

Presentation skills

Communicating what you know about a subject you have researched is an important aspect of learning. It also demonstrates what you have learned, both to yourself and others. Yet many students may be daunted at the prospect of making a presentation, even to the extent of avoiding a module altogether if it includes this form of assessment. Avoiding it can make things worse, you will not give yourself the opportunity to check and see whether you can overcome your anxiety and accomplish what is a useful life skill, (for example, at interviews etc).

You might find that some reflection on your worst fears, combined with the most essential thing, good preparation will support your performance when the time comes. Feelings of nervousness, overexposure or inadequacy are understandable. However, it can be very helpful to reflect on them and find out what can be done to minimise and counteract them.

Feelings you may experience

- I will be so nervous that I will not be able to think about what I am saying
- I will make a fool of myself by revealing my shyness
- I am not articulate enough
- I feel there is a right way to do it and I just haven't got it
- I cannot ask for advice – they'll think I'm stupid
- I am expected to give a perfect performance. I will let everybody down
- I am in a muddle. All I can do is keep my fingers crossed and hope for the best
- I can't bear to have everyone focusing on me.

It will help if you keep in mind that...

nervousness will not matter too much, provided that you are well prepared. In fact adrenaline can heighten your performance. The nervousness you experience will not come across to others as strongly as you may think

your tutors are not there to "find you out". They will naturally wish that you do well in the course they have been teaching

your tutors are not looking for perfection. They only want evidence that you are clear about the case you are arguing and that you can communicate it effectively enough, through your talk, the material and equipment you may use

there is not just one way of presenting. In so far as you meet the course guidelines and requirements, you will be encouraged to find your own individual style of expression. Be creative

good preparation will not happen magically, but it will not be impossibly difficult either. It just requires a good deal of work and organisation, combined with some help and advice

How to prepare:

First of all, it is important that you select a topic you are motivated to research. The more interested you are in the topic, the more likely you are to overcome your nervousness when presenting. Also your enthusiasm will help to keep your audience's interest alive

Structure your talk. Do not try to cover everything in the topic. Choose a few points, form your thesis, define the argument and support by evidence. Think about the introduction and the conclusion: a good beginning and ending will create an impact.

Prepare carefully your visual aids and handouts and use them efficiently. If they are unclear or too numerous they will confuse rather than assist your audience. Do not expect people to read your slides and listen to you at the same time.

Learn relaxation techniques which can help you manage anxiety. There are numerous ways of learning to relax: you could try deep breathing for five minutes, focusing on the inflow and the outflow of your breath.

This is something you can do in other situations, as well as before and during your presentation.

Practical tips:

If possible, in advance you could check the room where you are going to give your presentation. Make sure that the equipment is in place and in working order. Get an idea of how loud or soft your voice will sound.

Time your speech in advance by practising it aloud. A supportive fellow student/friend will be able to tell you whether you are being clear enough and whether your pace is the right one. Remember that you always sound faster to those listening than to yourself.

In order to maintain eye contact with the audience, glance at notes for cues rather than continually reading from them. Some people find cue cards effective for prompting their talk. Again, try and find out what really works for you.

After the presentation, celebrate your achievement and without being self-critical, review your strengths and weaknesses, so you can learn from the experience.

Additional help

If you find that you are still very anxious and cannot face the idea of having to do a presentation remember that help is at hand. You can contact a counsellor in your campus who will help you to explore your anxieties.

LET (Learning Enhancement Team) can help with study skills and developing your written and spoken English. For more information please see: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/let>

You also should check the various sources available on presentations – via literature and the web. Some modules may provide extensive information in their brochures.

How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

Please see website for up-to-date service details:
<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:
cmh@mdx.ac.uk

Further leaflets in this series

Abuse
Addictive behaviour
Anxiety and Panic
Bereavement and loss
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
Coming to Britain to study
Coping with trauma
Depression
Eating disorders
Exam anxiety
Helping someone you are concerned about
Managing stress
Mature students
Mental health
Mindfulness
Relaxation
Work difficulties and study blocks
Working in groups

Apr 2018