



THE KEY TO DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PRESENTATIONS

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on our lives, including how we communicate, present and disseminate our research work. Interviews, conferences, and scientific meetings which were originally in-person became virtual and moved online. Perhaps this change will stay or become increasingly common in our global quest to improve our carbon footprint and decrease long distance travel in response to the climate change crisis. Either way, our presentation style needs to be adapted for this medium of presentation.

Originally, whilst we used to analyse the use of stage space, ability to walk strides across the podium or giving eye-contact across the whole room, we now find ourselves confined to a small screen with only our head and upper torso visible. Whilst the

area of focus has now been decreased and concentrated to a smaller area, presentation skills have become all the more important to ensure the effective delivery of the message to our intended audience.

Successful presentations are attributed to a multitude of factors such as the energy and relationship we can build with the audience, and our ability to take them on a journey with us. Here are key points to bear in mind.

Setting

When presenting online, you may feel like you have no control over your background. We often pay no attention to what is on display behind us, nor do we give any importance to it. Perhaps we assume the audience will not notice it at all. In fact, we have greater control over our setting than

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of denture design, the artificially crafted façade behind you would become more apparent. Your knowledge should reflect and justify the books you display behind you. Perhaps your audience will be more forgiving if you do not make a false presence of academic reading.

2. **Lighting:** A key aspect of the presentation delivery. If there is not enough light, eyebags look darker and more pronounced. It can look less welcoming and even give the presenter a fake black-eye – not the look you should be aiming for.
3. **Space:** Your image to the audience will be restricted to a screen, so think carefully about how you use the space available. Having enough space around your torso means you can freely use your arms if you have a tendency to speak with your hands, for example. It is good to use these naturally rather than excessively.

Use of voice

You may start to speak in a certain tone which will gradually revert to your comfortable natural speaking style once you’ve settled. It’s natural, but think about these two factors:

1. **Speed:** You should vary your speed and prevent yourself from talking too fast. There is often a natural tendency to speak faster when we are nervous or do not feel like we have the authority to talk. As a speaker, you have a right of stage and should use that to talk comfortably and at your own pace. As the content of your speech is new to the audience, you should speak slowly; at about one clap between each word. This might seem really slow but is a good speed for the audience who have never listened to your content before.
2. **Tone:** Your tone should be appropriate for your audience. If it is too high or low, it can sound unnatural for the audience

and can be very distracting. It is very useful to find your own natural tone of voice as this is the most comfortable for your vocal cords and allows sustained speech for a longer period. This is also the tone that would sound the most genuine and be the most relatable for the audience.

Speech

Planning the structure and flow is usually the part of a presentation that we spend the most time on. Sometimes the fear of forgetting one’s points urges people to memorise their whole speech word for word. However, this will most probably sound monotonous and boring to the audience – and perhaps easily seen-through. To avoid this, consider:

1. **Preparation:** Experienced speakers usually only learn their key points to allow speech to naturally flow from themselves when presenting. It can be beneficial to practice the speech using different words each time so any obvious mistakes can disguise easily.
2. **Practice:** Even the best speakers practice before any presentations. It can be useful to get feedback from friends and even record yourself to watch the video back yourself. Sometimes watching ourselves makes us aware of something we may have missed. It can also be useful to practice in a mirror.

Regardless of what or to whom we are presenting, making presentations is a useful skill that will be required in many different stages of our dental career. Improving your presentation style may take time, but this is all part of a process to be a better presenter than you previously were and being able to adapt to different circumstances. Good luck!

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when we are presenting in person.

1. **Background:** Your background should be appropriate for the topic of the talk. It should be a calm and serene environment to avoid distraction from the words of the speaker. Perhaps you can experiment with light pastel colours. However, it should not stand out or distract the audience from your presentation. It should complement the tone of your presentation and literally add a backdrop to your presentation. Perhaps, a coloured wall, with a painting. If you choose to have a background of bookshelves, this should suit the topic of your talk, your level of expertise and knowledge base. For example, if you have a dozen denture construction books behind you but cannot answer a question about the stages