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Mary Garofalo

Kean University, mgarofal@kean.edu

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How to Present Your Research Professionally and with Confidence
Mary A. Garofalo, Ph.D. - Research Lead, NTLC
Kean University

Where to begin?

Now that your research has been accepted and you have prepared your presentation, it's time to start practicing. Public speaking is often a very daunting task. Even seasoned professionals have anxiety around speaking to a room full of people. This fear can be compounded by first-time jitters, imposter syndrome, or other invasive thoughts. Breathe. Everyone has been in your shoes. In the meantime, here are some strategies to cut down your anxiety, boost your confidence, and help you communicate your brilliant research in the most clear and articulate manner.

Practice, practice, practice

Of course you are familiar with your research, methods, and findings. However, you should get used to the order and rhythm of your presentation. That means practice presenting your presentation from beginning to end. Usually in the first minute or two of the presentation, you will give a brief introduction about yourself (and if you have a co-presenter, they will do the same). This typically includes your name, degree, program, institution, and impetus for the research you are doing. Additionally, feel free to add any other fun or relevant facts to your introduction to bring some color to who you are as a researcher and a person. Some presenters might take this opportunity to segue into discussion of lens, or the acknowledgement of bias regarding their research (Rowley, 2012; Davidson, n.a.).

“Hi, My name is James Davis. I am a sociological researcher at Kean University, where I am working on my Ph.D. My research is anchored in systems dynamics within society. A little bit about how I came to the field: I was a market researcher and really fell in love with the stories from the data. So, here I am before you, a research nerd and a die-hard Yankee fan!”

As you practice your introduction, presentation, and conclusion, time yourself. It would be important to know if you tend to talk fast or too slowly when you are nervous. An appropriate pace would be 1-2 minutes/slide. You want to be sure that you are staying in the bounds of time allotted for the presentation. Plan to have a few minutes built into the presentation to answer any questions the audience might have. There is usually a Q & A at the end of the presentation, but if not, you should establish when you want audience members to ask questions (Gorodnichenko et al., 2021; Rowley, 2012; Davidson, n.a.).

A few questions to ask yourself as you are practicing:

1. Who is my audience and how will I reach them? (Are they mostly Techies? Teachers? Medical Professionals?)
2. What is my key message I want the audience to take away from this presentation?

The more you practice your presentation, the smoother it will go. You are familiar with each slide, so you will not have to READ the slides to the audience (BIG NO!). You can tell your audience the story of your research with confidence. Rehearse in front of a friend, colleague, or loved one, who could give you some feedback on your presentation. If not, rehearse in front of a mirror to give yourself the best shot at fixing your delivery.

Preparation for the day of

Be sure you have discovered what technology will be available to you at the conference in terms of inputs, projectors, and adaptors. Contact the conference tech team to ask what is available, what you might need to bring, and prepare for any and all technological difficulties. Some conferences are still virtual, however in some ways that makes the tech end of things a bit more precarious.

Some tips (Gorodnichenko et al., 2021; Rowley, 2012; Davidson, n.a.):

1. Bring an adapter you know will work with most projectors (this is a great tip for anyone who might be using their computer to present anywhere).
2. Bring the presentation on a zip drive, just in case there are issues with your computer.
3. If you intend to have visual aids or handouts, be sure to have them copied ahead of time and bring them to the presentation.
4. If you can, examine the space you will be presenting in ahead of time. You will be able to visualize you presenting there, and troubleshoot any technological issues and or seating arrangements that might be more accessible for your presentation.
5. Pick out an outfit that is professional and that you feel good in. Comfortability and style are always a good pairing. Wear comfortable and professional shoes.
6. Prepare for things to go wrong and think ahead.
7. Charge your device and bring the power cord.
8. Bring water to the presentation.

The big presentation

The day of the presentation, you should be sure you get to the site early, or if you are presenting virtually, you have an opportunity to visit other presentations and to log in to the conference through the directions provided. If you know you have access to the space you will be presenting in, try to get there and set up early so you can troubleshoot. This is sometimes

impossible because of space and scheduling, however, you can scope it out to plan your set up. Depending on the kind of presentation you are giving, take direction from the room moderator who will give you all the directions and be your contact to the tech team if need be (Gorodnichenko et al., 2021; Rowley, 2012; Davidson, n.a.).

Presenting

It's totally reasonable to be a little nervous but remember, everyone in academia has been where you are. Every person in the audience, each presenter, no matter how seasoned, has a pinch of anxiety as they approach the front of the room. Some tips (Rowley, 2012):

1. Double check your presentation and technology surrounding.
2. Try to build a rapport with the audience early on (i.e., Chatting with the audience members as you are setting up).
3. Make eye-contact with audience members to establish a connection.
4. Talk to your audience; you are all colleagues in the Academy.
5. If you can, walk around a bit; do not be tied to the podium.
6. Speak slowly and clearly- do not rush through your presentation.
7. Be enthusiastic about your presentation!
8. Thank the audience.
9. Share your contact information at the end of the presentation for follow-up questions/ concerns.

References

- Davidson, M. (n.a.) Tips for presenting at an academic conference. Presentation: School of Communications. University of Omaha.
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