

Delivering presentations

Your University at your side

Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton:

- provide free and confidential individual counselling
- offer non-judgemental support and understanding
- are professionally trained
- are experienced in dealing with a wide range of problems

Counselling can:

- help you to develop your strengths
- offer you the chance to focus on and understand your difficulties
- enable you to make positive decisions and changes
- help you to develop the skills and resources to cope
- help prevent small problems from becoming bigger

Get in touch

You can make an appointment to see a counsellor by filling out the Contact Us form at www.wlv.ac.uk/SSW, alternatively, you can come along to one of our drop-in services. For more information go to the web address above and click on the Mental Health and Wellbeing option. From here you will find a wealth of useful information and self-help tools as well as our Drop-ins and Group activities.

Delivering presentations

How to cope with the stress of making presentations, or speaking out.



Delivering presentations

Introduction

Giving presentations is an inevitable feature of university life and the world of work. People often experience a great deal of fear and anxiety about presenting in front of others, and some feel physically ill at the thought of having to stand up and talk in front of their peers and lecturers.

Some of the negative reactions experienced when delivering presentations include:

Physical reactions

These include stuttering, sweating, turning red in the face/neck, trembling, getting a dry mouth, and feeling nauseous.

Emotional reactions

These include negativity, feeling worthless and inferior, feeling de-skilled, experiencing anxiety and fear, and wanting to withdraw.

Cognitive reactions

These include suddenly going blank, experiencing memory lapses, and repeatedly having negative thoughts, such as 'they will laugh at me', 'this is going to be a disaster', 'everyone else is so much better at talking in front of others', etc.

Strategies for managing presentation stress

Challenge your negative thoughts

We increase our anxiety by engaging in pessimistic thinking, and assuming a catastrophe will happen. On the other hand, we can help ourselves by thinking in an affirming and encouraging way, reminding ourselves of our skills and resources.

Be realistic in your thinking

Instead of telling yourself that everyone else can manage presentations easily, try to recognise that it is normal to find presentations scary and challenging. Instead of convincing yourself before even starting that it's going to be a complete disaster, emphasise the reality: "I have planned and practised this presentation, so it is likely to go well".

Be highly organised and prepare thoroughly in advance. It is of vital importance to be absolutely clear about the details of the presentation task: who, what, why, where, when. This will allow you to prepare your delivery effectively.

Know what facilities and equipment are available

Ensure that you're comfortable with any technology and resources to be used on the day. It may also be useful to have a copy of your talk in paper format in case of equipment failure.

Time your talk

Assess the length of your presentation in real time to avoid under/over-filling, and subsequently struggling with your timing on the day. Practise in front of friends/family (or at least a mirror) to gain confidence, and receive helpful feedback.

Consider your audience's level of knowledge

Consider how much the group know already in order to pitch your talk appropriately.

Seek advice

Ask other people about their experiences of public speaking. Think about what has worked well, and less well, in past presentations you've witnessed yourself, and try to incorporate some of this information in guiding your own design process.

Gain control over your nerves

Adopt a relaxed position – don't hunch your shoulders, neck, and arms. Breathe deeply. These actions will help to eliminate the worst effects of stress. Remember: relaxed body = relaxed mind! Start by introducing yourself (that means, test out your voice).

Take some water or lozenges

Have a bottle of water, or some lozenges to hand in case you develop a dry mouth.

Use the 'STOP technique' if you start feeling highly anxious. This method takes less than a minute. It aims to reduce unhelpful stress to a manageable level. Say 'STOP' to yourself, and breathe in slowly. Then, slowly breathe out, simultaneously relaxing your shoulders, arms, and hands. Pause, breathe in again, and then slowly breathe out, simultaneously relaxing your forehead and jaw. Stay quiet for a couple of seconds. Then, simply continue what you were doing, but deliberately aim to move and speak more slowly than before.

After the presentation, give yourself a treat for surviving it! Don't beat yourself up for every mistake you worry that you made. When you feel ready, think realistically about what went well, and what you could do differently next time. Ask for some feedback from a sympathetic friend who heard your talk.

You might find it helpful to:

- attend one of our workshops on this and related subjects. Visit our website for details.
- read some of our other leaflets: Dealing with anxiety and panic attacks; Overcoming the fear of failure; Managing stress; Developing confidence and self-esteem; Combating anger; Mindfulness.

Other people you might want to contact:

- Your personal tutor
- Lecturers who have a good presentational style
- Study skills advisors (in the Learning Centres) and visit: wlv.ac.uk/lib/skills_for_learning.aspx
- Friends/relatives who make formal presentations as part of their job
- The University Careers and Employment Services – on tel: 01902 321 414 or visit: wlv.ac.uk/careers
- Your GP (if you feel your anxiety level is so extreme that you're worried for your health)

Other useful websites

MIND: the mental health charity
mind.org.uk/information

The Royal College of Psychiatrists
rpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation.aspx

Some of the things students have said about the University Mental Health & Wellbeing Service:

"Counselling made issues more manageable."

"Counselling has helped me to put my life into perspective and sort out my problems."

student
+ support
wellbeing

