough for people to take notes, or make it clear the material is on handouts.
- Don't leave a slide on when you've finished talking about it. Consider using the B key, which blacks out the screen when you are not referring to a slide. Hit it again when you want the slides to reappear.
- Respect the next speaker if there is one. Finish on time; don't assume the whole audience is so fascinated that they want to run over. Clear your materials, take the memory stick out of the computer. You can always take people outside the room to ask supplementary questions.

Things

- Possible handouts:
    - Sets of data for you to comment on
    - Key points: just an outline or gapped notes for them to complete
    - A fairly complete summary
    - Only the difficult bits (tables, etc.)
    - An interesting paper related to what you have been saying
    - Bibliography

   Distribute your handouts at the beginning to avoid people madly scribbling unnecessary notes and to avoid delay exiting at the end of your session. Alternatively, give your audience a link to a handout and / or bibliography at the beginning. Get permission if copyright images, songs, etc. are used.
- PowerPoint
    - Keep it simple. Don't put up everything you want to say, just the key points.
    - Use an appropriate font size – remember the effect data projection has on size. 30 point should be a maximum, though 24 or 26 is standard. Smaller than 24 can be unreadable.
    - Think about using images (free ones; or www.istockphoto.com is a good cheap source).
    - Don't overwhelm people with too many numbers and statistics.
    - Think about integrating video where useful.
    - Use colours. Avoid white printing on dark background, and especially avoid white printing on light background. Avoid using a background with a pattern that will interfere with the printing.
    - Only use graphics that really enhance the message. Avoid sound effects. Transition effects such as 'Appear' can be appropriate, but don't use distracting transition effects.
    - Building up diagrams gradually can be effective.
    - Use the PowerPoint presentation; don't let it use you. From the beginning, plan to use it as an aid, not a script.
    - Think what you will do if the PowerPoint fails, or if you can't log into the laptop. This is where good handouts can come to your rescue.
- Arrange notes, materials, etc. neatly so you won't be scrabbling.
- Microphone: Use it or not? Consider possibility of moving around versus audibility for them / stress on you.

Your body

- Dress appropriately for the image you want to convey and the norms of the country/organisation, and dress comfortably. If you feel you look good, you will be more confident.
- Decide in advance whether you are going to move around or not.
- Stand if you can. Your default position: facing the audience, or at 90º if necessary with PowerPoint.
- Decide in advance whether you feel confident enough to move around or want the security of a fixed place.
- Try not to move your body or parts of your body nervously – it does not put audiences at ease. Use calm, slow gestures, across your body if facing the audience (easier to see) rather than towards and away from yourself.
- Don't speak too fast. Pause.
- Make eye contact with members of the audience in different parts of the hall (don't just sweep). If you are nervous about this, try looking at people in a 'W' pattern: someone at the left front, then left back, centre front, right back, right front, back to left front, etc. Avoid constantly looking down or looking over people's heads.
- Don't read from your slides. Refer or point to something on a slide, but don't read.

Other people: dealing with the audience

Rapport:
- Be friendly and adopt an appropriate degree of formality or informality, according to the context.

Latecomers:
- If they're seating themselves, just carry on.
- If they're disrupting, help to seat them.
- You may decide to use them as a pretext for a recap.

Questions:
- Respect and value questions and points made, even if they seem weak or odd to you.
- Repeat them if necessary, so that the rest of the audience can hear them.
- You can stall: '…interesting question', or 'Give me a minute to think about that', or reflect the question back: 'Do you mean…' or 'What I understand you to be asking is…'
- If you get a question you're not prepared for, you can say 'Give me a minute to think about that' and take your minute: your audience will respect this more than a knee-jerk defensive answer.
- In some cases, you can ask for a view from other members of the audience.
- You don't have to know everything! You can get back to someone - talk later in the conference or write/email.

If you get questions from people who seem to be there to heckle or have an axe to grind:
- Keep calm.
- Make it a discussion point – without losing your timings.
- Diplomacy can fail. Agree that you disagree and offer to talk to them afterwards. Don't get defensive. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.

This document is available in alternative formats. Contact catherine.walter@education.ox.ac.uk