How to give a good presentation

Previously in national PhD conference in Neuroscience Torunn Meyer had a workshop with some valuable tips to improve our presentation skills, below are some of her suggestions that can be useful when presenting your research. Practice your skills at this year NRSN symposium, good luck and have fun with presenting!

Flight, fight or freeze?

Breathing deeply can help reduce physical symptoms of nervousness, sometimes people might get elevated heart beat, sweaty hands, and a dry throat. Taking some deep breaths and focus on something mundane helps calm down the body

Have the "good talk" with yourself and practice a lot!

Thoughts like "*I should not be here*", or "*no one wants to hear what I have to say*" are common and can be very pervasive. It can help to have a good talk with yourself or someone you trust and to rehearse what you will say out loud. Remember, you're here for a reason! People want to hear what you have to say!

The perfect beginning

Some people might have had little time to prepare, and the beginning of the presentation can become somewhat awkward.
Try this: Walk quietly to your presentation spot, have a look at the audience, take a deep breath, look again towards the audience, try to get eye contact, and then start talking.

Verbal communication

When presenting you need to think about ***who*** is in the audience. Are the people experts in the field, or interested students, or is it a broad audience? Adjust your presentation accordingly.
Sometimes it can help captivate the audience to begin with a **story** or a **rhetorical question**.
Avoid a monotone speaking voice, it's okay to show your enthusiasm! If you show your enthusiasm for the topic, the audience will more easily get enthused as well.

Non-verbal communication

You can use your hands to gesture a point, however, be careful not to have too much hand movement as this can be distracting for the audience.
Move around: try to not stay at the same spot, move across the room if possible, a few times. This will keep the audience's attention.
Try not to cross your legs, try to keep a stable position, it's more comfortable and it will make you a bit more confident. Straighten your back and open your chest, it makes it easier to talk and gives you confidence.
Don't cross your arms!

These are just a few suggestions to improve your presentation skills!

10 tips for making a great poster

Know your poster

1 This may probably sound quite obvious considering you already spent several hours making it, but might actually be the most important point on this list. You should be able to present your poster without any notes or reading from it. You should also know what information is not on the poster, so you can fill in interested viewers when asked.

Make a plan

2 Plan your presentation and memorize it in your head before the session. You should also plan one short (2 min) and one longer (5-6 min) presentation, so that you are prepared for both the people who just want a quick walkthrough and also those who want more details.

Mind your surroundings

3 Do not stand in front of your poster. You might block the view. Try to stand on the left or right side of the poster – and practice to give the poster presentation from both sides. (Remember to not block your neighbors poster either!)

Summarize

4 Prepare a short summary of your project (3-4 sentences) with the most important key points and conclusions. This will make it easier to explain people what you are doing, and also works great as an introduction.

Mind the knowledge gap

5 When working with a project you are highly focused on the small (and exciting) parts of your research. However, people interested in your poster probably need a less detailed description. Remember that most of the attendees are not experts in your field. Try to simplify your research so other researchers with no or minor background in your field can understand what you are doing.

Ask questions

6 Before you dive into the details of your poster, you can ask the person you're talking to some questions about what they're doing, what they're interested in , and what they want to know about the poster. This helps level the playing field and facilitates easier discussion.

Use figures and illustrations

7 A poster is a visual medium, therefore it's worth while to spend some extra time making figures and illustrations to illustrate your methods and results. You can also experiment a bit more than you would in a manuscript. This will grab the attention of the viewers, and it'll aid discussion. Always keep accessibility in mind when using colors!

Anticipate questions

8 Poster sessions are meant to facilitate discussion. It could be a good idea to think about which questions from the audience you might get so you can prepare a good answer and improve the discussion even more.

Know what you don't know

9 If you get questions you cannot answer, you should tell the audience just that. Maybe they have some experience that might help you, and knowing what you don't know helps facilitate discussion as well.

Have fun!

10 You have spent several months, maybe years doing this project. This is a great opportunity to tell everyone what you are doing and share your work while getting some immediate feedback.

How to prepare a good slideshow

Creating the presentation

On the first slide include your name, title of presentation, the date, and your institution. Structure your presentation in a manner, that it is easy to follow:

- Give background information on the topic (introduce specific vocabulary/abbreviations if needed)
- Present the aim of the research or your hypothesis
- Make sure to describe each method and experiment (make use of illustrations where possible)
- Present the results (use figures as much as possible, but make sure to add a bullet point of the main finding)
- Present your conclusion, put your findings in broader perspective
- Address unknowns in your work and limitations of your methods to stimulate discussion
- Do not forget to include references where necessary!
- Check for spelling mistakes
- Check for spelling mistakes again

Tips for good slide design

There is no one best way to design your presentation, but a lot of wrong ways. Keep in mind these tips when you are getting creative.

- Make sure there's sufficient contrast between the text and the background. Use black and white preferably. Do not use yellow text on a blue background. Ever!
- Use the same font and size consistently through slides. Preferably use a sans-serif font (like this one). Remember that presentations given via Zoom look smaller on certain screens, adjust the font size accordingly.
- Do not overload your slide with information, try using maximum of 4 bullet points per slide or maximum two figures.
- A presentation is a visual medium more than a textual one, so use figures and illustrations liberally and never use large blocks of text.
- Keep accessibility in mind, certain colors are harder to distinguish for people with colorblindness, also keep contrast high.

Tips for preparing and presenting figures

Keep in mind that presentations are a visual medium. People will focus easier when they don't have to read text, but can look at figures or tables instead. Make use of figures and illustrations where possible.

- Each slide with figures should convey the main finding of the figure(s)
- Make sure to explain your figure fully (explain x and y axis, what is represented and what is the main finding of this)
- Make figures large enough for the audience to see
- Again – figures should help you and capture the attention of the audience, not distract them. Make sure the audience can easily focus on the relevant point.
- Also here, keep accessibility in mind, make sure colors are distinguishable for people with colorblindness too.

Tips for practicing your presentation

You can practice your presentation beforehand, here's some tips:

- Go through it a few times prior to your presentation, make sure you remember all the important points you want to mention.
- Make smart use of notes, you can write a few bullet points down, but avoid writing down entire sentences.
- Make sure you can give your presentation without having to read from the notes. You've likely worked on what you're presenting for a while, trust that you can talk about the topic without having to rely on your notes! You got this!
- Time yourself
- Do not rush through your presentation

Tips for giving a popular scientific presentation

Science is hard, and it's often complicated! In our daily work we tend to focus on nitty-gritty little niche details about our methods and our field, and these details matter a great deal to us. To a wider audience however, these details couldn't matter less. One might say that we easily go "down the rabbits' hole". And we tend to stay in there, because it becomes a big part of our work. So, when we want to "talk our science" to an audience who have never seen or been in our little rabbits' hole, we need to:

1 *Get out of the rabbit's hole*

Get out of the rabbits' hole and look around. Who will be your audience? Remember that even neuroscientists are a diverse audience. Make sure you understand what the global background of your audience is, and what **knowledge gap** needs to be closed in order for them to understand what you're doing.

2 *So what?*

When you're preparing your presentation, make sure you have a good reason why you included a certain concept, figure, or method. Ask yourself "*so what?*" so you make sure the audience understands the **relevance** of what you show them. How does your work connect to their work, their their lives or their world.?

3 *Mind your language*

Be aware of jargon and abbreviations – will everyone in the audience understand the **big words** you use? If you need to use them, can you draw a line between that and "the real world", use a metaphor, can you tell why that particular cell/mechanism/brain area is important for us?

4 *Use visuals*

Presentations are a visual medium - can you paint a picture to get your point across? Audiences have only a limited attention span, and they can't focus on what you're saying if they have to read and remember text. Use figures and illustrations where possible!

Learning to disseminate our work to our friends, family, taxpayers, scientists that are outside our field and the public as a whole is a skill that will serve you long beyond your current job!

"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler" – Albert Einstein