

The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences

Guidelines on Free Communication Presentations

There are two types of free communication presentations:

1. Free communication presentation - a 10-minute presentation of your work followed by four minutes of questions, in a chaired session with other presenters.

2. 5 slides in 5 minutes free communication presentation - this presentation format entails a five-minute presentation of empirical results followed by two minutes of questions in a chaired session of short communications. Preference will be given to presentations of a short study that demonstrates an important finding, a replication, or a validation of a method.

I know of few - if any - who are not nervous and experience feelings of trepidation in relation to free communication presentations. I also know some who are particularly able and part of this ability - apart from natural talent - is attributable to three factors: preparation, practise, and experience. Say what you are going to say, say it and then say what you have said.

Guide the audience gently and take them through the background to your work, state the purpose, your methods, your findings and finally the implications. Above all, keep your slides simple and don't cram them full of information. Use fonts large enough for people to read from the back of the room and make sure the typeface is dyslexia friendly. A good illustration or picture can explain an idea more quickly than spoken or written words. Use illustrations to show for example, apparatus and rigs. Digital cameras make such pictures ever so easy to generate.

Give your audience time to take in your points and make use of a laser pointer or simply the mouse cursor to emphasise key features. Attempts at jokes and witticisms can backfire. That's not to say they don't have a place - just think carefully before trying.

Try to look at the audience most of the time - not at the screen. Don't read from a script; if necessary, use prompt cards but better still, use your slides as prompts and memorise their content. If you are worried that you will forget what you will say with each slide, write notes on the paper that goes with the slide.

Rehearse in front of colleagues to polish your delivery and have back-up plans to deal with failures of equipment or incompatibility in software. Also, if you don't already, consider listening to Radio 4's Just a Minute and see if you can develop an ability to speak on a topic for 1 minute without hesitation, repetition or deviation. Allow one to two minutes per slide (so about six to ten slides for a 10-minute presentation and five slides for the 5 slides in 5 minutes free communication presentation). If you have more, the audience might not have time to read and think about the slides.

Questions are a great opportunity to clarify issues or consider your research from a new light. Questions can also be troublesome, and it is surprising how often a key point is raised that you had not previously considered. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so! Don't waffle. You could strengthen your response by recourse to conflicting views to show that your "don't know" is from a position of strength, not weakness. The chair should manage questions and ensure they are not aggressive or malevolent, but such questioning can occur so try to be prepared.

Above all, take satisfaction from a well-presented outcome to a useful investigation and then enjoy the acclaim and post-presentation discussions with others who share your interest.

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