

Follow this step-by-step guide to help you to write, design and deliver presentations.

This is a general guide. The specific requirements for your course may be different. Make sure you read through any assignment requirements carefully and ask your lecturer or tutor if you're unsure how to meet them.

Writing your presentation

Before you begin writing, make sure you understand the purpose of your presentation and have researched your topic. Once you've done this, begin to think about your audience and how you'll structure your presentation.

Audience

To ensure your presentation is engaging, think about who you'll be presenting to. Ask yourself:

- Who is my audience?
- What do they already know?
- Why are they attending my presentation?

Make sure you pitch your presentation at the appropriate level. If your audience knows your topic well, they may get bored if you try to simplify the presentation too much. If your audience has no previous knowledge of your topic, they will find the presentation hard to follow if it's too complex.

Was your audience invited and will they be eager to hear what you are presenting, or is it a compulsory tutorial for them? This will affect the way you approach the presentation – in some cases you will have to work harder to motivate your audience to get involved and convince them to listen to you.

Structuring your presentation

To ensure your audience understands your message, your presentation needs to flow logically. To help you achieve this, your presentation should follow a set structure.

Most presentations use the following structure:

1. Introduction
2. Body
3. Conclusion

Introduction

A good introduction will capture your audience's attention and give your presentation focus.

When writing your introduction, make sure you include:

- a strong statement to capture the audience's attention – this may include a rhetorical question or an interesting statistic
- an outline of your topic, what you'll be covering and the purpose of the presentation.

Body

The body is where you describe and link each of your main points to meet the purpose of your presentation.

When writing the body of your presentation, make sure that your main points are:

- supported by evidence, examples or statistics
- directly related to the purpose of your presentation
- presented in a logical sequence with links between relevant points.

Conclusion

By the time you reach the conclusion, you should have covered all your main points – don't introduce any new information at this stage.

Use your conclusion to:

- reinforce your main points
- link the points back to the purpose of your presentation.
- Once you have finished writing your presentation, remember to read over it and check that information flows logically and is linked effectively.

Presenting research results

If you're presenting research results, your presentation should focus on:

- what you did to reach the results
- what information you discovered
- why the results are important.

Avoid spending too long discussing your research methods – the results and their impact are more important.

When presenting research results, use the following presentation structure as a guide:

- 1.Context and why the research is important
- 2.Objective and methods
- 3.Results
- 4.Discussion

Designing presentation slides

To keep your audience engaged and help them to remember what you have to say, you may want to use visual aids, such as slides.

When designing slides for your presentation, make sure:

- any text is brief, grammatically correct and easy to read
- the colour theme is simple and the background colour provides enough contrast
- images and graphs are used to support your main points.

Images and graphs

Your audience will respond better to slides that deliver information quickly – images and graphs are a good way to do this.

When choosing images, it's important to find images that:

- support your presentation and aren't just decorative
- are high quality
- you have permission to use.

If you use graphs in your presentation, label the data directly instead of using a legend – legends force your audience to look back and forth between two points. If your presentation includes graphs or charts, make sure to explain these to your audience – describe each axis and note any important features.

Avoid using unnecessary visual elements – such as animations or complicated graphs – as they can distract your audience instead of enhancing your presentation.

Once you have finished designing your presentation, give it a trial run. Remember, images and colours can look different on different screens, so try to practice with the equipment you'll be using to present.

Delivering your presentation

Pace and timing

You'll need to practice to get the pace and timing of your presentation right.

Try not to speak too quickly or too slowly – a good speed to aim for is about 100 words per minute. Speak enthusiastically about your topic, and make sure to include brief pauses after important or complicated points. This emphasises your point and gives the audience time to take it in. Pay attention to how professional presenters speak for examples of how to pace yourself and use pauses effectively.

When you are rehearsing your presentation, remember that rehearsing in your mind will be faster, and won't give you a proper indication of how long your presentation really is. Rehearse your presentation out loud to get a proper sense of how long it is.

Engaging with your audience

Remember that when you speak, your voice, tone, gestures and eye contact have a big impact on your audience. To help your audience to engage with your presentation:

- show interest in your topic
- try to look confident and make eye contact
- speak at a good pace, use pauses effectively and make sure your audience can hear you
- ask questions and interact with your audience.

Sometimes we are unaware of habits, such as repeating words like "um", which can distract audiences. Try to rehearse your presentation in front of a friend – they may be able to pick up on some of these habits for you.

Audience participation

You may be required to lead a tutorial discussion on your topic as part of your presentation. It may help to begin with some questions for your audience to get them thinking about the topic.

Start with closed questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no", and when people start to participate more, move on to open questions (e.g. "Why do you think that?").

Be patient: it can take some time for participants to think of a good answer to challenging questions. If your audience is reluctant to answer, try rewording your question or asking a different one.