



Tips and Best Practices for Professional Presentations

Paper and Panel Presentations

Conference presentations highlight original research or special projects, sometimes on a set theme. Some organizations require a brief written document to accompany the presentation. Paper and panel presentation guidelines vary by conference; be sure to review individual requirements beforehand. These tips can help with paper and panel presentations, regardless of the venue.

Planning

- **Consider the Abstract:** Use your accepted conference abstract as a map for your presentation development. Does your presentation address all the information your abstract promised to deliver? If not, it's important to note why.
- **Know Your Audience:** Are the attendees of your conference primarily academics? Are they members of the public, or a variety of information professionals from different backgrounds and levels of expertise? All of these are important to consider before developing your presentation.
- **Collaborate Wisely:** If you are speaking on a panel, make sure you and your fellow presenters are in sync with timing, content division, and slide design.

Development

- **Use Images:** Use meaningful images, charts, and graphics to clearly demonstrate your message. Be prepared to describe their content and purpose for your audience.
- **Design with Care:** Use sans-serif fonts with text sized 36 or larger. Ask yourself: could an audience member in the back row of a large room read your slides? Check for strong color contrast and avoid placing text over busy backgrounds. Limit use of animations and transitions. Any video content you include should be closed-captioned.
- **Plan for Time Limits:** The time allotted for your presentation will vary by conference. Be sure to coordinate timing with conference instructions, your session moderator, and any co-presenters. Leave more time than you think you'll need for questions or discussion.
- **Ask Yourself:** If someone misses the presentation but is reading your slides, would they understand your topic?

Delivery

- **Check Your Tech:** How will your presentation be delivered to conference organizers? Will you need to upload your slides to a central site, or bring them on a flash drive? Will you need sound or additional equipment for your presentation? Be sure to have a plan in



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place before your session and request advance assistance from Conference Services if necessary.

- **Stay Aware of the Space:** Speak clearly into microphones provided, as your session may be recorded and some audience members may be relying on live captioning or sign language interpretation. If you are moving around a space, please ensure you remain audible. Encourage quiet or limited applause to make the event more sensory-friendly.
- **Have a Conversation:** Slides are a roadmap, but they should not become a script. While you should avoid reading your slide text aloud verbatim, do remember to describe data and image content shown on screen for attendees who may be unable to view it—use specific phrases like “this photo of weeded books from our collection project” or “the bar graph shows that 60% voted ‘yes’” rather than vaguer language such as “here,” “this result,” or “in the picture.”
- **Repeat Questions:** When an audience member asks a question, please repeat it into your microphone prior to answering for clarity.
- **Check with Your Moderator:** The moderator for your session will hold up cards with your time guidelines, including warnings when you are running out of time. Make sure to make occasional eye contact with your moderator to manage your time effectively.
- **Share Your Work:** If you are creating a handout to accompany your presentation, please see the “Presentation Handouts” best practices tip sheet. If uploading handouts or slides to the conference website, post in more than one digital format (e.g. Word and PDF).

Resources for Further Exploration

American Library Association. (2016). [Best practices for presenters](#).

Anderson, C. (2013). [How to give a killer presentation](#). *Harvard Business Review*, 91(6), 121-125.

Penn State University. (2017). [Microsoft Office accessibility: Word, PowerPoint, Excel](#).

Washington State Public Health Association. (n.d.) [Conference presentation best practices](#).

Web Accessibility in Mind (2017). [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#).