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How to Prepare and Deliver a Good Presentation: General Principles for Success

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Abstract.

The author has over fourteen years' experience in higher education, supporting students in delivering presentations for assessment and in marking across all levels up to masters, and as an external examiner. This article examines and highlights the general principles which will assist the student in writing, preparing and delivering a successful presentation. Standing up in front of your peers, tutors, or interviewers can be one of the most stressful things students and job applicant's face. The aim of this article is to give advice and encouragement to the student thereby hopefully reducing some of the stress that presentations cause.

Areas such as the length of the presentation, structure and content, maintaining confidentiality, referencing, presentation marking criteria, spelling and grammar, font size and clutter, animation and colour, individual or group presentations, poster presentations, preparing for questions, audience participation, notes and handouts, confidence and body language, and feedback will be discussed.

Key Words: Academic Writing, Assistant Practitioners, Group Presentations, Individual Presentations, Nursing Associates, Poster Presentations, Presentations, Students, Support Workers.

Introduction

Whether you are a Support Worker, an Assistant Practitioner, a Nursing Associate, an undergraduate nursing student, or a nurse, presentations and poster presentations are likely to form part of any programme of study, or standalone modules that you undertake. Increasingly presentation are also being used in the interviewing process for new posts and promotions. Getting the basics right from the start will assist you in writing and preparing a good academic presentation and will allow you to present in a relaxed and confident manner. Assessments are the process in which your tutors will determine if you have met the learning outcomes for the module of study, and have therefore passed. It is also the way in which you demonstrate your knowledge, learning and development.

Length of Presentation

Unlike an essay where you are given a recommended word count, presentations are usually set in units of time, 15, 20 or 30 minutes in length, or number of slides to be used. It is important that you stick to the length imposed. Practising your presentation by running through it as you would on the day will help with timing. If you do run over you may be told to wrap up in the next minute or so, or even told to stop right there. This could cost you marks.

Structure and Content

As with essays, presentations should have an introduction, a main body and finish with a conclusion or recommendations. There should be a title slide at the beginning with the title of your presentation and your name. If your presentation is based on a scenario or real life patient, then this could come next. Then comes your required discussion as the main body. At the end there should be a slide which contains your reference list.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Confidentiality within presentations is as important as it is within essays. The Code of Conduct for Healthcare Support Workers and Adult Social Care Workers in England (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013) makes it clear in section 5.1 which states you must “treat all information about people who use health and care services and their carers as confidential.” Therefore any mention of patients, family members or carers, staff members or clinical areas in your presentation must be anonymised. This can be achieved through the use of a pseudonym, but you must make this clear at the start of your presentation. Often your educational institution will provide you with a standard sentence which can be inserted into one of the first couple of slides.

By failing to maintain confidentiality will usually result in a fail grade being given by the course provider and if a registered professional this may have wider ramifications.

Referencing

Each point within a presentation needs to be referenced as you would in an essay. These references then need to be listed in the reference list at the end. Correct referencing as per your educational institutions referencing style is very important.

One word of advice, do not leave completing your reference list until the very end, but do it as you go along. There is nothing worse at the end not being able to find the details of a source you have used, or trying to find which bit of paper you have the details written down on.

Presentation Marking Criteria

As there is for each different assessment type, presentations have their own marking criteria for each different level of study. This is an important document which sets out

what you need to do to gain a certain mark. It is divided into bandings usually going up in 10%'s. These bandings are divided up into sections, which together with the usual information, structure, interpretation and analysis and relevant and accurate evidence, also includes sections on presentation skills, group skills and time management. Your tutors will refer to this when they mark your presentation. However it is a very good idea to look over this document before you start your preparation for your presentation.

Spelling and Grammar, Font Size and Clutter.

In presentations, both electronic and poster based ones, you are required to disseminate your information in the clearest, possible way. Therefore make sure that there are no spelling mistakes or grammatical errors as these will stand out. The font size should not be too small, but large enough to be read on a screen or poster. Avoid having too much information on each slide. York St John University (2003) recommend only one subject per slide with a maximum of six bullet points only. It is far better to have only a small number of bullet points or statements per slide which you can then elaborate on, than having the screen full of text.

Animation and Colour

This is where you attempt to wow the audience with fancy images and texts moving in and out of your slides. However I would add a word of caution here. Animation tends to distract your audience and makes them miss what the key points are. Also the more things which are happening, the greater the chance for something to go wrong. If you feel the need to use these then keep them to an absolute minimum and fairly simple.

The colour of both the background and your words is also important. Always test out any colours up on the screen first to make sure that they do not prevent the words from being seen. Usually black or dark text on a lighter background works best.

Individual or Group Presentations

You may be asked to present individually or as a group. If individually then the research, planning, development of the presentation and the delivery are all down to you. However in group presentations you are now reliant on the other members of your group to perform and do the required work. Part of the assessment may well be looking at team work and how you worked together. If you have a group member who is not pulling their weight this is often very clear to whoever is examining the presentation. The examiner will be looking at how you are working together as a team on the day. Part of your presentation may be you reflecting on how the process went and what you have learned from this. Sometimes this reflection may be part of an extra written formal piece supporting the presentation or an informal reflection for a personal portfolio.

Time management and delegation of tasks will need to be managed. Dividing up the work load into equal parts and setting deadlines when work has to be completed by is very important. You will need to factor in times when you can all meet to bring everything together and to have a rehearsal. The actual presentation will need to be divided up so each member has an equal part to present.

Poster Presentations.

These are different from the normal stand up in front of the screen presentations. Here you either individually or as a group produce a poster examining a topic. Whereas a presentation with slides progresses as you move along, a poster is fairly static. The information is all there from the start. As part of your brief and guidance you will know who your intended audience is. Whether academic staff, other support workers or students, patients or family members, or members of the public. Is it aimed at a particular age group? All this will contribute to how you present the information and at what level. Posters generally need to be more eye catching and be able to grab the attention of the reader. As slides should not have too much text presented, posters can have more text, but there should be a good balance between pictures and words. The poster should also be able to be read from a few feet away so the font needs to be big enough to facilitate this. You may be required to stand by your poster and present it to your tutor's, answering any questions.

Preparing for Questions

It is important that you know your subject inside out as you will most likely be asked questions at the end. These might be to clarify something you have said, or to ask you about something you have not said. As Waugh and Bell (2018:11) state "questions are not there to catch you out, but rather to give you the opportunity to expand on certain points raised."

Audience Participation

Depending on how much time you have and the subject you may want to include your audience in some part of your presentation. This could be as simple as producing an information leaflet aimed at patients for them to read, or passing round items of equipment for them to examine.

Notes and Handouts.

You will usually be allowed to take notes in with you. However avoid having everything written out exactly as you are going to say it. Much better to have flash cards with just your main points. By not reading everything off a sheet demonstrates to your assessors that you know your subject.

It is also good practice to provide handouts of your slides for your tutors or interviewers. This allows them to make notes and to remember your presentation afterwards when writing up feedback. It may also be a regulation of the assessment

that you submit a copy for marking. If presenting in front of your peers it is not necessary to give them handouts.

Confidence and Body Language

This leads nicely onto this next subject. Nerves are an expected part of presenting and very few people will admit to not feeling nervous. However your nerves must not be so bad that they prevent you from performing. Knowing your subject inside out is the best way to reduce your nerves and having practiced your presentation beforehand. Maintain eye contact with your audience looking around at the different people present. Do not stand with your back to them reading large paragraphs of text directly off the screen. It should be sufficient for you to just glance at the screen when you move onto a new slide. Find out how formal or informal the presentation is expected to be. If you are allowed to sit do you feel comfortable doing this? Would you prefer to stand? Do you have a say in how the room is set out?

Feedback

Once your presentation is over, after a set time you will receive your mark and feedback. In group presentations you will either receive an individual mark for your part of the presentation, or one overall mark that everyone receives. It is very important that you go over the feedback as this will assist you in any subsequent presentations you are required to do. Feedback should cover both the content of your presentation, your presenting style, and team working where appropriate.

Finally

Do not leave it to the last minute. It does take time to research your topic and design your slides. Plan time into your busy schedule so you can give it your best. Presentations really cannot be left until the night before and posters thrown together at the last minute will give you away.

Conclusion.

So to conclude, the aim of this article has been to discuss some of the basic considerations that students need to be mindful of when preparing for, and delivering a presentation. With good planning and preparation, the fear of standing up in front of an audience can be allayed and you can deliver an outstanding presentation to gain that top mark, to get that dream job, or influence and develop clinical practice.

Key Points:

1. Practice running through your presentation before hand.
2. Print off a copy of your slides for your tutor and in case there are any technical issues on the day.
3. Avoid just reading off a sheet, but use cards with just the main points on.

4. Face your audience having eye contact when appropriate.
5. In group presentations how the team has worked together is an important factor and should be reflected upon either formally or informally.

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