

General advice for improving the delivery of presentations as an international student

Plan your talk thoroughly. Start your preparation several days before the talk. It takes along time to prepare a good presentation and it cannot usually be done very well at the last minute.

Use structuring devices to 'signpost' your talk. For example, 'Now I'd like to move on to...', 'Finally, I'd like to mention...'

Speak more slowly than normal. As you will be giving new information, do not underestimate the amount of time that will be needed to understand it.

Practise beforehand to get the right timing. Try giving the whole presentation at home as if you were doing it on the day. Time yourself. If it goes too quickly, try cutting things out or try speaking more concisely.

If reading aloud, make sure it is done with feeling and expression. Reading aloud interferes with pronunciation and makes your paper harder for others to follow. Only read aloud if you are confident doing so, and can read with feeling and expression. When you read quotations, try to speak slowly and deliberately and try to use your voice to sound interested.

Think in advance about possible areas of pronunciation difficulty. Try to know what your own difficulties are. Check word stress in a dictionary before you give the paper.

Be aware of your own body language. Remember how important it is to communicate with the audience, but don't make your gestures too prominent or intrusive. Try to stand in one place when you speak. Be relaxed and speak at a comfortable (not rushed) pace.

Try to look at your audience. You obviously don't want to look fixedly at one or two people, but try to scan the audience and get some eye contact with a few people, if you can. It can help to build up the rapport and sense of communication.

Make regular pauses to enable the audience to absorb what you are saying.

Use PowerPoint with care. In particular, try not to disguise any problems in language with over-flashy PowerPoint slides. And remember that not all university classrooms will have PowerPoint facilities. So be prepared and have a set of back-up OHT sides - this is very important in any case, because the computer may malfunction.

Be restrictive in use of visual materials. Remember that the human brain can only take in a certain amount of information at any given time. Try not to overload the listener by asking them to read, listen and watch at the same time.

Check up long or technical words in a dictionary.

Avoid memorising chunks of your talk.

Know how to say and pronounce the names of countries, nationalities and languages.

Provide a summary of your talk at the end.

Rephrase questions asked in your own words for the benefit of others.

Remember to smile!