



HER RESOURCES

A collection of resources designed to provide practical tools for women undergraduate students.

Key Presentation Skills

From the classroom to the boardroom to everywhere in between, throughout our lives as academic and professional women, we are expected to give presentations. Sure, anyone can stand in front of a room, say a few words, point at a few slides, and sit back down. But, what does it take to make a presentation so meaningful that your audience will take your message home with them and keep talking about it? What does it take to deliver a pitch so powerful you not only get the funding you've asked for, but also a little more? In this issue of Her Resources, you will be presented with some of the skills that are integral to giving effective, impactful presentations.

"FOR ME, A SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATION IS DEFINITELY ABOUT HONING YOUR SKILLS AND PREPARING. BUT, JUST AS MUCH AS IT'S ABOUT THAT, IT'S ABOUT KNOWING YOURSELF. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. FIGURE OUT WHAT MAKES YOU COMFORTABLE WHILE YOU PRESENT, AND THEN YOU CAN PUT THAT TO WORK IN REAL TIME. KNOWING YOURSELF IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS KNOWING YOUR MATERIAL!"
- COMPUTER SCIENCE MAJOR



Tools

1

Preparation: Putting in the time to prepare for a presentation will pay off in more ways than you can count. First off, becoming familiar with the subject you'll be presenting will make you comfortable talking about it. Comfort will, in turn, translate to confidence, and if you exhibit confidence, you will seem like more of an authority figure. Additionally, having prepared materials and charted a clear course for the flow of the presentation will demonstrate to your audience that you are on top of your work and are ready and willing to communicate it to others.

3

Pacing and Enunciation: Say you're about to give a presentation about your research to a hiring group at a company who wants to assess your technical skills. If you love your research, you might be thrilled to be talking about it, but also a bit nervous. This mixture of sensations can all too easily translate into talking too fast and stumbling over your words. While your excitement will likely show, the hiring team may have a difficult time following what you are saying. Take some time prior to the meeting to practice at the pace at which you plan to present. Focus on speaking in a way that makes your words clear and understandable. If you can, ask a coworker, classmate, or friend to listen to your practice round and give you pointers on if and how you can make yourself more understandable.

5

Visual Aids: More often than not, presentations will have some form of visual component, usually a slide deck. These slides serve two main purposes: to organize your presentation and to provide visuals for your audience. Your presentation should follow a story arc, with an introduction, background information, information/data/analysis that you are providing, and a conclusion. Also be sure to include references and acknowledgements if others helped you in your work. It's often helpful to include an outline slide between sections of your presentation, highlighting the next section, so that the audience can easily follow the organization of your presentation. These outline slides also allow you to catch a breath, check your pace, and organize your thoughts. It's often helpful to first create all of your slides with only titles and then organize them in your preferred order before filling in any information. As for the content on the slides, the most important point is for them to be legible. Ensure that font sizes are large enough and that any pictures/graphs/tables are easily seen and read by the audience. Don't clutter your slides with information; instead, provide key bullet points and visuals so that the audience can focus on your words. Your slides alone should get across your main points and provide an outline for yourself during the presentation, but you want the detail to be in your spoken words. You are the star, not your slide deck!

2

Evangelization: More important than anything else about your presentation is how engaged you are. It is not enough to simply read the words that are on your slides or even to talk disinterestedly about your slides without looking at them. If you do not exhibit passion about the topic about which you are talking, how can you expect your audience to get interested in it either? Get invested in what you're talking about, and really sell it to your audience with your emotions. Your excitement will make your audience excited.

4

Body Language: When giving a presentation, not only are you presenting your material, but you are presenting yourself. Your body language clues the audience in to how confident you are with your material and how engaged you are with your audience. Make sure you keep your body open. Always face the audience, don't cross your arms, and don't turn around to read from your slides. If you're comfortable with it, move around across the stage instead of standing still. Maintaining eye contact with different people in the audience is important to hold their attention and to make a deeper connection with what you are presenting. This will also help with the previously discussed Evangelization.

Notes from the Authors

There's a lot of pressure around presentations. I mean, just the word "present" connotes putting yourself out there to be assessed by other people. But, because of their very nature, presentations are also a chance to show off all your hard work. Remember that you put in the time and effort to get to this point, and be proud of yourself. Let that pride lend you confidence, and you will absolutely crush it! - Kristen Tan, B.E.

All throughout high school I was terrified of public speaking. In college, I made the decision to change that. Confidence for public speaking and giving presentations is all about practice, so I became a tour guide. Speaking to strangers for hours made me comfortable with presenting information and answering questions. Now I don't get nervous at all before a presentation. I even had to give a 45 minute technical presentation for an interview and I nailed it! With the right amount of practice and comfort with your presentation, anyone can get over their nerves. - Caralyn Cyr, M.E.

Further Reading

"20 World Class Presentation Experts Share Their

Top Tips" provided by Forbes

"Presentation Tips" provided by the University of Washington

"How to Give a Killer Presentation" provided by Harvard Business Review