

# Writing Sample 4 - Presentation Skills

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## 1 Introduction

Glossophobia, otherwise known as the fear of public speaking, is reported to be a fear present in approximately 25% of people across the world. This fear occurs most notably when someone has to “...perform an oral presentation or a speech in front of other people.” [8] In academic settings, it is expected that the first couple of times a person presents, it is not unlikely that they are going to be anxious and fearful. In order to alleviate as much of this fear as possible, it is important to heed the Boy Scout motto and “Be Prepared” for whatever presenting in academia may bring. The following seeks to provide an understanding of the four different academic presentation areas a researcher may find themselves in, as well as some tips for visual aid presentation.

## 2 Types of Presentations

### 2.1 Conference Presentation

A *conference presentation* is used by academics to “[fulfill] distinctive functions in claim-making and in marking out a research territory.” [7] These kinds of presentations are intended to be directed at a specified audience, all of whom have a direct or at least tangential understanding of the topic being discussed. The goal of an academic conference is for “...academics to exchange ideas, questions, problems, and achievements concerning their personal research activities.” [3] A conference is a structure intended for academics to be able to provide feedback to each other for the sake of improvement, and a conference presentation is a way that information can be disseminated to a large body of people quickly. The presenter(s) in this format is/are usually a research group made up of several individuals who worked or are working on the same research.

### 2.2 Classroom Presentation

Of all the forms of research, this should be the most familiar to any academic. A *classroom presentation* as the name implies is a presentation given to a class of people (usually students) by another individual or occasionally a group of

people. The classroom presentation usually takes one of two forms. The first format, the *lecture*, is usually given by a professor or grad student to a class in order to teach on a certain topic. Lectures are multi-faceted, with the ultimate goal of “[transmitting] cutting-edge information which supplements or enhances reading.” [1] The second kind of classroom presentation, *student presentations*, is intended for a student or group of students to demonstrate what they have learned. This format of presentation offers students a form of “...freer practice...” in order to prepare a student to eventually give some of the other presentations [4].

### 2.3 General Audience Presentation

Sometimes, researchers will be required to present in a venue that may not be of an academic nature. *General audience presentations* are intended for audiences that may not have experience with the topics being discussed. As the University of Washington points out, the key to speaking to a more general audience is “[Avoiding] including a lot of technical or academic jargon...” [6]. In addition, the speaker(s) should take deliberate care if possible to “...research ahead of time to know what might resonate with [their] audience...” in order to frame the presentation in a way that will interest the listeners in the topic at hand [6]. In the scope of academia, the presenter(s) will likely be the same kind of research group present in the previous examples; however, the content in a general audience presentation needs to be provided in a completely different way.

### 2.4 Research Update Presentation

When a research group meets to discuss progress on a project, one or many of the research group members may share progress in the form of a *research update presentation*. This forms should take up the shortest amount of time of any of the other presentations, barring that the update a researcher has to provide is something drastic. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a researcher should present any “...background or theory for your research...” in as “...concise...” of a manner as possible in order to leave time to present any and all “...studies and findings...” [2] The presentation may be as simple as an oral confirmation of the progress for a week, or as complicated as the display of an entire presentation. In either case, these presentations need to be brief and concise.

## 3 Preparing Visual Aid

To accompany any of the previous examples of presentation, a presenter will often have one of two additional means of providing information about their research besides their voice: a *slideshow* or a *poster*. While a slideshow will likely accompany a presentation to a larger group of people, posters are usually used

to present to only a few people at a time. Above all, a researcher will normally want one of these visual aids for assistance as they are verbally presenting. As for some universal tips that can be applied to both posters and slideshows, New York University Libraries offers inspiration for the following [5]:

- Important information should be readable from the audience’s perspective
- All color, text, and images effectively communicate the research
- The overall layout is clean and consistent

Following these premises will create a helpful aid for the presenter(s) as support and reference as they present their research.

## 4 Conclusion

With an understanding of all the types of presentations, their audiences, and their purposes, a new researcher can gain some comfort in being prepared for when these situations arise. Additionally, the researcher will understand the purpose of using slides or a poster, and some tips to make their visual aids have more of an impact on their target audience. The fear of presenting may persist, but developing skills through understanding how to present may one day allow the fear to subside, if not disappear entirely.

## References

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