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## Delivering a presentation



### Technique sheet

Problem-based learning resources

### Introduction

Not everyone is happy standing up in front of a group of people - but engineers may have to do this as they present their ideas to customers, managers, and even at global conferences. A few simple rules can make this easier. These work for online conferences too!

### Who is the audience and what are they interested in?

Make sure you know who your audience will be and match your presentation to their needs. A group of engineers will expect to see more data and may ask technical questions. A group of accountants might need a less technical presentation and ask more questions about the costs.

- Make sure you prepare for your audience - don't just re-use an old presentation and hope it will work!

### Why are computers and projectors so evil?

I don't know - but they are! Assume that the projector will have a weird connector, the network will be down so that you can't access your online presentation and your laptop battery will be low on power. If possible, arrive before you need to start the presentation and check everything is working - the worst time to find a problem is when you are facing an audience!

- Make sure you check the equipment and facilities and have a copy of your presentation with you (ideally on a USB drive). Don't rely on being able to access it online!

### How do I start a presentation?

It is always a good idea to introduce yourself and explain why you are making this presentation. Include your contact details if appropriate. Sometimes an outline of what you intend to

cover is good but don't waste too much time on this. Sometimes a good joke helps for large conferences – but choose them carefully and don't offend anyone!

- Make sure you introduce yourself and set the audience at ease – but don't take too long before you start on the main part of your presentation.

### Should I use notes or just read out a script?

If you are confident, notes are often better – reading out a preprepared script can look robotic and make it difficult to respond to the mood of the audience. However, a script (for some of the parts at least) can be very supportive. Also, talking from notes means you can ramble and use up too much time. Decide what you are comfortable with. This might depend on the audience and the complexity of the presentation. Some audiences are more intimidating than others!

- Make sure you know what you are going to say and are comfortable with your message. Use notes if you can and a script if that would make you more confident.

### How long is a good presentation?

You will have a time limit – do not go over! Some people will cut you off in mid-presentation and it looks like poor planning. Allow two minutes per slide assuming that each slide is simple with no more than three points. More complex slides or diagrams need more time. Be honest about how

much time your presentation will need and cut slides ruthlessly if needed. If you have 20 slides for a 10 minute presentation you must cut 15 of them!

- Make sure you take the time limit seriously. Plan to complete your presentation comfortably without rushing. Practice, and time it beforehand if you are at all uncertain.

### What and how much can go on each slide?

The more complex and crowded a slide becomes the harder it is to read. Three bullet points is standard – think of the slide as the headings for your talk. Images can help and sometimes a video clip will show what you need. If you use video keep them short (less than 30 seconds) and check that you can access them easily where you are doing the presentation.

Make sure your slides do not become overloaded with detail – it's better to remove detail from the slide to make it clearer. You can always clarify a point if needed by the audience.

### How do I end a presentation?

It is always good to summarise your main points at the end of a presentation. Be careful that you do not just repeat all the slides you have already shown! A single summary of the main points is good – and you can leave it showing when you move on to questions.

- Make sure you include a short summary at the end – give your contact details if appropriate.



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## How do I handle questions?

Most questions are not designed to trip you up or cause trouble. If they are short and cover a small point of information or understanding it is usually best to answer them during the presentation. If they need a longer answer it is usually best to say 'I'll leave that for the end if that's OK?'. Make sure you note down the question and return to it at the end. This is another good reason not to finish late – plan to leave 5 minutes for questions when you design your presentation.

- Make sure you deal with questions respectfully but do it in your own time – don't be bullied into letting questions disrupt your presentation.

## And what about online presentations?

The rules remain the same although make sure you know how to share your screen or what format the presenter wants your files in prior to the meeting. Phrases like 'I'm sorry, I've never used Zoom before' or forgetting to switch on your microphone when you speak do not inspire confidence and can waste your audience's time. As with offline presentations – check your equipment (including software) before the session. What will people see on your computer desktop if you share your screen, are there any sensitive company documents pinned on the notice board behind you? Remember, computer microphones can catch up comments from people who are not seen in the video feed!

- Make sure you check you can use the video conferencing software before the presentation and prepare the place where you will be presenting from to avoid embarrassment.



## Check yourself

**You should be able to answer these questions easily after reading this sheet.**

1. Roughly how much time should you allow for a simple slide in a presentation?
2. List three things to check before doing your presentation in a strange venue.
3. Why is it importance to know what the audience knows and is expecting when you plan your presentation?



## Taking it further

**These activities will deepen your understanding of this topic.**

1. Think of a few presentations you have viewed. Rank them from best to worst. Once you have your list think about why one presentation was better than another: was it shorter or longer? How did the presenter keep the audience's attention? Are there any tips you can pick up to use? Or any warnings of things that did not work?
2. Choose a topic you have already written something about. How would you convert your writing into a presentation that lasted 10 minutes? Plan out the slides (no more than 5). Once you have done it look through them and see if you can simplify or shorten them without removing any important points.