

HOW TO ACE YOUR DISSERTATION PRESENTATION

IN COLLABORATION WITH PREVIOUS WARWICK STUDENT, REBECCA PREEDY



Nervous about your dissertation presentation? For many people, oral presentations (or public speaking in general) can be stressful experiences. However, the vast majority of degrees require some form of formal discussion about your research, and for many this will actually count towards your grade. Whether it's formative or summative, it's worth looking at your presentation as a chance to show your department what you're made of, and to gain valuable feedback in the process. So, with that in mind, here are some tips to help you ace your presentation!

1: Know your audience

Who are you giving the presentation to? Your supervisor? Another member of staff? Perhaps there are some students listening. It's important that you keep the audience in mind when creating your presentation. If it's to your supervisor, you know that they'll already be aware of the context and content of your research.

Don't forget to ask for feedback!

However, if there are other students listening you can't assume that they will understand everything that you're talking about. Look over your notes and decide if anything needs clarification. It's easy to lose an audience if you haven't properly explained the circumstances of your research, but it can be a simple mistake to fix.

2: Pick and choose

Another easy trap to fall into is choosing to focus on the wrong aspects of your work. If you're only given ten minutes to present your dissertation, it's probably not feasible to fit your entire structure into one PowerPoint. It's therefore to your advantage to be clever in terms of which parts of your work you pick and choose to discuss. If your presentation will be marked it's a good idea to pick the areas of research and methodology that you are most confident with, since you will then be more prepared for questions afterwards.



However, if your presentation isn't marked and is more like a staged opportunity to receive feedback, you might want

to discuss one of the sections you are less sure about so that you can get helpful responses about whether or not you're on the right lines.

3: Keep it clear, keep it snappy

Your department should have given you some advice about the length of your presentation. It's really important that you stick to this. The time that's been given to you has been set to make sure you don't commit the biggest presentation crime of all time: waffling. Wandering off-topic or focusing on one point for too long can be extremely boring for your listeners, and they'll soon lose interest.

...select some images that relate to your work.

In the same vein, don't rush to try and fit as much as possible into your allotted

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time. If you don't speak clearly, you risk your audience missing something or not understanding. The same applies to your word choice; it's tempting to overuse a thesaurus to make yourself seem more intelligent, but this has consequences on the clarity of your speech. The phrase to keep in mind is 'Quality, not quantity', both in the content of your presentation, and in your choice of words.



4: Illustrate your point

We've all fallen victim to a PowerPoint presentation that looks like a four-hundred-page novel has been copied and pasted onto each slide. This is again something to avoid in order to achieve a clear presentation. Instead of using words, select some images that relate to your work. For some, this might be art or material objects, for others it could be a graph or chart. A flow-diagram is a great way to illustrate structure and methodology as opposed to using a long-winded

description that fills up an entire slide. After all, a picture tells a thousand words.

The phrase to keep in mind is 'Quality, not quantity'...

5: Practice makes perfect

It's a great idea to practise your presentation in a space that you feel comfortable in. Rehearse it in front of a mirror, or (even better) for trusted friends or family. Record yourself so you can listen back and make sure you're speaking clearly and are within the time limit. Don't forget to ask for feedback!

6: Listen

Finally, it's important to remember that there are two sides to every presentation: talking, and listening. Once you've finished, it's easy to relax and then stumble when you're asked questions. Listen carefully to what's asked, making sure you understand. Ask for clarification if there's something about the question that feels unclear. This can also give you more time to think of a good answer.

Feel free to ask beforehand for feedback on a specific area. For example, if you aren't sure about your methodology, it's helpful to ask for advice specific to this. Finally, don't forget to take any feedback on the presentation itself in your stride, as it can be really helpful for the next time you need to give one.



If you're still struggling with your presentation, why not check out the Library's Online Course, [Presenting and Visualising Information](#).

Good luck!