

Tips from Peer Advice series

Organising a Peer-led Seminar

There are key questions you should consider before running a peer-led seminar:

- Why are you running this seminar? Is it just the dissemination of research? Is it for your own self-publicity or CV? Or for the key speaker?
- What's the subject and exactly who will present it? How does this fit within your department?
- Has your speaker got credibility?
- Who is your audience and how are you going to reach them? Think about the lead time for the event – not too late, not too far in advance.
- Check that it's not conflicting with anything in your department or that your intended audience might also wish to attend.
- Find a hook or key message that will draw people in
- Find a good, suitable venue that is big enough for your desired audience and make sure you book this well in advance.
- Think about food and refreshments – food can be a big draw!
- Be prepared to adapt – what if you get more responses than expected?
- Who's going to pay for it? Find sources of funding across the University.

Writing Professional Emails

When writing professional emails there are 5 key things to consider:

1. Style: use a formal style and formal expressions, rather than a chatty style.
2. Clarity: the purpose for sending your email must be clear to the recipient
3. Use a professional email address

4. Format your email professionally. Address it formally 'Dear Sir or Madam' or 'Dear John Smith'. End the email with a formal sign off, using phrases like 'Best wishes' or 'Kind Regards'
5. You need to be responsive. Make sure you reply to emails as swiftly as possible.

Conducting an Effective Interview

Consider the following when conducting an interview:

- Purpose

What is the purpose of the Interview? You need to be clear what you want from the interviewee.

- Preparation

Prepare relevant questions or an interview guide. An interview guide is a set of questions prepared by the interviewer beforehand to ensure that the interview goes in the desired direction and that the interviewer gets all the information that they need.

- Reduce Stress

People generally do not like to be put on the spot. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to put the interviewee at ease, reduce their stress and ensure they are as comfortable as possible. Have a brief introduction and a relaxed session with the participants beforehand, this ensures they are comfortable in the interview setting and lays down the basis of a good interview to follow.

- Variety of questions

Have a selection of open and close ended questions. Closed questions get clarity, but open questions allow interviewees to talk about what they wish to talk about and allow for more information from the interviewee.

Conducting an Effective Meeting

- Make sure you have an agenda which is structured enough to ensure that you accomplish what you want from the meeting

- Participation – research shows 5-8 participants is an ideal meeting size. Make sure participants are appropriate/relevant to the meeting
- Decide on the structure of the meeting before it takes place. Make sure it suits the participants' intentions and gets the proper feedback.
- Place and time – make sure this suits your participants and is convenient to them
- Have a meeting facilitator – they can steer the meeting in particular direction and are able to help mediate and settle disagreements
- Start and end on time – this shows your respect of people's commitment and time, as well as the importance of the topic under discussion
- Documentation – make sure that everything that everything said is documented and create minutes. This – helps share responsibility between participants and also ensures whatever has been said is accomplished. It also means that you can review and track progress
- Appreciate the other peoples' point of view!

First Impressions

When you meet someone, you automatically make a judgement about them. From that moment, you'll look for evidence to support this judgement, rather than looking to change this judgement or process characteristics independent of this.

- Clothing

Clothing is the visual representation of you that other people see. It also invokes feeling and emotion in you. For example, wearing gym clothes when doing sport can help you feel more active, whereas lounge clothes might help you unwind and relax at home. Dressing for how you want to feel and to suit your professional environment can help get you in the appropriate mindset.

- Handshakes

Your handshake is one of the first pieces of information that people get to judge you on, and they will. Practice with a friend and ask for their feedback to ensure that your handshake is a good strength (not too feeble, not too vice-like).

- Listening

Listening is a skill. Try to practice to 'RASA' when you engage in conversation with someone.

R – Receive information

A – Appreciate the information. Show you're listening by nodding or adding small comments: "Yes", "I see", "okay", "sure" when appropriate.

S – Summarise. Give a brief version back to the speaker when they have finished ("So...")

A – Ask a question back.

Doing this also helps you to retain the information you have been given, as it helps you memorise the information through rehearsal, as well as showing that you are listening attentively.

Effective Pitching

When you're networking or talking to people about your area of research, you might want to make use of the 'elevator pitch'. The elevator pitch is a short pitch, which might take the amount of time you would have with someone when in a travelling elevator. There are 3 different type of elevator pitch.

- The 10 second pitch

This pitch is aimed at people who are not familiar with your field of research so describe your research in simple, concise terms, without complex terminology.

- The 30 second pitch

This is targeted at people in your research field, who might have a general knowledge of your area of research but not an expert.

- The 60 second pitch

This is targeted at experts in your field. This can be very detailed, and you shouldn't have to explain concepts or terminology.

You should spend some time writing and practicing these pitches. Don't improvise them! Having an effective pitch ready to go will be invaluable and ensure that you give the right message to people that you may only have one encounter with.

If you are not sure what level to pitch at, then pitch low. If someone is familiar with your field or an expert in your area they should make this obvious in their response or questions.

When you meet someone that you feel like you would want to pitch yourself to, don't jump straight in. First ask some questions and find out about the person. Their responses should give you indicators of which level to pitch at and gives you a chance to develop rapport.

Try to be these three things:

1. Confident – this is an appealing quality that people are drawn to. It will also inspire people to have confidence in you.
2. Trustworthiness – you want to encourage people to invest resources in you (be it a job, funding or time).
3. Competence – you need to show that you know what you are doing! This will help them to understand that you are able to follow through with what you say.