

Academic Presentation Skills

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Being a good presenter

- What makes a good presenter?
- What doesn't?



Arthur Lavine, *Boy with Speech Therapist*, Greenfield, New Hampshire, October 1955: image from the Amica Collection, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

What makes a good presenter?

1. Being engaging (getting and holding on to the audience's attention)
2. Appearing confident
3. Being prepared and in control

Being engaging: getting and keeping the audience's attention

“Do not WRITE the conference paper - talk from prompts and visuals on PP slides instead. Easier to keep eye contact with the audience and keep them engaged.”

“Do not literally "read" your paper, because if you do you will put people to sleep.”

- Being audible
- Eye contact
- Varying delivery (tone and pace)
- Conveying enthusiasm

Being audible

“Speak loudly and clearly. Do not bury your head in your script. Make sure people in the back can hear you. This does not apply only to women!”

- It is important that everyone in the room can hear you.
- If available, use a microphone (for those using hearing loops).
- It's OK to check if people can hear you.
- Try to minimise external noise (building work, adjacent rooms or corridors) by closing doors, windows. Conference organisers should be on top of this.

Eye contact

- “Make eye contact: interacting with your audience is important, it's fine to read a paper but don't forget to make eye contact with the audience (it can help keeping them interested!).”
- “Look up as much as possible and try to address people all around the room (i.e. don't just keep looking in the same direction).”

Varying delivery

- Change your tone, volume and pitch.

“Don’t read monotonously, nor too fast – read it as if you are thinking it. Make use of emphasis, if necessary marking up your paper like a play script. Rehearse it and leave time for questions at the end.”

“Slow down and pause a lot: it might feel awkward, but actually it makes you sound more natural and it gives your listeners a chance to catch up with you. Listening requires concentration and that requires effort. If you give them some little breaks, and they’ll take in more of what you are saying.”

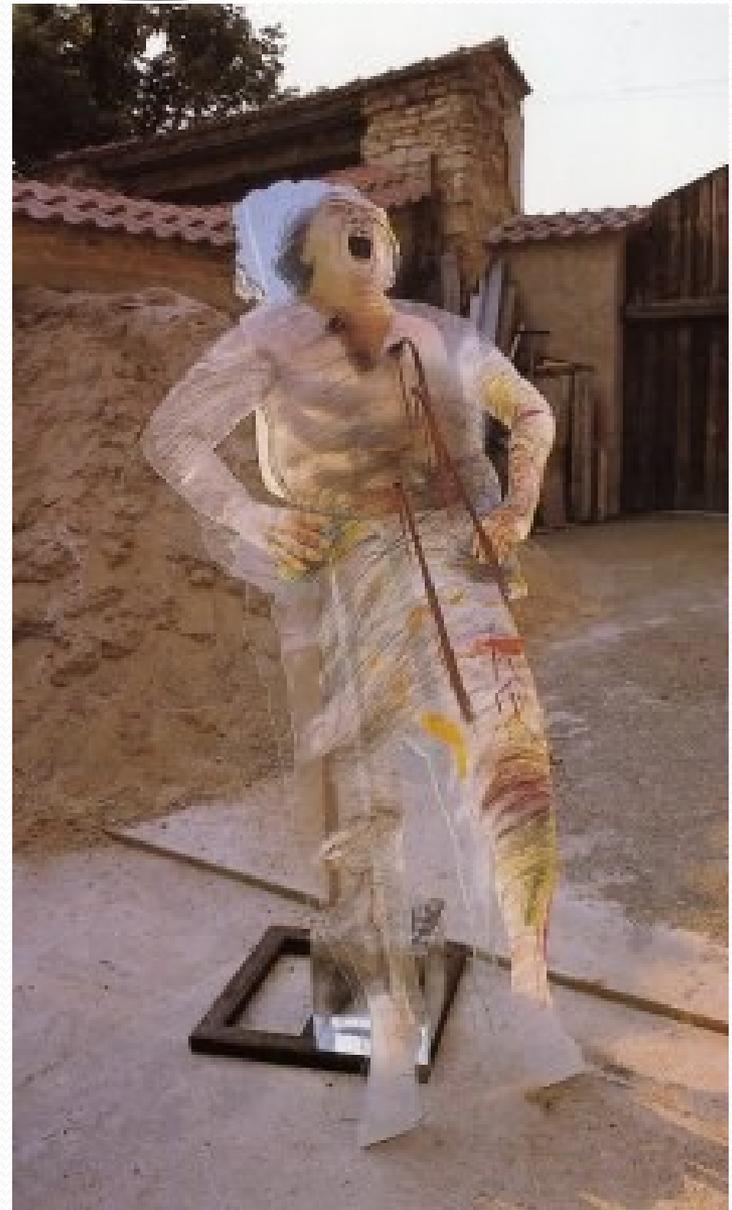
“Speak at a normal pace. If your material is complicated, speak slowly. Whatever you do, do not rush as people will be unable to follow you.”

Conveying enthusiasm

- A speaker who is passionate about their subject will be more engaging.
- Think about what excites you about your research?
- What are you passionate about?
- Enthusiasm can also be expressed in your delivery (tone, pitch) and body language.

Engaging your Audience

Zamecnikova, Dana, "Shout", 1990. Image from ECA
Library Image Collection.



Presenting with Enthusiasm

Guy Pène du Bois “Mother and Daughter”,
1928: Whitney Museum of American Art.



Appearing Confident

- What does a confident speaker look like?
- How can you ‘fake it’ to look like that?

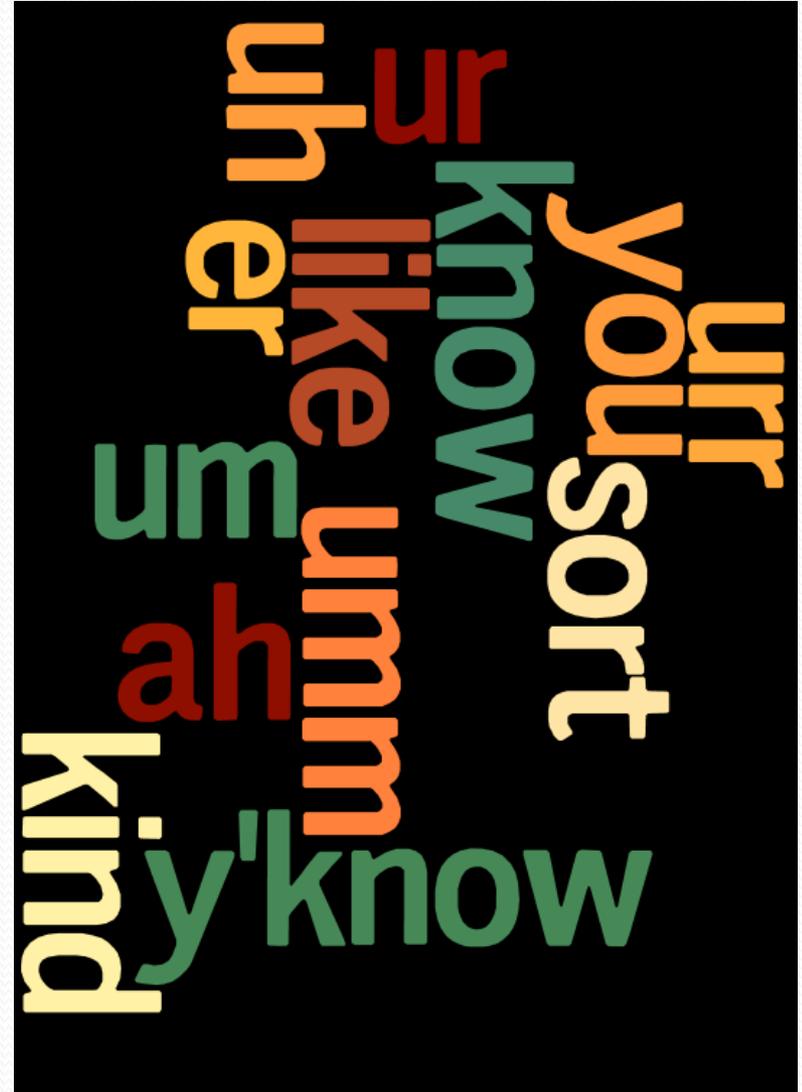
W. A. Rogers, “We are against his politics but we like his grit”, 1912: image from The AMICA Library, courtesy the Library of Congress.



Dealing with Nerves

- What exactly are you nervous about?
- What happens when you think about presenting?
- How does your nervousness manifest itself?
- In which situations are you less nervous about speaking in public? Why?
- How can you transfer the way you feel about these situations to presentations?

Presenting with Confidence



Being Prepared and in Control

- “Make sure your technology works before you begin. Wasting 5 minutes of a 20-minute slot fussing with your PP or your audio will only annoy your listeners and get you off to a terrible start.”
- “Know the practicalities (where it is, how the IT works, who is chairing...) Have a back up IT plan (e.g. dropbox and a memory stick).”
- “Always have a pdf version of any presentation file (PowerPoint, etc.) that you are using.”

What if it all goes wrong?

Poor, poor Michael Bay.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=R4rMy1iA268

Turning the negative...

- What would be the destructive thoughts that could go through Michael Bay's mind at this point after having gone through this experience?
- What would the effect be if Michael Bay continues to hold onto these thoughts for the rest of his career?

... into the positive.

- What could Michael Bay learn from this experience? Can you replace these negative thoughts with *constructive thoughts*?
- Have you had a similar experience? Did you experience destructive thoughts? How could you turn these into constructive thoughts?

Dealing with the Unexpected

- What if:
 - The computer provided for slides does not work?
 - Someone interrupts me in the middle of the presentation and starts asking questions?
 - I get a dry throat and start to cough?
 - The audience stops paying attention?

A final tip for great presenting

- Film yourself. This is probably the best way to see yourself presenting as others do.

“Try recording your presentation ahead of time, so that you can judge its length and catch onto any annoying speech-mannerisms. This is guaranteed to be excruciating to listen to, but may be very helpful in the long run.”