Transcript

Preparing for Presentations

So, some dissertation courses will have a presentation as part of the assessment, so we thought we’d give you some practical advice that should help you prepare. Now, for many people, the thought of formally speaking in front of others is quite intimidating, but with a little bit of preparation, it might not be quite as scary as it sounds.

In terms of content, there are five key elements of a research presentation:

* Context - why is this an interesting thing to do, what have other people said about it, and what were your aims and objectives?
* Method - how did you address those aims and objectives? And that is, simply, what did you *do*?
* Findings - what did you find in relation to your aims and objectives, and the weight of the content is usually on this component
* And then conclusions - in terms of a summary of the findings, and why they are important
* And some presentations will also have a questions slide literally stating ‘Any Questions?’

And if you are to transpose this into ‘slides’ for a presentation, it might look something like this

* A title slide, including your details
* 1 slide that covers the context, and perhaps another that clearly sets out the aims and objectives
* 1 slide about methods, describing your methods. Here include: research strategy, research design, sample and data collection methods, and techniques of analysis
* Then 3 or 4 slides on your findings, and try to make them reflect your aims and objectives
* Then another slide that concludes the talk, including key points and a summary of why the research is important
* And then, as I say, 1 slide thanking the audience and asking for ‘any further questions’

Now there might be a requirement to include a slide of references that you’ve used in the talk, and you may have an overview of the talk after the title slide. However, you can verbally introduce what you are going to do over the title slide, so it’s not always necessary.

Now, in terms of presentation itself, slides should be used to express key points to the audience - that you can talk to and around during your presentation. Remember that you will be looking at your audience, not at the slide and this means that they are not really there to prompt you, but instead they anchor key issues in the mind of the audience. Be clear and concise when presenting material, less is usually better than more, and try not to think of your slides as an expression of your personality. Don’t use wacky fonts or strange colours. Visual images are fine as they draw people into your talk, but don’t over-do it. The same goes for animations.

In terms of what to say, we tend to advise students to ‘know what you are going to say, not necessarily how you are going to say it’. If you read something from a script, it becomes formulaic, but if you try to speak ‘off the top of your head’, it is very easy to ramble.

However, a really quick tip to help you develop a script so you can familiarise yourself with what you are going to say and how it might sound is to use the voice typing function in Google Docs. So when practising your presentation, get a microphone (most android and apple phones will have an in-built one), and use the voice typing tool as you are talking. Google will automatically transcribe your talk. Now, of course, we don’t speak like we write, so you’ll have to do some editing, but doing this will help reveal where the ‘weak spots’ are in your talk might be and gives you an opportunity to fill them in before you present your work for real. And the purpose here isn’t to read out the transcript verbatim in your final presentation, but it gives you something concrete to work with in terms of the content of your talk.­