

How to Give a Presentation



TSM Guides

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How to Give a Presentation

The typical medical student talk, which we've sat through many times, usually follows this script:

Introduction: "The subject of my talk is pulmonary embolism."

Content: unrealistically extensive overview of a massive topic based on major texts

Conclusion: "Well, I guess that's all I have."

It's easy to make that talk significantly more impressive and memorable.

Introduction: "*Substantial and unacceptable.*" Those were the words of Dr. Kenneth Moser, referring to the morbidity and mortality rate of venous thromboembolism ...¹ A major issue in reducing these high rates is enhancing early diagnosis. In my talk today, I'll review recent advances in diagnostic techniques of pulmonary embolism."

Content: in-depth review of a focused topic including recent medical literature

Conclusion: "As the recent literature has shown, the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism may clearly be challenging. As in the case of our patient Mr. Smith, however, a combination of diagnostic methods leads to improved sensitivity."

Being asked to give a talk is a common, yet anxiety-provoking, medical student experience. Medical students are often asked to give a talk to the team, usually pertaining to an issue that arises during rounds. Some students face anxiety and dread just at the thought of giving a talk. However, preparing and presenting a talk is a great opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and grasp of clinical issues, and can definitely impress the team. While you can't control what an attending might ask during rounds, you do have complete control over your talk. With sufficient preparation and practice, you should be able to deliver an outstanding talk.

In this chapter, you'll learn specific recommendations to improve the quality and impact of your talks. You'll learn how to choose a topic and perform an audience analysis. You'll read a number of introductory and concluding statements that can be incorporated into any talk. You'll learn how to reduce anxiety and how to respond to audience questions. You'll also learn about specific recommendations that can enhance the quality of your speaking and your audiovisual aids.

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Rule # 226 Be the first to volunteer to give the talk.

During attending rounds, an issue may arise that requires further research. Sometimes an attending will turn to the team and ask “Who wants to give us a talk about this subject?” As team members pointedly try to avoid the attending's gaze, the request is often met with silence. This isn't surprising. Most residents, interns, and students would rather not prepare and give a talk, if they had the choice. This reflects poorly on the entire team.

If the attending asks for a volunteer, you should be the first person to raise your hand. This is yet another opportunity to demonstrate your enthusiasm and initiative. You may not like the thought of giving a talk. However, as you'll see in the remainder of this chapter, with adequate preparation you can deliver an outstanding presentation.

Rule # 227 Choose the correct topic.

In most cases, the attending will assign the topic. However, if you're allowed to choose the subject, carefully consider the following:

It's always better to choose a topic that you already know something about. If you recently cared for a patient with asthma, speak about some aspect of asthma. If in your last rotation you spoke about pulmonary embolism, speak about it again if it pertains to your current rotation.

Choose a topic that you have an interest in.

Make sure that your topic will be of interest to your audience.

Make sure that you can discuss the topic in the time you've been given. In some cases, you may have been assigned a broad topic, such as lung cancer. It's hard to do justice to such a topic unless you've been given considerable time to speak. Instead, ask the attending if there's a specific aspect of the topic you may focus on. If he leaves it up to you, pick an aspect of the topic that would be relevant to your audience, such as the therapy of metastatic lung cancer.

Did you know...

In a study of medical student talks, Yale students were asked to present a 30minute talk on a topic of their choice during the Internal Medicine Clerkship.² At the orientation, students were informed to avoid overviews or large topics. As an example, rather than talking about pneumonia, students were asked to focus on a particular aspect of pneumonia. Despite this recommendation, faculty evaluations noted that 35% of presentations were too broadly focused.

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Rule # 228 If you'll be giving a talk, find out when.

In the student's mind, a 10minute formal presentation requires at least two weeks of preparation. The attending feels otherwise, and asks for it two days later. The message: never assume that you know what your attending is thinking. When assigned a talk, ask when you are expected to give it.

Realize also that talks aren't always given on the specified date. A patient issue may consume more time than expected during rounds. While you prepared extensively, and would just like to give your talk and get it out of the way, there's not much you can do except be ready to give the talk on another day.

Tip # 72

Some attendings will give students a vague deadline. "There's no rush with the talk." Knowing when you're expected to give the talk is important information, so at least try to get a time frame. Above all, don't view a vague deadline as a license to procrastinate.

If just a few days remain before the end of the rotation and nobody mentions the talk you were assigned some time ago, you need to bring it up. Never leave a clerkship without finishing any project, including an assigned talk. If you don't bring it up, the attending may assume that you just didn't prepare.

The Urology Department at Virginia Commonwealth University reminds students to deliver their talk on the final day of the rotation even if it requires some degree of assertiveness. "Topics should be chosen by the conclusion of week one and the presentation should occur on the final day of the rotation unless otherwise requested. Students may not be 'reminded' regarding this requirement; however, they are encouraged to be assertive and make sure they are given dedicated time to present their work."³

Rule # 229 Find out how much time is allotted for your presentation.

You can't prepare for a talk unless you know how much time you have to speak. If the talk is a requirement of the clerkship, time limits may be defined in the orientation materials. For talks assigned by your attending, always ask about time limits. Your attending has a preconceived notion as to how much time your talk should take. A talk that lasts longer takes away from the completion of other tasks during rounds. One that is too short will prompt the attending to wonder how much effort you expended researching your topic.

Never take up more than the allotted time. As described in an article on presentations, "many speakers who have not adequately prepared their talk go beyond their time limit. The result is often an annoyed chairman, an irritated audience ..."⁴ Exceeding the allotted time may also have

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a negative effect on your grade. The Department of Emergency Medicine at Maimonides Medical Center stresses to students that “the presentation should last roughly 20 minutes. Due to the large number of students giving presentations, exceeding the 20-minute allotted time frame may reflect negatively upon your grade.”⁵

Rule # 230 Get to work.

After being assigned a talk, students do one of two things. They either begin working or they put it off. Most students choose the latter.

Students procrastinate mainly because of fear. They worry that they'll sound uncertain or unknowledgeable, or are scared to be the center of attention. These concerns may be stronger for new clerks, who haven't yet given a talk in the clinical setting. You can alleviate these fears by preparing for your talk as soon as it's assigned. With adequate preparation, you can polish your talk and gain confidence in your ability to deliver it well.

Rule # 231 You can't give a talk unless you know your audience.

Since you'll usually give talks to your team, you will know your audience beforehand. Keep in mind that this is a mixed audience. The team consists of members at different educational levels. Always take into account the knowledge level of your audience, which allows you to develop a talk that suits the needs of all listeners.

If you're assigned to speak before an unfamiliar audience, ask for information beforehand. During my psychiatry clerkship, the attending asked me to give a talk on obesity during psychiatry grand rounds. Having never attended psychiatry grand rounds, I was completely unfamiliar with the group. Only after finding out about the audience was I able to prepare a talk tailored to their needs and at a level that was appropriate for their educational background and expectations. Since many of the attendees were psychiatry faculty, I prepared a talk that took into account their knowledge and experience. If the group consisted only of fellow students, I would have prepared a very different talk.

Your audience analysis should yield answers to the following questions:

How many people will be in the audience?

How familiar is the audience with the subject?

What is the educational background of the audience?

What does the audience expect from me?

How can I provide information relevant to their specialty?

What would I like the audience to do with the information I present?

What materials do I want to leave with the audience?

What questions might audience members ask?

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Students who carefully consider the composition and background of their audience are more likely to deliver a talk that meets the needs of their listeners.

Tip # 73

Careful consideration of your audience is the key to developing content that is appropriate. In her article "Presenting with precision," Happell wrote that "it is extremely frustrating to attend a presentation, confident that you are likely to learn something new, only to be exposed to basic information and knowledge that is readily available."⁶

Rule # 232 You cannot prepare an outstanding presentation unless you fully understand the purpose of the talk.

For most talks, your general purpose will be to inform. You also need to determine the specific purpose of your talk. You can do so by considering the needs of your audience and establishing goals and objectives. Without a specific purpose in mind, you run the danger of preparing a vague and disorganized talk.

When developing a purpose statement, be specific. Consider these purpose statements:

I want my listeners to know how to manage an acute gout attack.

I want my listeners to be able to specify at least three types of medications that can be used to manage an acute gout attack.

The latter statement is clearly more specific. It's much easier to develop a focused talk when you have a specific purpose statement.

Rule # 233 Strong introductions are critical.

Start your talk with an introduction that leaves your audience eager to hear what else you have to say. You only have one chance to make a strong first impression. When you fail to grab their attention, it can be difficult to capture it later. For this reason, plan your introduction carefully. Too often, students begin their talk with one of the following types of statements:

I'm talking today about ...

The subject of my talk is ...

You should include the topic and purpose of your talk in the introduction. However, rather than using a bland statement to open the talk, begin with an intro that will stir interest.

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Ask a rhetorical question

We all realize that pulmonary embolism is a major cause of death. Did you know that the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism is missed in approximately 400,000 patients per year? And that's just in the United States ...

Make a bold statement or share a startling statistic

In the United States, 650,000 people are diagnosed with pulmonary embolism every year, with over 200,000 deaths.

Use a historical reference

160 years have passed since Virchow's classic paper on thrombosis and hemostasis was published and we, of course, continue to use the principles of Virchow's triad in the diagnosis and management of patients with pulmonary embolism. From historical reports, Virchow was small in stature but possessed a quick wit. He was known to be sarcastic, particularly when he dealt with incompetence or inattention. Yet he could also be generous and friendly, recognizing those who had made significant contributions. If he were alive today, he would perhaps be impressed with the progress that has been made in the diagnosis and management of pulmonary embolism, but he might also berate us for not making more progress. After all, pulmonary embolism remains a major cause of death in the United States ...

Provide a thought-provoking quote

"Substantial and unacceptable." Those were the words of Dr. Kenneth Moser, referring to the morbidity and mortality rate of venous thromboembolism ...¹

Tell a brief story

If you've ever seen a patient die suddenly of a massive pulmonary embolism, it's not something that you will ever forget ...

Tip # 74

Since the audience's attention is best at the start of a talk, create an attention-grabbing opening that will keep them interested in the remainder of your talk.

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Rule # 234 Utilize the correct resources.

Do not use handbooks as your primary source of information. Instead turn to larger, more authoritative texts as well as the recent literature. While the information in your handbooks may suffice for your fellow students, remember that your audience will also consist of an intern, resident, and attending.

If you have difficulty finding data, seek the assistance of the research librarian. Research librarians are wonderful yet underutilized resources. They don't have all the answers, but they generally have a good idea of how to help you find the information you seek.

Did you know...

Your choice of resources may have bearing on how your talk is received or evaluated. For example, the University of North Carolina Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology requires students to give an oral presentation, which accounts for 5% of the total clerkship grade. The Department writes that "you will be evaluated on your use of resources, knowledge base and presentation style."⁷

Rule # 235 Your goal is to educate, not overload.

Before you even organize your talk, you have to first select material for your presentation. The real trick is determining what not to use. Your research will usually yield more material than you have time to talk about. You need to avoid information overload, as there is definitely a limit to what your audience can handle in a finite period of time. Happell writes that "there is a tendency for inexperienced presenters to overdo the content in their presentation. It is easy to feel that every little piece of information is vital, but we know from experience that even the most interesting topic becomes hard to follow when we feel we are bombarded."⁶

How do you know what to include and what to discard? When you're not sure, ask yourself if the information supports your purpose. Discard that which is irrelevant. As Starver and Shellenbarger stated in their article on presentations, "it is tempting to include lots of information about the topic, but be sure that it clearly fits the purpose of the presentation."⁸

Tip # 75

One of the most common mistakes students make is presenting too much information. Every point you make should support your talk's specific purpose. If it doesn't, cut it out.

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Rule # 236 Make sure your data is accurate.

During your talk, you will present data that support your ideas. Your data must be accurate and relevant. Review all data several times. Nothing will damage your credibility more than passing along inaccurate information. Even one inaccurate fact can call into question the accuracy of your entire talk. With statistics, make sure that the information is up to date. Presenting statistics that are years old when more recent information is available will damage your credibility as well.

Rule # 237 Practice correctly.

When practicing, strive to simulate the actual experience as closely as you can. Whenever possible, practice in the room in which you'll actually speak. If this isn't possible, pick a room that closely resembles the real location of your talk. Doing so allows you the opportunity to become comfortable with the environment.

As you practice, don't just go over your talk in your head. There is a difference between going over a talk in your head and actually delivering it. For this reason, stand in the proper spot, imagine an audience in front of you, and rehearse your talk. Use your notes exactly as you plan to during the actual talk. If you'll be using audiovisual equipment, practice with the equipment.

Tip # 76

As you rehearse your talk, time yourself to ensure that your presentation fits within the allotted time. If you run over, delete material rather than increasing your pace.

You can learn a lot about how you'll appear by videotaping yourself. This is a valuable yet underutilized way of improving performance. Play it back so that you can see and hear yourself as others will. Students are often surprised by what they learn from a videotape of their performance. Annoying habits that usually aren't self-evident will be obvious during this type of review. Learn about these habits during a practice session when you still have the opportunity to correct them.

Tip # 77

If you'll be using audiovisual equipment, realize that problems often occur. The computer may crash. A bulb in the projector may burn out. Unfortunately, problems aren't always correctable. You must be able to continue your talk if an equipment failure can't be corrected.

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Rule # 238 Do not, under any circumstances, read your talk word for word.

Many students write out their talk and then proceed to read it word for word. This is among the most common errors students make when giving a talk. It almost always leads to a monotonous delivery, a surefire way of boring your audience. It's also impossible to maintain eye contact with your audience save for an occasional upward glance, which diminishes credibility.

Tip # 78

Talks that are read are boring. They lack spontaneity and rhythm. Think about the best speakers at your medical school. How many of them read their talks word for word? Keep in mind the words of Edwards who wrote that "... natural rhythm of telling a story with its pauses and eye-to-eye contact with the audience is lost when the talk is read."⁹

Rather than reading your talk word for word, we recommend that you use note cards with no more than ten words on each card. You can use these words as a reminder of the points you wish to make and then proceed to formulate sentences to express these points. You might worry that this seems like a risky method, but you will be practicing with these note cards. With sufficient practice, you'll become comfortable developing sentences using the cues you have on the card. As you grow less dependent on your notes, consider memorizing your introduction, which allows for a great first impression.

If you can speak without detailed notes, you will enhance your image. Since so many students read their talks, attendings are impressed with students who can give a talk using a paucity of notes. This type of student comes across as brighter, confident, and more articulate.

Tip # 79

When quoting an article or conveying detailed statistics, it's better to refer to your notes. You don't ever want to misquote or pass along inaccurate data.

Tip # 80

Should you memorize your talk? It's a risky option. What if you draw a blank? Even if you don't, you're more likely to come across as robotic and stiff rather than natural and enthusiastic.

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Rule # 239 Avoid the monotone.

Too often, students speak with the same force, pitch, and pace, leading to a monotonous delivery. Speaking in a droning monotone bores listeners. It also suggests a lack of interest in the topic.

Is this the impression you wish to convey? Of course not. However, this is precisely the impression that many students leave. You may be very interested in the subject matter. However, that does you no good if the force, pitch, and pace of your speech suggests otherwise.

Rule # 240 Utilize gestures appropriately.

Students commonly remain seated during talks given to a small group, such as their team. In the seated position, students generally place their hands underneath the table. This robs them of the ability to gesture. It has been found that voice patterns often follow hand movements. When hands are kept under the table, it can hamper your ability to vary inflection. Gesturing, if done appropriately, can help you speak with inflection, leading to a more powerful talk.

For this reason, we recommend that you give your talk while standing. Don't keep your hands in your pockets or clinging to a lectern. Instead, have them in front of your body with your palms open. In this position, you are able to effectively gesture.

Avoid gestures that indicate nervousness or a lack of confidence.

These include:

- Keeping your hands in your pockets
- Gripping the lectern or audiovisual equipment
- Playing with keys or coins in your pocket
- Rocking back and forth or from side to side
- Rubbing the back of your neck
- Playing with your hair
- Clenching your fists constantly
- Pacing back and forth
- Fidgeting with clothes or jewelry

If you still choose to give your talk while seated, don't forget to lean forward in your chair, a gesture that conveys enthusiasm and confidence.

Since we're usually unaware of how we gesture, it is useful to take note of your movements while standing in front of a mirror and practicing. You can also review your gestures on videotape or solicit feedback from others after they watch you rehearse. Take note of any inappropriate gestures and make a conscious effort to eliminate them during practice.

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Tip # 81

Only 7% of a speaker's message is felt to be obtained through actual spoken words.¹⁰ 55% is conveyed through nonverbal communication, while 38% is transmitted through vocal tone.

Rule # 241 Don't use fillers.

Fillers are sounds like “um” and “er” that find their way into talks when speakers are thinking about what to say next. The use of fillers suggests that you lack knowledge or are unsure of your information. “The speaker's voice, tone, and inflection are powerful tools for attracting an audience ... Speakers are advised to refrain from speaking in a low, monotonous style and from taking long breaks with fillers such as ‘uh...uh...’”³

Most students don't even realize that they use fillers. If you record your presentation and listen to it, you can determine if fillers are a problem for you. If so, practice replacing these fillers with short pauses.

Rule # 242 Speak at the proper pace.

You need to speak at a speed that allows your audience to understand what you're saying. Talks lead to a great deal of anxiety for most students. In students who normally speak at a reasonable pace, this anxiety can cause them to speak at a faster speed with few, if any, pauses. The effect can be poor enunciation with garbled words and sentences. “Too many ideas presented too quickly will not be understood, even to the most well-informed and intelligent audience.”⁹

You must make a conscious effort to slow down so that your listeners can follow you. Accomplished speakers will also pause periodically to allow their listeners to fully process what they've said. You should aim to do the same. In their article on lecturing, Brown and Manogue wrote that lecturers, to improve clarity, should “speak clearly, use pauses, and don't go too fast ... Whilst these suggestions may seem common sense, observation of lectures suggest that they are not common practice.”¹¹

Did you know...

In a study of emergency medicine residents at the University of Toronto, faculty and peers completed feedback forms following resident presentations. In an analysis of these forms, researchers found that “slowing down” and “use appropriate volume” were frequently mentioned feedback statements (15% frequency).¹²

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Rule # 243 Utilize the techniques of professional speakers to handle anxiety.

Some surveys have demonstrated that public speaking is the number one fear, ranked ahead of even the fear of death. Anxiety affects everyone, even the best speakers. However, the best speakers are able to channel that nervous energy into a better performance.

The following table suggests several methods that can combat anxiety. Just before the presentation, take several deep breaths, stand tall, make eye contact with your audience, and smile.

Ways to relieve anxiety before giving a talk	
Method	Description
Adjust your attitude	How you view the talk will have a large bearing on the anxiety that comes from it. Those who view it as a task to avoid may develop greater anxiety than those who see it as an opportunity to improve skills in communication.
Ensure adequate preparation and practice	The best way to lessen speech anxiety is to give yourself sufficient time to prepare and practice the talk.
Don't overestimate the talk's importance	A talk typically accounts for only a small percentage of the clerkship grade.
Use positive selftalk	"I know my topic, have prepared well for the presentation, and am confident that it will go well."
Visualize success	Athletes and actors, as well as public speakers, use the techniques of visualization. Visualize yourself, with full detail, delivering a well received presentation

Did you know...

Too much anxiety is a problem, especially if it's apparent to the audience. However, studies have shown that speakers generally report a higher level of anxiety than what an audience can perceive.¹³ In other words, audiences aren't very accurate in detecting a speaker's level of anxiety.

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Rule # 244 Don't end with a whimper.

Some students conclude their talk by mumbling "I guess that's about all I have," or "I think I've gone over everything." These statements completely lack impact. Others even close with an apology. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to find more," "I'm sorry I couldn't get the projector to work," or "I'm sorry the talk went so long". In ending your talk, do not mumble and do not ever apologize. The conclusion is also no place for bringing up new points or rambling on and on. Students who don't take the time to think about their conclusion end up closing with a whimper rather than a bang.

To conclude in a way that leaves the audience with a lasting, powerful impression, begin with a phrase that tells your audience that you are wrapping up your talk. Examples include:

In concluding, I want to ...

Let me leave you with ...

As a final thought ...

To wrap up my talk ...

Since most of your talks will be informative presentations, it's reasonable to close by briefly summarizing your main points. After doing so, end your speech with an interesting closer, perhaps a quote or rhetorical question. Since a talk is often assigned when a team member raises an issue pertaining to a patient, one effective way to conclude is to apply your information to that specific issue. "As the recent literature has shown, the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism may clearly be challenging. As in the case of Mr. Smith, however, a combination of diagnostic methods leads to improved sensitivity." To leave your audience with a strong, final impression, avoid reading your conclusion. Instead, know it well enough that you can deliver the conclusion with few, if any, notes.

Tip # 82

Avoid the all-too-common abrupt or awkward conclusion. Instead, use a strong conclusion to leave your audience with a favorable impression.

Rule # 245 Eye contact is a critical component of delivery.

If you can't maintain eye contact with your listeners, it will be difficult to keep them absorbed in what you're saying. Too often, students make no eye contact whatsoever, reading their talk word for word from their detailed notes. Even when students try to present without reading, they often look elsewhere at the floor, ceiling, table, or audiovisual material.

As you give your talk, make eye contact with your listeners. This keeps audience members interested, and helps you come across as more credible and confident. Looking into people's eyes while delivering a talk can be difficult for some students. If you find this unnerving, you don't actually need to look into people's eyes. Instead, focus on another

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part of the face such as the forehead, nose, or mouth. Your listeners won't know the difference.

As you make eye contact, don't be surprised if a team member isn't paying attention. You may notice your audience nodding off, as your audience, sadly but expectedly, is often a tired group. Don't be thrown off track if a pager goes off or if team members are engaging in conversation. As distracting as any of these may be, you can't let it affect your presentation.

Rule # 246 Pay attention to feedback.

It's very easy to be overwhelmed by the task of providing great content and ensuring an effective delivery. Most students are single-mindedly focused on giving a great presentation. However, you need to be alert to audience feedback. During a presentation, this takes the form of nonverbal cues, such as body language cues that indicate total boredom. While it's easier to process such feedback when you're an experienced speaker, such cues should be a warning sign. You may need to work on eye contact, or vary your volume, pitch, or pace of delivery.

Rule # 247 Project enthusiasm.

It would be great if you were only asked to speak about topics that you love. As a student, that just isn't going to happen every time. And speaking as an audience member, there is nothing more boring than listening to a talk where even the speaker isn't interested. It is imperative, therefore, that you learn to project enthusiasm about your subject material.

Tip # 83

As one attending physician once remarked to me, "There are no dull subjects, only dull presentations." If you don't have natural enthusiasm for a topic, find a way. Fake it if you must.

Did you know...

In a study of emergency medicine residents at the University of Toronto, faculty and peers completed feedback forms following resident presentations. In an analysis of these forms, researchers found that "being engaging and enthusiastic" was one of five top faculty themes.¹²

Rule # 248 Visual aids enhance presentations.

Studies on learning styles have clearly identified distinct preferences. Some individuals are visual learners, while others describe themselves as aural learners. Some learn better by seeing, others by hearing, but a talk that meets the needs of both learning styles will have the most impact. Whenever possible, then, you should incorporate visual aids.

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Obviously, there are situations where this won't be possible. If the attending has asked you to give a quick 2-minute "blurb" on a topic while standing in the hallway between patient rooms, the short duration and location of the talk clearly preclude the use of visual aids. For longer talks that take place in an environment more conducive to the use of visual aids, there are compelling reasons to do so. Visual aids, if done well, can enhance your talk, making your presentation more interesting and enjoyable. Effective use of audiovisual aids can:

- reinforce your statements
- help you direct the audience's attention
- help your audience comprehend your ideas and points
- make you appear more credible and professional
- lead you to deliver a more memorable talk

Although a variety of visual aids are available, students most often use slides, PowerPoint projection, or overhead transparencies. All are useful presentation tools, but only when utilized well. While good visual aids can certainly complement your talk, bad ones can damage your talk. Below are some tips for PowerPoint presentations.

PowerPoint Do's and Don'ts

- Don't read the text.
- Use a font color that contrasts with the background color.
- Use the same background color throughout the presentation (medium blue is popular).
- Maintain consistency by using the same symbols and typefaces.
- Don't use full sentences. A good rule is to keep each line no more than 67 words.
- Don't place too many points on each slide (less is more).
- Use at least 18 font size (be sure that people in the back row can read the information).
- Avoid fancy fonts. Instead, choose a standard font like Arial or Times New Roman.
- Don't capitalize entire words unless necessary.
- Proofread your text for spelling, repeated words, and grammatical errors.
- Avoid overly complex tables, charts, graphs, or diagrams.

Should you provide your audience with a handout? In most cases, yes. Handouts can help the audience follow your train of thought. Most listeners appreciate written material that they can refer to later. The fact that you produced a handout will also give your audience some idea of the effort you put into the talk.

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As you prepare the handout, pay careful attention to its presentation. Its appearance is a reflection of you. If it appears unprofessional, your listeners may form a negative impression of you and what you have to say, even before you open your mouth. As always, proofread your work to avoid misspelled words and grammatical errors.

You can either provide the audience with the handout before or after your talk. The disadvantage of handing it out at the start is that your listeners may pay more attention to the handout than to you. With complex subjects, however, you may find it preferable to have the audience follow your thought process.

Did you know ...

Cleveland Clinic researchers sought to determine which features of a lecture were most important to attendees.¹⁴ Features found to be important included:

- Clarity and readability of slides
- Relevance of lecture material to the participants
- Presenter's ability to identify key issues
- Presenter's ability to engage the participants
- Ability to present material clearly and with animation

Rule # 249 Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."

At the conclusion of your talk, you should invite questions from your listeners. While few students end their talk with such a statement, it is important to do so. Many students would rather avoid questions, because they fear they won't know the answer. This is natural, and is a concern for experienced speakers as well. However, experienced speakers will prepare for the question and answer period by anticipating questions. They then proceed to develop responses to these questions, providing for more polished replies. You can do the same.

You can begin the question and answer period of your talk by simply asking the audience, "Do you have any questions?" When asked a question in front of a large group, you should rephrase the question before answering it. "Can you clarify the research methods used in the study on statins and inflammation?" "Certainly. The question refers to the research methods used in the study on statins and inflammation. In this particular study..." This technique ensures that everyone has heard the question and also provides additional time to formulate an answer.

While you are expected to be well read about the subject of your talk, you are not expected to have all the answers. In the event that you are asked a question for which you don't have an answer, you can opt to say "I don't know, but I will find out." Another option is to defer the question to your attending. "Dr. Chen, in your experience with pulmonary embolism, how would you handle this situation?" Avoid at all costs an attempt to bluff or to provide inaccurate information.

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Tips for answering questions at the end of a talk

- Let your listeners know early in the talk when you will answer questions.
- Encourage questions by asking "Do you have any questions?"
- Listen carefully to the question to make sure you understand it.
- Make eye contact with the questioner while the question is being asked.
- Repeat the question, especially in a large group, to make sure it has been heard.
- Make eye contact with the audience as you answer the question.
- If you don't know the answer, don't bluff or lie. You also need not apologize.
- Consider deferring the question to an expert, if one is in the room.

Rule # 250 Feedback, feedback, feedback.

Hopefully, team members will offer you specific feedback after your talk. However, most feedback tends to be vague and short on the specifics that you need to improve your performance during future talks. To make the most of this experience, you must solicit specific feedback. Examples of questions you might ask:

- Was the introduction interesting?
- Was the topic and purpose of my talk clear?
- Did you feel that I made eye contact throughout the talk?
- Did I appropriately gesture? Did my gesturing enhance or detract from my talk's message?
- Was I able to maintain your interest?
- Did I come across as enthusiastic?
- Was the talk well-organized?
- Do you have any other suggestions for improvement?

Take team members' suggestions seriously. Determine how you will use this information to improve future talks. What specific steps will you take to improve in these areas? You'll have the chance to listen and appreciate some great speakers during your career. However, nobody starts out at that level. Speaking well is a learned skill.

Tip # 74

You can also solicit feedback during your practice sessions. Have a trusted colleague or friend listen to your talk. The constructive criticism you receive may be invaluable. If you've been given information as to how your talk will be evaluated, solicit feedback on these particular areas.

