

Another Addition to our Top Tips Series:

Top tips ... for giving talks

Dr. Mark Griffiths

Psychology Division, Nottingham Trent University

The ability to speak to an audience is an essential skill in the academic world (whether you are a student or lecturer). Very few people are “natural born orators” so here are my top tips for oral presentations.

Before speaking

- (1) ***Prepare thoroughly*** - Preparation is crucial. Ask yourself questions such as these to help you prepare. Who are you speaking to? How long have you got to speak for? What are you trying to achieve? What are your main objectives in the talk?
- (2) ***Organize your material*** - During preparation, make sure things are in a logical sequence. Only present once concept or idea at a time and try not to backtrack except for summarizing purposes. Ask yourself some key questions about your content : Why is this information important? What are the facts? What are the implications/consequences?
- (3) ***Be focused*** - Be specific and concentrate on the topic in hand. Do not over-prepare and try to cover too much material. If you have lots of information, sift out anything irrelevant.
- (4) ***Know your subject*** - During preparation, check all necessary information for clarifications and/or questions from the audience, and background information for follow-up debates etc. Mistakes can lead to lack of credibility.
- (5) ***Use legible visual aids*** - Check the legibility of your visual aids if you hand write them and make sure you use a big enough size font if you word-process them (24 point will usually suffice for most sized rooms).

Just before speaking

- (6) ***Check the room before speaking*** - It is usually a good idea to get an idea of where you are speaking. You can check out the acoustics, and check the

mechanics of how to use the overhead or slide projector as many of them have little differences. You can also do things like move the lectern closer to the overhead projector. Check that all the equipment is working properly (there is nothing worse than discovering a faulty overhead projector or that your Powerpoint presentation is incompatible with the system provided).

- (7) ***Make yourself physically and psychologically comfortable as possible*** - Before your talk, do a few breathing exercises if you are nervous. Concentrate on feeling relaxed. Get a glass of water in case you need it. Simple well-established routines should help calm nerves.

During speaking

- (8) ***Don't read out your talk*** - Although you might feel more secure reading out your talk word-for-word, it will not come across very well. Use cue-cards and/or general headings on overheads and talk around them.
- (9) ***Pace yourself*** - Don't talk too quickly or too slowly. Very fast presentations are usually a sign of nervousness whereas talking very slowly may look as though you are unfamiliar with the material. You also have the option to use silence as pauses can add emphasis. Pause between changes in topic. Have a glass of water on standby just in case your mouth dries up.
- (10) ***Use pace, pitch and tone to your advantage*** - Having said pace yourself, it can pay to alter pace on occasions. If you want to relax people, drop your voice, leave pauses and slow down. If you want to enthuse quickly, then speed up.
- (11) ***Establish eye contact with the audience*** - While speaking, look at your audience. Shoegazing or fixing your gaze on the wall at the back of an auditorium will look unnatural.
- (12) ***Speak to those who are actively listening*** - Do not concentrate your eye contact on the one or two people who have switched off. Their failure to listen to you almost certainly has nothing to do with you.
- (13) ***Start and end with strong statements*** - There's nothing worse than starting or finishing weakly. People will tend to remember these bits of your talk even if they cannot recall much else!
- (14) ***Use a variety of communication methods*** - People like to receive information in different ways. Some prefer visual overheads, some like the person's oratory, others focus in on the words used (looking for logic,

argument etc.). Try and use a variety of methods so that everyone can at least take something from your talk.

- (15) *Use stories or anecdotes to get your point across* – There is nothing wrong with using a well chosen story or anecdote to get across your point. Storytelling is a good way to communicate an idea. A good metaphor or analogy can make your presentation memorable and have high audience impact.

After speaking

- (16) Learn to recognize and overcome anxiety symptoms – everyone who gives a talk will learn to recognize the signs of impending anxiety and nervousness (racing heart, dry mouth, unusual voice etc.). Your audience will usually appreciate that you are nervous and they will want you to do well (they don't want to be bored in the process!) Once you know the symptoms you experience, and know that you can give a good talk, you will be able to say to yourself "This happened last time but I still got through it fine".

For more of Mark's Top Tips, as well as much, much more, see the new Tips & Tricks section of our website.

<http://www.psypag.co.uk/>

You can find T&T under the Resources link.

Here are some of the titles you will find there:

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- φ Top 10 Tips for Getting Your First Lectureship,
- φ Top 10 Tips on Writing and Getting Published,
- φ PhD Teleworking,
- φ Ideas for articles and how to get them,
- φ Advice for giving Poster Papers,
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- φ Really Useful Websites, by Stella Bain
- φ Experiencing The Viva, by James Hartley & Susan Jory
- φ Nineteen Ways To Have A Viva, by James Hartley
- φ Dealing with The Media, by Diana Harcourt