

# Presenting With Confidence

WENDY H. VOGEL, MSN, FNP, AOCNP®, and PAMELA HALLQUIST VIALE, RN, MS, CNS, ANP

From <sup>1</sup>Wellmont Cancer Institute, Kingsport, Tennessee; <sup>2</sup>University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco, California

Authors' disclosures of conflicts of interest are found at the end of this article.

Correspondence to: Wendy H. Vogel, MSN, FNP, AOCNP®, Wellmont Cancer Institute, 4485 West Stone Drive, Suite 200, Kingsport, TN 37660.  
E-mail: wendyvogel55@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.6004/jadpro.2018.9.5.9>

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## Abstract

Often, advanced practitioners must give clinical presentations. Public speaking, which is a major fear for most individuals, is a developed skill. Giving an oral presentation is a good way to demonstrate work, knowledge base, and expertise. Giving an effective presentation can help obtain recognition of skills and proficiency as an advanced practitioner or expert in the field. This paper will highlight skills and techniques that can help to improve presentation style and the ability to connect with an audience.

**A**s an advanced practitioner, it is likely that you will be asked to deliver a lecture at some point in your career. Medical presentations can range from casual in-services to professional lectures given to audiences of thousands. Since public speaking is listed as one of the top fears of individuals living in the United States, it pays to develop skills as a speaker or presenter.

Giving an oral presentation is essential to demonstrating your work, knowledge base, and expertise. Giving an *effective* presentation can help you obtain recognition and acknowledgement of your skills and proficiency as an advanced practitioner or expert in the field. However, many presenters lack the skills to deliver a dynamic and persuasive lecture. Inadequate speaking skills can be detrimental to your ability to deliver an important message, or worse yet, bore your audience. This article will highlight skills and techniques that

can help to improve your presentation style and ability to connect with your audience.

## FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

If you are afraid of public speaking, you are not alone. Marinho, de Medeiros, Gama, and Teixeira (2016) studied college students to determine the prevalence of fear of public speaking. In a group of 1,135 undergraduate students (aged 17–58), over half of those surveyed ( $n = 63.9\%$ ) reported a fear of public speaking. Almost the entire group surveyed (89.3%) wanted classes to improve public speaking. Specific traits associated with a fear of speaking were reported as female gender, infrequent experience, and perception of poor voice quality.

Giving a bad presentation can alienate your audience from your lecture and the message you are trying to deliver. Table 1 lists ways to give a bad presentation. But, let us

**Table 1. Tips for Giving a Bad Presentation**

- Do not prepare at all and just wing it
- Avoid any spontaneity or enthusiasm for your message
- Make your presentation as long as possible
- Ensure your slides have a small font size and are very busy
- Look at your slides while speaking
- Turn your back on the audience while reading every slide aloud
- Talk in a low monotone voice without inflection
- Avoid eye contact

*Note.* Information from Smith (2000).

assume you do not want to give a bad presentation at all. In fact, you have an important message to share with your audience and you have been invited to give an hour-long lecture on the subject. How can you deliver that message in an effective and engaging manner?

## HIGH-LEVEL TIPS

The first tip is to know your subject and know it well. In fact, should your audio-visual equipment malfunction (and if you speak often enough, this is likely to happen), you should have your presentation memorized. However, it is a good idea to make a hard copy of your slides and use them in case of equipment failure. Your audience might not be able to see a graph in detail, but you'll be able to speak to a study and deliver the results without panicking about your lost slide deck or incompatible presentation equipment.

The second tip is to know your audience. If you are speaking to a group of nurses on a unit, your speaking style and delivery message will be more casual than when you speak to a room of 500 people. Nonetheless, you need to know who you are talking to and what they expect from your lecture. Table 2 lists some information you will want to know about your audience. Researching and

**Table 2. What to Know About Your Audience**

- Who is your audience?
- What is their baseline knowledge of your topic?
- What do they want to learn?
- Does your audience have any preexisting bias?
- What motivates your audience?
- Why is your audience attending your talk?
- What message do you want to convey to your audience?
- What will help your audience understand your message?

knowing your audience will make your message more pertinent and personal.

Understanding who your audience is will enable you to engage your audience. Look excited and enthusiastic. If you are motivated about your topic, then they will be too. Show your interest in your subject and your excitement about sharing the data with your audience.

Another tip is to develop your stage presence. Actors rehearse their roles until they can do it in their sleep, creating their best and most polished dramatic performances. You aren't in a Broadway musical, but you need to have a stage presence. Recording your lecture and then examining ways to improve your delivery is a great way to develop your speaking skills. Utilize who you are and capitalize on that. Practice in front of a friend or mentor for feedback on your delivery

Your audience will develop an impression of you within the first 15 seconds. Develop an impactful opening to start off right. Table 3 gives some examples of impactful openings. For example, if you wanted to demonstrate the effect that tanning booths have had on the incidence of melanoma in young women, you could open with a photo of a tanning booth, followed by the daunting statistics in melanoma and an example of a case of melanoma. This slide becomes the "hook" that captures your audience's interest.

When giving a medical presentation, advanced practitioners have a wonderful chance to share a patient story or vignette that will demonstrate the medical problem and its impact on practice (Moffett, Berezowski, Spencer, & Lanning, 2014). You can do this easily by showing a patient radiological study or lab values, or a picture of a particularly challenging side effect. The net result is that your audience will be intrigued and relate to your story, especially if they take care of that patient population. Tell the story of the patient and describe the significance of the side effect or disease state. Clinical presentations

**Table 3. Examples of Impactful Openings**

- Case study: Describe a patient scenario and ask your audience if they have ever seen an example like this
- Picture of a patient complication
- Statistics: Describe a significant increase in cancer numbers, deaths, or risk factors
- Impact: Describe why this matters to your audience

often benefit from case studies that your audience may recognize from their own practices. Some of the most successful presentations use case studies followed by examples of right or wrong approaches to a patient problem, asking the audience to decide best practice and thereby engaging the audience fully. Tell your audience why this topic is important and why they need to know about it (Moffett et al., 2014). Then, share the data supporting the importance of your story and how your audience can use the information to affect or change practice. You want to capture the attention of your audience at the very beginning of your presentation and then hold it. Humor may also be used for openings, but care must be taken with this and should be directed at yourself and not anyone else. Keep the attention of the audience by developing your delivery skills. Lastly, and perhaps the most important advice, is to “practice, practice, practice.”

## DEVELOPING SLIDES

Most medical speakers use PowerPoint to illustrate their talk and data. Using your slides effectively can make an important difference in your presentation and how your audience will respond. Develop your presentation and topic first, then create your slides. The 5/5/5 rule calls for no more than five words per line of text, five lines of text per slide, or five text or data-heavy slides in a row (LearnFree.org, 2017). See Table 4 for tips for using PowerPoint.

Adding images to your slides can create visual interest. Pictures of patients with side effects or

complications can immediately show the audience what you are trying to communicate. As with data slides, appropriate referencing of images must be added to each of your slides. If you are using clip art to add interest or humor to your presentation, be mindful of possible distractions to your main message. Use these kinds of imagery sparingly.

Using slides during your presentation can enhance the message you are giving, but it is vital that you use the slide and not let it use you. Know your slides well enough that you do not have to read them. The title of the slide should give the key message of that slide. You do not have to tell your audience everything on the slide; instead, give them an overview of what they are looking at. Never read a slide to an audience. Do not present to the slide; present to your audience.

## KEEPING THE AUDIENCE'S INTEREST

If your presentation is longer than 20 minutes, you may have a “mid-talk slump.” This is a great time to check in with your audience: Do they understand your message thus far? Pause for a moment and engage your audience with a question or anecdote, or perhaps a patient story. Ask your audience if they have something to share regarding the topic. Change the pace and change the inflection of your voice.

Taking questions from your audience can be daunting. Table 5 gives some tips on how to answer questions. Determining when to take questions will depend upon your audience size and makeup, and the setting of your presentation. The most important tip is to listen carefully to the question and be honest if you do not know the answer.

Your delivery skills can determine how the audience perceives you and your message. Eye con-

**Table 4. PowerPoint Tips**

- 5/5/5 rule: no more than 5 words per line of text, 5 lines of text per slide, or 5 text-heavy slides in a row; busy slides are confusing to the audience
- Animation of text or slide can enhance a slide if used sparingly
- Data and image slides must be referenced appropriately
- Sans serif or simple font is easier to read
- Do not center your text; align text either left or right
- A dark text on light background is easier to read
- Remember to hit “B” (or period) to display a blank black slide, or “W” (or comma) to display a blank white slide
- Hit any key to return to your slides after a blank black or white slide

Note. Information from Butterfield (2015); LearnFree.org (2017); Wax (2017).

**Table 5. Handling Questions From Your Audience**

- Decide up front if you will take questions during or after your presentation, and let your audience know
- Listen carefully
- Repeat or rephrase the question to ensure that you understand the question
- Make eye contact with the questioner, but break visually from the questioner when answering the question so that you don't lose the rest of the audience
- Be honest if you do not know the answer
- Keep track of the time; move on when the allotted time for questions is up

tact, voice, pace, inflection, gestures, and posture are all important aspects of your delivery. Eye contact establishes rapport and a feeling of being genuine. Although you shouldn't stare someone down, making eye contact while making a statement, then moving to your next audience member and giving another statement fosters engagement. Scanning, which is running your eyes over the audience and not focusing on any one person, should be avoided.

Your voice should be loud and animated. Generally, however loud you think you should be, be louder. Convey your enthusiasm, and vary your pace and inflection.

Gestures can enhance or take away from your talk. Be natural with an open-body approach. Keep your hands at your sides if you're not using them. Avoid pointing; instead, use open-handed gestures. Your posture should be good, with your shoulders back and weight equally balanced on both feet. When you move, move with purpose; do not sway, rock, or pace (Butterfield, 2015).

It is very normal to feel anxious or nervous. But let that feeling work for you, not against you. When you are faced with a challenging situation, cortisol and adrenaline are released, causing dry mouth, difficulty getting words out, shallow breaths, tremors, sweating, and nervous behaviors like laughter or fidgeting. To combat this, take some deep breaths, which reduces adrenaline output. Slow down and look around. Take a moment, take a sip of water, and smile. Look confident even if you do not feel it. Utilize every resource you can find to further your skills (see Table 6 for further reading).

## CONCLUSION

Advanced practitioners have many opportunities to give medical presentations, both as part of their job and as a way to advance in their professional practice. The tools provided in this article can help you develop a presentation that will be meaningful and impactful to your audience. It is a great feeling when audience members come to you after your presentation to share with you how much they enjoyed and learned from your talk. With practice, your presentations can make a difference. And remember—your audience wants you to succeed. ●

## Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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**Table 6. Resources for Presenters**

Resource	Link
PowerPoint shortcuts	<a href="https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Use-keyboard-shortcuts-to-create-your-presentation-EBB3D20E-DCD4-444F-A38E-BB5C5ED180F4">support.office.com/en-us/article/Use-keyboard-shortcuts-to-create-your-presentation-EBB3D20E-DCD4-444F-A38E-BB5C5ED180F4</a>
PowerPoint basics	<a href="https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Create-a-basic-presentation-in-PowerPoint-c364a6e4-1e26-4d52-8013-b8d3c2024cce">support.office.com/en-us/article/Create-a-basic-presentation-in-PowerPoint-c364a6e4-1e26-4d52-8013-b8d3c2024cce</a>
Toastmasters public speaking tips	<a href="https://toastmasters.org/Resources/Public-Speaking-Tips">toastmasters.org/Resources/Public-Speaking-Tips</a>
Toastmasters podcast	<a href="https://dowellwebtools.com/tools/bg/Bo/tmpodcast">dowellwebtools.com/tools/bg/Bo/tmpodcast</a>
How to give a great medical presentation	<a href="https://pallimed.org/2010/02/how-to-give-great-medical-presentation.html">pallimed.org/2010/02/how-to-give-great-medical-presentation.html</a>
Death by PowerPoint (and how to fight it)	<a href="https://slideshare.net/thecroaker/death-by-powerpoint">slideshare.net/thecroaker/death-by-powerpoint</a>