Presentations: Considering your purpose and audience

In this post we will explore how to plan your presentation to ensure it’s appropriate for your purpose and audience. To see all out posts and resources which support presentations please visit [Library support for presentations](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/packages/presentations/).

# Presentation purpose

Understanding the purpose of your presentation allows you to tailor your content to ensure it meets your goals. Specific circumstances will vary and no two presentations are the same, but as a general indication, common purposes for presentations are to: inspire, inform or persuade.

* **Presentations to inspire might include things like:**TED talks and conference keynotes.
* **Presentations to inform might include things like:** Academic assignments and conference presentations.
* **Presentations to persuade might include things like:** Job interviews or a sales pitch.

Often presentations fit into more than one of these categories and being aware of the purpose of your presentation as you’re writing it will help you to tailor the content and style of your presentation to support your goals.

# **Knowing your audience**

You probably wouldn’t speak to your lecturer the same way you speak to your friends. Delivering a presentation is the same; you need to tailor the tone, style and content of your presentation to make it appropriate for your audience.

To do this, you need to establish who your audience is, which you can do by trying to answer the questions below. You won’t be able to answer for every audience member, but you should be able to get a general impression of who you’ll be presenting to so you can write your presentation according to their needs and expectations.

## What is their cultural background?

This may affect your use of slang, idioms or cultural references. Remember that what you consider to be common knowledge may not be so common to all audiences.

## **How much do they know about your topic?**

This will affect how much background information you need to include, how much you need to explain key concepts and whether or not you can use subject-specific jargon and acronyms.

## **Why are they there?**

Are they there to learn from you, or to challenge your ideas? Do they already have strong ideas about your topic that you will be challenging? This is an important factor that is often overlooked. If your audience is there under duress, you may need to do some extra work in winning them over.

## **How will they be feeling?**

Consider things like the timing of your presentation and how that may affect your audience’s mood. If yours is the last one following a whole day of presentations your audience is likely to be tired, so you might want to consider things you can do to re-energise them, such as increasing the level of activity or participation.

# Presentation Scenarios

Consider these three presentation scenarios; how might the style and content of your presentation vary for each one?

## **1. Presentation to an interview panel about your suitability for a job role**

Here your purpose is to persuade and inform. Your audience is likely to be working within the industry you’re applying for, so you can assume that they’ll be familiar with industry-specific terminology. Depending on the company, it’s likely to be quite a formal setting so you’ll want to dress smartly and avoid using slang.

## **2.**Presentation on university life to a group of 16-year-olds in a low-income area

The purpose of this presentation is to inspire and persuade these young people to consider applying for university, so you might use techniques such as emotive language, stories and a call to action. Humour, activities and audience participation may be appropriate to engage your audience but jargon will not be helpful as you won’t be aware of their current level of knowledge on your topic.

## **3. Presentation on the research done within your school/discipline, to a group of visiting academics**

This is an informative presentation to a group of experts, so you can assume that they’ll be familiar with key terminology within your subject. Well-presented data can enhance an informative presentation. The formality may vary, so it would be worth finding out what the expectations will be. Persuasive techniques such as emotive language are unlikely to be appropriate in this situation.

Remember to consider the purpose and audience of your presentation, as this should shape the content you include and they way you present it.