

Giving Presentations

Presentations are often used as part of selection processes as they are an ideal opportunity for an employer to assess your oral communication skills. You might also be asked to make a presentation during a selection day for some postgraduate courses such as teacher training.

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR?

Broadly speaking, employers will want to see if you can communicate ideas clearly and effectively. Is the talk well structured with a beginning, middle and end? Can they hear, and understand, what you are saying?

Closer attention may be paid to the exact content of your talk if you have been asked to present on a topic closely related to the job vacancy. It is likely that interviewers will make notes during your presentation as they assess your performance but don't get distracted by this.

The amount of time that you may be given to prepare a presentation will vary. In some cases you will be given the opportunity to choose your own topic and take a prepared talk to the interview. On the other hand, an employer might also want to assess how you respond to pressure and ask you to prepare a talk once the selection centre is underway.

GETTING READY

The basics - Make sure that you are clear about the following:

- How long you will be required to talk for, 5 minutes, 10 minutes?
- What equipment, if any, will be available? Will you need to prepare a digital presentation or are you expected to use a flip-chart?

Preparing a topic - Think about the audience to whom you are presenting and their level of understanding. Don't try to cram in too much detail but make your talk interesting by including data and examples to illustrate the points that you are making. Aim for three big ideas in a five-minute talk. Structure your presentation by firstly giving the audience an outline of the content, then deliver the content and conclude by restating, very briefly, the key points. In short:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them what you have told them!

Using notes - Avoid reading out your presentation from a prepared script. You might find it useful to put the main points that you want to cover on index cards using large print which will be easy to read. Number the cards and make sure that they are fastened together in the right order. If you are using slides, make sure you indicate this on the cards.

Visual aids -

- Using PowerPoint or Prezi can enhance your presentation and highlight key points. Make sure, however, that they don't distract the audience from your input. Don't put too much information on each slide.
- Think carefully about font size, layout and colour. It can sometimes be tempting to try and demonstrate your ability to produce a complex 'slide-show' and forget that the audience only has a few moments to take in all the details. Brief bullet points are far easier to read than long sentences.
- If you are unfamiliar with using PowerPoint or Prezi, ensure you spend some time practising. Use your visual aids when you rehearse your talk. Remember not to block your audience's view by standing in front of the screen or flip-chart.
- Don't be tempted to read from the screen; it is important to look at the audience, so use your notes if necessary.
- Check if you should save your prepared digital presentation onto a memory stick, or other format. If so make sure that you have named the file clearly; this is a very obvious point but in the heat of the moment, you don't want to open the wrong document. Take along copies of your slides on paper just in case there is a last-minute problem with the computer. You can always use the paper copies as handouts for the audience.
- Make sure that there are no spelling mistakes on your slides. Ask a friend who has a good eye for detail to proof read them for you.



LOOKING AND SOUNDING GOOD

- Rehearse your presentation several times to make sure that it fits within the time limit. There can be a tendency to try to say too much and you must not overrun.
- Although you might feel very strange talking out loud to yourself or just one other person, practise in front of the mirror or a trusted friend.
- Take a few deep breaths before you start. This will help calm your nerves and also make sure that you have an adequate supply of air in your lungs so that your voice is stronger.
- Check the audience is ready before you start and smile at them.
- Look at your audience and show enthusiasm. Watch the rate at which you speak – don't gabble, but don't speak too slowly either. Check that the person furthest away can hear you.
- Try to stand still and with a relaxed posture. Don't fiddle with loose change in your pockets or jewellery.

IMPROVING YOUR SKILLS

The ability to confidently present to an audience will be a great asset in your career. It's well worth developing this skill. Few people start out fully confident and it's not uncommon to suffer from nerves before presenting. However everyone can develop their skills in this area with time and effort. The best way to get better at it is to do it. So, take any and every opportunity to speak in front of an audience. If you are nervous, start with small and friendly groups in a social setting. Look out for training courses through Careers (see [JobsLive](#)) or in your course. There are also lots of resources outside the University that you could try (see Further Support for some ideas).

FURTHER SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Careers Service website** section on Assessment Centre Activities: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/assessment/activities
- **'At the Assessment Centre' online** - provides an insight into the range of activities which take place at assessment centres. This and other videos are available via the Careers Service website www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/resources/videos
- **Prospects website** - www.prospects.ac.uk - look for 'interview tips' under 'Careers Advice'
- **Reference books** - 'The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking', 'Perfect Presentations', Peter Levin & Graham Topping; 'Wrestling with Crocodiles', Dr Stuart Wineberg - available in the Careers Service, Level 5 Sherfield Building
- **Careers Service events** - each year we plan talks and workshops which are designed to enhance your chances of success in the application process - for details, see [JobsLive*](#)
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure

* www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive

