

# Chapter 1

## Ten Stages in Preparing Your Slides

You will learn how to

- plan your preparation
- begin your preparation by focusing on what you want to say rather than immediately creating the slides

Why is this important?

If you don't rehearse (i.e., practice) it is very unlikely that you will give a good presentation and you will thus waste a perfect opportunity for promoting your research and for setting up collaborations.

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Below are 10 stages in preparing a presentation that you can follow.

Note that there are seven stages before you create your slides. It is generally best to first decide what to say, and then use that as a basis for creating your slides. Often, people who begin by preparing the slides

- find that they spend so much time on the slides that they don't have time to practice. But the success of your presentation very much depends on how much you prepare and practice
- don't think about what it is that they really want to say, so their slides then dictate what they will tell the audience. It is a much better strategy if your slides reflect and support what you want to say
- create some slides that they subsequently find are not needed, and thus waste valuable preparation time

Realistically, you may not have time to do all the stages suggested below, but try to

- focus on only transmitting three key points (see [Section 1.2](#))
- think about your structure by answering the questions in [Section 1.5](#)
- minimize the number of slides and the amount of text on those slides
- write down your beginning and ending. Practice them as much as you can (on the plane, in the bath, wherever)
- learn the correct pronunciation of key words

## 1.1 Find out about the potential audience

It is very useful to find out how much the audience already know about your topic. If you are too technical you may alienate those who are potentially interested in the topic but are not experts. However, if you are too general you will bore the experts.

Here are some ways to find out about the audience:

1. If the conference is organized so that attendees sign up in advance for the talks they are going to attend, then you should be able to ask the organizers to give you a list of probable attendees at your talk. Go through this list carefully. You can Google them and also see if there are any names of people who have appeared in any bibliographies of your own or similar papers—this will help you to see how many experts there are.
2. The list of attendees to your talk may also help you to understand what nationality they are. If there are a lot of native English speakers, then at the question and answer session you might need to explain that you are not a native speaker yourself and ask them to speak slowly and clearly. Similarly, if there is a disproportionate number of non-native speakers, then you may need to talk more slowly.

3. Look at the titles of the other talks. This should give you an indication of what the audience may be interested in.
4. If your talk is late in the schedule, go to as many of the earlier talks as possible to judge the possible level of the audience's interest in your topic. Then you can make a few adjustments to make it more, or less, technical as appropriate.

You are likely to have a mixed audience, so don't make too many assumptions about what they may and may not know (unless you managed to understand this by doing point 4 above). You thus need to find the right balance and prepare extra slides that you can use to tailor your presentation to the specific audience.

## 1.2 Identify your key points/messages

Write down what you think are the most important/interesting aspects of your research that you want to communicate to your audience.

Try to limit the number of your important points (hereafter, key points) to about three or four, as this is the number that experts have proved is what most audiences can realistically remember. By not trying to cover everything but limiting yourself just to certain aspects, your presentation will have a clear focus. This does not mean that you only mention these key points and nothing else. Instead, it means that you mention them in your introduction and in your conclusions, and you give them the most space while describing your methodology and/or your results.

This process is a little similar to writing an abstract for a paper, which acts as both a summary and an advertisement of your work. It may help you to think that there might be journal editors and reviewers in the audience and that your objective is to give them the highlights of your research so that they will be interested in publishing your work in a video version of their journal.

Your key points should generally indicate what makes your research stand out (i.e., why your community should be interested) and how it contributes to knowledge in your field. The key points could be, for example,

- what problem you wanted to resolve/investigate and why this was important for the scientific community
- how you did it (your methodology)
- what success you had (your results)

Alternatively, perhaps the problem you wanted to solve is well known (and thus doesn't merit much description), but your methodology is highly innovative. In this case your three main points may be connected with how your method works, or how you selected your data.

Or maybe your methodology is not important, but your results are. Thus your three important points could simply be your three most important findings, or your one important finding has three important implications.

### 1.3 Prepare a two-minute talk

If you try and condense your presentation down to a two-minute coverage of your three main points, this will make you understand what is, and is not, absolutely essential. So, imagine you are about to give your presentation at an important international conference. You have the last slot of the last day. The person before you talked for more than their allocated time. Finally it is your turn to present. The conference chairperson says to you *“I am really sorry but we have run out of time, I can only give you two minutes to explain your research to this very important audience.”* What would you say in those two minutes?

Write some notes for your two-minute presentation. Preferably think and write in English. Try to use short simple sentences. Imagine you are going to speak to a group of friends rather than researchers. Using simple constructions and sentences will help you to focus on what you want to say. It will also enable you to express the concepts in the clearest way, which will be the easiest way for the audience to understand.

A presentation is not an oral version of your paper. It is an oral version of the most interesting and significant highlights of the research that led to your paper. This means you do not need to include everything that you covered in your paper. In fact it is a good idea not to use your paper as a starting point.

### 1.4 Record and transcribe your two minutes

Record yourself speaking (in English) about your three main points and make sure you don't go over two minutes. Imagine that you are chatting to a friend.

### 1.5 Expand into a longer presentation

Transcribe your recording, and then think how and where you need to expand what you have said—but always focus on explaining not more than three key points. Either write down exactly what you want to say or simply write some notes.

Creating a written speech is the best option, but it obviously takes longer.

See Chapter 2 Writing out your speech in English

A good and easy structure to follow is to imagine that you are telling a story.

The title of your presentation is the title (summary) of your story. You then structure your presentation around your three most important points. It might help you to organize what you want to say if you include short answers to the following questions:

- a) Why did I choose this topic in general? Why am I enthusiastic about it? What can I tell the audience that they probably don't know but that they will find interesting? How can I make it interesting to those attendees who are not experts in this field?
- b) What motivated me to decide to test a particular hypothesis or investigate a particular aspect? Was I stimulated by someone else's research?
- c) What did I do to test the hypothesis/aspect (i.e., a description of your methodology)? What problems did I have during the design and testing phases (these problems may be even more interesting to the audience than the successes, so think about the strengths and weaknesses of your approach)
- d) What did I find? And what did I *not* find? Did my findings confirm my initial hypothesis? Were there any inconsistencies or surprises?
- e) What is the significance of my work in the big picture of my field of interest? How and where can my findings be applied?
- f) What questions do I still have? What am I planning to do next? (Plus a reminder to the audience of most important results so far)

Think of your presentation as the headlines in a newspaper. Let the audience read the details in your manuscript or on your website. The true test of whether something in your presentation should really be there is to think about what would happen if you removed it. Would the audience even notice? Or would the presentation fail as a result?

## 1.6 Practice with colleagues

Using your script or notes that you created in [Section 1.5](#), ask colleagues, friends, or family members to listen to you. When you have finished, get them to write down questions to ask you. Do this with a variety of people. If you think the answers to their questions are fundamental, then incorporate answers to them into your speech. If they are not fundamental, keep a note of them and think how you might answer them in a Q&A session at the end of your presentation.

See Chapter [16](#) Questions and Answers

## 1.7 Give your presentation a structure

The next step is to divide your speech/notes into sections. The sections might be Introduction (questions a and b from [Section 1.5](#)), Methodology (c), Results (d), Discussion (e), and Conclusions (f). Think about what your specific intention is for each part of the presentation and think about where and how you can focus on your

key points. If you have no particular intention this will be immediately transparent to the audience.

The way we receive and absorb information in an oral presentation is very different from how we get it by reading a paper. When we read, we control how fast and in what order we want to absorb information. We can scan the whole paper quickly if we wish, and we can skip certain parts. If a written paper is well organized, we are guided by the section headings and paragraphs and we can see how the points fit together.

While watching a presentation, we have no control over what or how or in what order the presenter will give us this information. We cannot go backwards to “reread” if we didn’t understand the first time.

So in your preparation, everything you do should be oriented to making what you say easily and immediately understandable to the audience—they only have one chance to hear you. This is achieved through a clear structure, clear slides, and easy-to-follow explanations.

## 1.8 Create the slides

At this stage you will be reasonably familiar with the content of your presentation, so now you can decide what slides are really needed. Every slide should have a purpose and its purpose must be clear not just to you but also to the audience. A slide is needed when it does one or more of the following:

- makes an explanation less complicated and quicker
- helps people to visualize and recall something better
- makes something abstract become more concrete
- attracts attention or entertains the audience (but only in a way that is relevant to your topic)

If a potential slide does not do any of the above, then you probably do not need to create it. You do not need a slide for every point you make. Some points you can simply tell the audience or alternatively write them on the whiteboard.

See Part II What to write and show on the slides

## 1.9 Modify your script

You have now created your slides. The next stage is to modify your script so that it takes into account exactly what you will say about each slide.

Try to keep the colloquial style in your speech. It will be much easier for you to talk during your presentation if you talk as you normally do in everyday life. It will be natural for you and will sound natural to the audience. You do not need to adopt a specific “presentation voice.” So ask yourself “*Is this something that a normal person would say in a normal conversation?*” If it isn’t, change it.

See Part III What to do and say at each stage of the presentation

## 1.10 Cut redundant slides, simplify complicated slides

Practice your presentation with colleagues. Ask them what slides you could cut and which slides they found complicated to understand.

You could ask them to classify each point in your presentation as follows:

A: absolutely essential

B: important

C: include only if time permits

See Chapter 4 Practice and learning from other people’s presentations

Your aim is to focus only on what the audience want/need to hear so you don’t need to include things simply because you think you **SHOULD** include them; for example, because you think it is more professional to cover everything or because you think by putting them in you will make a good impression on your boss.

By this stage you should be very familiar with the content of your presentation. Now you need to focus on the language and pronunciation.

See Chapter 2 Writing out your speech in English and Chapter 3 Pronunciation and intonation





## Chapter 2

# Writing Out Your Speech in English

You will learn how to

- be concise and clear, and avoid improvising
- decide what style of language to use
- assess when your use of English is and is not crucial
- use appropriate vocabulary and grammar
- identify which tenses to use at various stages of the presentation

Why is this important?

At least 20% of the words and phrases that inexperienced presenters use tend to be redundant, i.e., they give no information that is useful for the audience. That's 20% less time for explaining and emphasizing the key points. Also, using the right style (personal rather than impersonal) will considerably increase the impact of your presentation.

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This chapter outlines some ways to improve how you write your script, and thus on how you orally deliver your presentation. If you are a researcher in the arts or humanities, you may have to give a presentation without any slides at all, so this section should help you to decide how to write your speech.

For more on good scientific and technical writing, see the companion volume:  
English for Writing Research Papers

## **2.1 Why should I write a speech? I'm giving an oral presentation, not a written one**

Obviously you do not need to write down every word you will say; though you may be surprised to learn that a typical ten-minute presentation only requires 1200–1800 words, depending on how fast you speak and how much time the audience need to absorb the slides. This is not much longer than an introduction in a paper.

For the more technical parts of the presentation, when you explain your methodology and results, it may be enough to write notes. This is because these aspects will probably be the easiest for you to talk about, as you will be very familiar with them and will probably have all the correct English terminology that you need.

On the other hand, the beginnings and endings of presentations tend to be less technical and are the places where presenters tend to improvise the most and are thus more prone to making unnecessary repetitions and being less clear. So it is a good idea to write down exactly what you want to say in your introduction and conclusions.

The reasons for writing the script are absolutely NOT for you to then learn every word. Memorizing a script is not a good idea. You will not sound natural when you speak and you might panic if you forget your “lines.” However, writing a script is useful for other reasons—to help you to decide

- what the best structure is and thus the best order for your slides
- if certain slides can be cut
- if the audience really needs to know what you plan to say

Once you have written your script, you can then write the slides. The slides themselves will help you to remember what to say, so you can then practice talking about the slides without using your script.

A written script will also help you to

- identify words that you may not be able to pronounce
- check that the sentences are not too long or complex for you to say naturally and for the audience to understand easily
- understand when an example would be useful for the audience

- clarify where you need to make connections between slides
- delete redundancy and unnecessary repetition
- identify the moments in the presentation where audience interest might go down
- check if there are any terms that the audience might not understand
- think of how you could deliver your message in a more powerful or dynamic way
- verify if you are spending too much time on one point and not enough on another
- time how long the presentation will take

In addition, if you write a speech then you can easily email it to an English-speaking colleague to revise or you can even submit it to a professional service (see page 164 for a list of some reputable agencies). Then you can be sure that at least the grammar and vocabulary will be correct.

You can also show your speech to a colleague (without forcing him/her to watch you performing)—this is a quick way to see if your presentation is clear and interesting.

## **2.2 Use your script to write notes to accompany your slides**

Most presentation software allows you to write notes for each slide. On the basis of your script you can write down what you want to say for each slide in note form. You can then print your slides with the accompanying notes and have these next to you when you do the presentation at the conference. It is best to print several slides on one page, then you don't need to keep turning the pages. Having these notes with you will give you confidence, because you know that you can consult them if you forget what to say or forget where you are in your presentation.

Also, you can practice your presentation using these notes.

## **2.3 Use your speech for future presentations**

Having a written speech will also help you in future presentations. The next time you go to a conference you may be able to use exactly the same presentation, so practicing for it will be much easier if you already have a script. After each presentation it is worth going through the script to modify it and improve it in the light of the audience's reaction and questions. You will see where you need to add things and where to cut parts that weren't necessary, that the audience didn't understand, or which you found difficult to explain.

Even if you do a completely different presentation in the future, the way you introduce yourself is likely to be the same, and the rest of your script will give you a structure to work on.

## 2.4 Only have one idea per sentence and repeat key words

If you are an inexperienced presenter the most important thing is to use the simplest English possible by using short phrases containing words that you find easy to say.

Each sentence should only contain one idea. This makes it easier for you to say and for the audience to understand.

Split up long sentences by deleting relative pronouns (*which, who, that*), and link words and phrases (e.g., *and, also, however, moreover, in addition, it is worth noting*)

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The scenario is a typical wireless network, in <u>which</u> there is a single base station in the middle and subscriber stations around it. We used a simulator in order to understand how the power-saving mechanism influences the performance of the users <u>in addition</u> to calculating what effect it has on the environment. <u>It is also worth noting that</u> , testing can be classified in different ways on the basis of the part of the network being tested and how testing is performed.	The scenario is a typical wireless network. There is a single base station in the middle and subscriber stations around it. We used a simulator to help us understand two factors. First, how the power-saving mechanism influences how users perform. Second, the effect that power saving has on the environment. Another important aspect. [pause] Testing. [pause] Testing can be classified in different ways depending on which part of the network you are testing and on how you are doing the testing.

Notice how in the revised version

- the sentences are much shorter. This gives you natural pauses when you're speaking
- key words have been repeated in the place of pronouns (in the fifth sentence *power saving* instead of *it*). This helps the audience to follow you as they may not remember what *it* (or similarly *they, this, that*, etc.,) refer to
- verbs are used in preference to nouns (fourth sentence: *how users perform* instead of *the performance of the users*)
- emphasis and drama can be created by very short phrases interspersed with pauses (e.g., in the fifth and sixth sentences)
- active forms are used instead of passive forms (final sentence)

## 2.5 Simplify sentences that are difficult to say

Your aim should be to create sentences that you find easy to say. Writing a script will help you to identify sentences, such as the one in the original version below, that do not come out of your mouth easily or naturally. So, read your script aloud, underline any phrases that are difficult to say, and then try to rewrite them until you find a form that is easy for you.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
In 2010, Kay proved that most people speak at a speed of one hundred and twenty to two hundred words per minute, but that the mind can absorb information at six hundred words per minute.	1) In 2010, Kay proved that most people speak at a speed of <i>nearly</i> two hundred words per minute. <i>However</i> , the mind can absorb information at six hundred words per minute.  2) In 2010, Kay proved that most people speak at a speed of around two hundred words per minute. However, the mind can absorb information at six hundred words per minute—that is four hundred words more than the speed of speech.

The original text is difficult to say because it contains a lot of numbers plus a repetition of sounds (twenty to two hundred). The first revised version gives an approximate number and splits the sentence into two parts. The second revised version states the same fact in a different way so that the audience will remember it better.

2.6 Do not use synonyms for technical/key words

Never use more than one term to refer to the same key concept. If you do, the audience may think that each word has its own specific meaning and wonder what it is. For example, if the adjective *sustainable* is a key word in your field, then don't find synonyms for it, do not use words such as *manageable*, *steady*, or *persistent*. Likewise, if you use the term *gender studies* don't suddenly use *feminist studies* to mean the same concept. If there is a difference between gender studies and feminist studies then you should explain it, but if they have an identical meaning then just use one or the other.

2.7 Avoid details/exceptions

If you include too many details the audience will have to hear complex explanations that cover all possible cases, and look at complex tables and graphs.

If you leave out details you will not be considered as superficial or unprofessional provided you introduce what you say with a qualification:

This is an extremely simplified view of the situation, but it is enough to illustrate that . . .  
In reality this table should also include other factors, but for the sake of simplicity I have just chosen these two key points:  
Broadly speaking, this is . . .

For more on how to deal with details, see [Sections 13.5–13.11](#)

## ADVANCED TIPS

### 2.8 Avoid quasi-technical terms

Compare these two versions. Which one sounds more natural and is possibly easy to understand?

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Engloids are communities gathering scientists of homogeneous thematic areas. They produce and/or consume documents of different types, using different applications and hardware resources.	Engloids are communities of scientists who study the same topic. What happens is that these scientists need to write documents and correspond in English such as in papers, presentations, emails, referees' reports. And to do this they use different applications and hardware resources.

The revised version expresses exactly the same concepts as the original, but in simple English. Avoid quasi-technical terms (e.g., *homogeneous thematic areas*) when you can use something more direct (*who study the same topic*).

The more syllables a word has the more likely you are to mispronounce it: *homogeneous* has five syllables, *same* has only one.

### 2.9 Explain or paraphrase words that may be unfamiliar to the audience

Make sure the audience understand key words—explain/show what they mean, as a multilingual audience may know the concept but not the word in English.

Even if you pronounce a word clearly and correctly, there is still a chance that the audience will not understand the word because they have never seen/heard it before. For example, imagine you are talking about crops and cereals. If you mention *rice* and *maize* and you have an audience of agrarians they will understand. But if you mention specialist or less familiar terms such as *cowpea* and *mung bean* then many people, even agrarians, might not understand even though you have used the correct words. In fact, they may think you have simply mispronounced another word. In such cases you can

- have the word on your slide and say “*a mung bean is a member of the pea family and is grown for manure and forage.*” (*manure* and *forage* should be comprehensible as they are sufficiently generic for agrarians)
- have a picture of a mung bean so that people may be able to recognize it

If you use a nontechnical word which you think the audience may not know, say it and then paraphrase it. Example: *These creatures are tiny, they are very small.*

## 2.10 Only use synonyms for nontechnical words

Having a written speech will also stop you from unnecessarily repeating the same word. Note below how the word “aim” appears three times in two sentences in the introduction in the original version, and the second sentence does not appear to add any new information.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The <u>aim</u> of this research project is to evaluate the role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships among health care trusts with an <u>aim</u> to mitigate shortcomings due to competition. Besides, this study <u>aims</u> to look into the effects generated by planning and control systems, or by the lack of these, within interorganizational relationships.	We wanted to/Our aim was to evaluate the role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships among health care trusts in order to mitigate shortcomings due to competition. Secondly, we were interested in the effects generated by planning and control systems, or by the lack of these, within interorganizational relationships.

To resolve the problem of repeated non-key words, you can do as in the revised version or

- find a synonym—in the first occurrence *aim* could be replaced by *objective* or *target*
- delete it—in the second occurrence *with an aim* could be deleted with no loss of meaning

## 2.11 Be concise—only say things that add value

*The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.*  
(Thomas Jefferson, chief author of the Declaration of Independence)

The more words you use

- the more mistakes in English you will make!
- the less time you have to give the audience important technical info

Here are some examples of sentences from the beginning of a presentation that could be deleted because they delay giving important information to the audience.

The work I am going to present to you today is . . .

My presentation always begins with a question.

I have prepared some slides.

This is presentation is taken from the first draft of my thesis.

The title of my research is . . .

Here are some phrases that could be reduced considerably, as shown by the brackets:

Testing [can be considered an activity that] is time consuming

The main aim of our research [as already shown in the previous slides] is to find new methodologies for calculating stress levels. [In order to do this calculation,] we first designed . . .

Finally these phrases below could be reworded to make them more concise:

Another thing we wanted to do was = We also wanted to

In this picture I will show you a sample = Here is a sample

Regarding the analysis of the samples, we analyzed them using = We analyzed the samples using . . . *or* Let's have a look at how we analyzed the samples.

## 2.12 Use verbs rather than nouns

Using verbs rather than nouns (or verb + noun constructions) makes your sentences shorter, more dynamic, and easier to understand for the audience.

X is meaningful for an understanding of Y = X will help you to understand Y

When you take into consideration = When you consider

This gives you the possibility to do X = This means you can do X./This enables you to do X.

## 2.13 Avoid abstract nouns

Abstract nouns such as *situation, activities, operations, parameters, issues* are more difficult to visualize than concrete nouns and thus more difficult to remember. Often they can simply be deleted.

Our research [activity] focused on . . .

If you find that your speech is full of words that end in *-ability, -acy, -age, -ance, -ation, -ence, -ism, -ity, -ment, -ness, -ship*, you probably need to think about deleting some of them or finding concrete alternatives or examples.

## 2.14 Avoid generic quantities and unspecific adjectives

Replace generic quantities such as *some, a certain quantity, a good number of* with a precise number.

I am going to give you a few examples = three examples

We have found some interesting solutions to this problem = four interesting solutions



Audiences like numbers:

- they make us more attentive because we start counting and we have a sense that we will be guided
- they give the information a more absorbable structure and thus help us to remember it better

Clearly the number of examples has to be low, otherwise the audience will think you will be talking all day. Or you can say

We believe that there are possibly 10 different ways to solving this problem. Today I am going to outline the top two.

## 2.15 Occasionally use emotive adjectives

If you tell the audience you were “excited” about something, then they are more likely to become excited too, or at least be more receptive to what you are going to tell them. Good adjectives to use, for example, in descriptions of diagrams or when giving results, are *exciting*, *great*, *amazing*, *unexpected*, *surprising*, *beautiful*, *incredible*.

## 2.16 Choose the right level of formality

The style of language you adopt in your presentation will have a huge impact on whether the audience will

- want to listen to you, and their level of enjoyment/interest
- find you approachable and thus someone they might like to collaborate with

There are essentially three levels of formality:

1. formal
2. neutral/relatively informal
3. very informal

Although most presenters think they should aim for the first level of formality (which is generally only appropriate in a plenary), in reality most audiences prefer presenters who deliver their presentation in a relatively informal way. In English, this informality is achieved by using

- personal pronouns (e.g., I, we, you)
- active forms rather than passive forms (e.g., *I found* rather than *it was found*)
- verbs instead of nouns where possible

- concrete or specific nouns (e.g., cars) rather than technical or abstract nouns (e.g., vehicular transportation)
- short simple sentences rather than long complex ones

Think about levels of formality in your own language. Do you feel most natural speaking in a very formal way or a friendlier way? Is your dialect perceived as being friendlier than your official language? Would you tell a joke in your dialect or your official language? Studies of people who speak both a dialect and their official language show that when they wish to appear friendly, warm, and likeable they often choose to speak in dialect. On the other hand, choosing to speak in the official language distances them from their interlocutors and they are perceived as being colder but probably also as more authoritative and knowledgeable. The secret in presentations is thus to be not only seen as being both authoritative and competent but also as friendly and warm.

The two are not incompatible—the authoritativeness comes from *what* you say, the friendliness from *how* you say it.

Compare these versions from a presentation on analytical chemistry.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The application of the optimized procedure to the indigoid colorants allows their complete solubilization and the detection of their main components with quite good detection limits, estimated at about 1 ug/g for dibromindigotine. Here the markers are shown—dibromindigotine for purple and indigotine for indigo.	When we used this optimized procedure on the indigoid colorants we managed to completely solubilize them. We were able to detect their main components within quite good limits, at about 1 ug/g for dibromindigotine. Here you can see the markers—dibromindigotine for purple and indigotine for indigo.
The characterization of organic components was first performed by Py-GC-MS which did not reveal the characteristic compounds of indigo and purple. Quite surprisingly after pyrolysis at 600°C it was still possible to observe the pink color; the failure of the technique was attributed to the massive presence of the silicate clay and research is still in progress.	We initially characterized the organic components using Py-GC-MS. But this did not reveal the characteristic compounds of indigo and purple. In fact after pyrolysis at 600°C you can imagine how surprised we were to still see pink. We think this might have been due to the massive presence of silicate clay. In any case, we are still trying to find out why this happened.

Note how in the original versions

- there are no personal pronouns—it sounds like a paper rather than an oral presentation. In normal life, no one speaks like this
- all the verbs are in the passive—this tends to alienate rather than involve the audience
- there is a disproportionate number of nouns
- the sentences are long

The revised version uses lots of personal pronouns. This makes the speech more informal and colloquial and leads to shorter sentences, which are much easier to say. Some of the nouns in the original version have been converted into verbs, and passive verbs have been replaced with active forms. The audience is also addressed directly (*as you can imagine*). The result is that the speech sounds more natural and dynamic.

So when you finish writing your script, check that each sentence sounds like something that you might say to a colleague at lunch time. If it isn't, rephrase it in simpler terms so that the audience will feel that you are talking directly to them. This has big advantages for your English too. The simpler your sentences are the less likely you are to make mistakes when saying them.

## 2.17 Summary: An example of how to make a text easier to say

Imagine that the sentence below is part of a speech for a presentation. What problems do you think you would have if you had to say the original version aloud? And what problems would the audience have in understanding it?

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The main advantages of these techniques are a minimum or absent sample pre-treatment and a quick response; in fact due to the relative difficulty in the interpretation of the obtained mass spectra, the use of multivariate analysis by principal component analysis, and complete-linkage cluster analysis of mass spectral data, that is to say the relative abundance of peaks, was used as a tool for rapid comparison, differentiation, and classification of the samples.	There are two main advantages to these techniques. First, the sample needs very little or no pre-treatment. Second, you get a quick response. Mass spectra are really hard to interpret. So we decided to use two types of analysis: principal component and complete-linkage cluster. We did the analysis on the relative abundance of peaks. All this meant that we could compare, differentiate, and classify the samples.

The original version would be difficult to understand even if it were in a manuscript. The audience would find it hard to assimilate so much information at a single time. And for the presenter, it would be hard to breathe while saying such a long sentence (74 words!) without a pause.

The solution is to

- split the sentence up into very short chunks (12 words maximum) that are easy for you to say and easy for the audience to understand
- use more verbs (the original contains only four verbs but around 20 nouns)
- use the active form and personal pronouns

The revised version contains a series of short phrases. Short phrases do not mean that you express yourself in a simplistic way. You can give exactly the same information and keep all the technical terms that you need. And the result is something that sounds natural and that the audience will enjoy listening to. If you talk like in the first version you risk alienating or confusing your audience.

## 2.18 Tense tips

Tenses are used in different ways in different parts of the presentation. The most frequently used are

present simple: I work  
present continuous: I am working  
present perfect: I have worked  
present perfect continuous: I have been working  
past simple: I worked  
future simple: I will work  
future continuous: I will be working  
going to: I am going to work

You can always either use full forms (e.g., *I will*, *I am*) or contracted forms (e.g., *I'll*, *I'm*). There is no difference in meaning, but the full forms can be used for emphasis, and the contracted forms sound more informal.

You don't need to have a perfect understanding of English grammar in order to be able to use the tenses correctly. I suggest that you consider the examples given in this subsection as useful phrases which you know that you can say at particular moments during your presentation.

More precise rules on the usage and meaning of these tenses can be found in the companion volumes:

English for Writing Research Papers  
English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar

Note: All the examples given in this subsection illustrate correct phrases that you can say. There are no examples of the misuse of tenses.

### 2.18.1 Outline

Three tenses are usually used in outlines. When you outline your first point, just use either going to or the future continuous. For the other points, you can also use the future simple.

Let me just outline what **I'll be discussing** today.  
 First, **I'm going to tell** you something about the background to this work.  
 Then **I'll take** a brief look at the related literature and the methods we used.  
 Finally, and most importantly, **I'll show** you our key results.

### 2.18.2 Referring to future points in the presentation

Use either the future simple or the future continuous. In this context, there is really no difference in meaning.

As we <b>will see</b> in the next slide . . .	As we <b>will be seeing</b> in the next slide . . .
<b>I'll tell</b> you more about this later . . .	<b>I'll be telling</b> you more about this later . . .
<b>I will give</b> you details on that at the end . . .	<b>I will be giving</b> you details on . . .

Don't use the present continuous to refer to future parts of presentation. Only use it when informing the audience about what you are doing now or when hypothesizing about what they are probably thinking as they see the slide.

**I am showing** you this chart because . . .  
 Why **am I telling** you this? Well . . .  
 You **are** probably **wondering** why we did this, well . . .

### 2.18.3 Explaining the background and motivations

Use the present simple to talk about the general situation, established scientific fact, and to explain your opinions and hypotheses.

As **is** well known, smoking **causes** cancer. But what we **don't know** is why people still **continue** to smoke  
 Despite some progress, not much **is known** about . . .  
 Current practice **involves** doing X but we **believe** that doing Y would be more effective

Use the simple past for events and situations that have ended.

We **decided** to address this area because:  
 We **started** working on this in May last year.  
 Our initial attempts **failed** so we **had** to adopt a new approach.

Use the present perfect to talk about open issues, the progress that has been made in your field so far and when; the precise time is not important.

Several authors **have published** their findings on Y.  
 Other researchers **have tried** to address this problem, but no one **has yet managed** to solve it.  
 Not much progress **has been made** in this field so far.  
 Our experience **has shown** that . . .

### 2.18.4 *Indicating what you did in (a) your research (b) while preparing your slides*

You need to make a clear distinction between what you did in your research (simple past) and the choices you made when preparing your slides (present perfect).

We **selected** patients on the basis of their pathology  
 We **used** an XYZ simulator which we **acquired** from ABC.  
 We **concluded** that the difference between A and B must be due to C.  
 I **have included** this chart because . . .  
 I **have removed** some of the results for the sake of clarity . . .  
 I **have reduced** all the numbers to whole numbers . . .

### 2.18.5 *Talking about the progress of your presentation*

When you refer to what you have done up to this point in the presentation, use the present perfect. This is often used for making mini summaries before moving on to a new point.

So we **have seen** how X affects Y, now let's see how it affects Z.  
 I **have shown** you how this is done with Z, now I am going to show how it is done with Y.

But when you are talking about moments earlier in the presentation use the simple past.

As we **saw** in the first/last slide . . .  
 As I **mentioned** before/earlier/at the beginning . . .

### 2.18.6 *Explaining and interpreting results*

Use the simple past to say what you found during your research. But to explain what your findings mean, use the present tense plus modal verbs (*would, may, might*).

We **found** that in most patients these values were very high.  
 This **means**/This **may mean**/This **seems to suggest** that/This **would seem to prove** that patients with this pathology should . . .

### 2.18.7 *Giving conclusions*

Make sure you distinguish between what you did during your research (past simple) and what you have done during the presentation (present perfect).

Okay. So we **used** an innovative method to solve the classic problem of calculating the shortest route, and this **gave** some interesting results which we then **analyzed** using some ad hoc software.  
 During this presentation, I **have shown** you three ways to do . . .

### 2.18.8 *Outlining future research*

Various forms of the future will be needed here. Use the present continuous for actions in progress, and with verbs such as *plan*, *think about*, *assess the possibility* and *consider* to talk about possible plans. With *plan* and *hope* you can also use the present simple.

We **are currently looking** for partners in this project.

We **plan/are planning** to extend this research into the following areas . . .

We **hope/are hoping** to find a new way to solve PQR.

You can use a mix of the future continuous and the future simple to give the idea of an already scheduled plan:

In the next phase we **will be looking** at XYZ.

This **will involve** ABC.