

Presentation Skills & Review Process

isiCNI 2020, Muizenberg, South Africa

Alyssa Picchini Schaffer

24 Jan 2020

apschaffer@simonsfoundation.org

Why do we give presentations?

- To communicate information so that the audience absorbs and understands it

Constructing your presentation

- Step 1 – Define the central message
 - What should the audience leave with after hearing you speak that they did not know before?
- Step 2 – Story arc
 - Map out the trajectory of your talk BEFORE you start making the slides.
 - A common way to construct the arc of your talk:
 - Context - Why should your audience care? What fundamentally do you want to understand about the brain (which is why you built the model)?
 - Background - what do they need to know to understand what you will tell them?
 - Background info should be adjusted for each audience
 - Always better to give more background rather than less
 - Motivation & Data – focus on the questions and the most interesting order of those
 - Here's the big question I'm going to answer → which leads to this first experiment → which leads you to want to know this thing next → which is why this next experiment was done → which leads to us needed to understand this other thing → which is why we did this analysis → which gave us this information that we incorporated into this model ...
 - Conclusions - ...which explains the answer to the big question I posed at the beginning.
- Step 3 – Making your slides
 - People are there to hear you TALK. Explain the richness and nuance in your work verbally. Your words should be the main event, not your slides. Your slides should play a supporting role.
 - Directing attention - Using slides well is about directing attention. You want people to be looking at the thing you want them to be looking at when you want them to look at it.

- General Rule: 1 slide = 1 point
 - There is a **limit** to how many pieces of information people can hold in mind at the same time. Don't package too many ideas together.
- Simplicity - use as few words on a slide as possible – punch lines
 - If people are reading the words on your slides, they aren't listening to what you are saying, or vice versa.
 - Don't write in words what can be better illustrated by a picture or graph
- Speak to everything on a slide
 - You should talk about everything you have on a slide. Said another way: You should not have anything on a slide that you don't talk about directly.
 - Graphs/figures -- one on a slide at a time. Explain all axes, walk the audience through the figure step by step. If multi-panel figures are necessary to show side by side, have each panel appear as you walk through it.
- Visual appeal - make the information on the slides as easy to understand and digest as possible.
 - Readability of text (size and color) – in figures too
 - Can use visual cues (colors, icons) to remind the audience of things you want them to remember.

Giving the presentation

- Language - Use the simplest possible language to explain what you mean.
- Pace – pay attention to the speed you are speaking
 - Too fast – people won't stay with you
- Nonverbal communication - All of the cues you send to the people in the room matter
 - Body language
 - Facial expressions
- PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE before you give the presentation

Review Process

- What happens after you submit a grant or fellowship?
 - Triage - done by program officer, makes sure applications meet requirements and are in scope of the request for applications
 - Reviewers - then sent to 3-5 people for review
 - Review Meeting - reviewers come together and discuss applications and rank them in order
 - Funding line - list goes back to program officer to determine how far down the list can be funded

- Priorities - funding agencies focus on what they want to fund - know their priorities before you apply.
 - Read the request for applications in detail.
 - In the application, present your work in terms that are in line with the funding agencies priorities.
 - Only apply if your work fits the priorities
- Program Officer - *always* contact the program officer before you apply for a grant or an award
 - Can provide information and context not in the request for applications.
- Tailor each CV and application
 - CVs and research statements should be edited and adjusted for each application
 - Make sure the information that is specified in the request for application is easily found