



Presentation Tips for Interviews

taylorollinson - *recruiting scientists*

INTERVIEW PRESENTATION TIPS

Companies will often incorporate a presentation as part of the second stage interview process. There are many reasons for this and they include everything from the obvious (you'll have to give corporate presentations as a regular part of your job) through to:

- your ability to communicate effectively
- take a brief and convert it into a clear presentation
- follow instructions
- time management
- to test how you react when your work is questioned
- understand complex ideas i.e. what you will do in your first 3 months in a new role
- your ability to sell

Whatever the reason, presentations are here to stay and are an integral part of the recruitment & selection process. This guide is designed to help you produce and deliver a stand-out interview presentations.

Whilst presentations are an excellent opportunity for you to sit/stand and sell yourself to the interview panel, having somebody stand and talk to you for a period of time can be challenging, especially if you are the Xth person who has presented that day!

So its important to engage the audience in if you are going to stand-out and make a lasting impression. However, as everybody is different its essential to use a variety of formatting styles and delivering techniques to keep everybody entertained.

This guide will help you write and deliver a presentation that stand-out presentation. So, where to start?!

BE CLEAR ON WHAT YOU ARE PRESENTING

Many presentations come with a defined title so this should be relatively straight forward, however if there is any lack of clarity as to what you are expecting to present then it's always best to ask.

On occasions the company will leave the title for you to choose– this can be much more difficult but try to put something together that is relevant to your audience, you are knowledgeable on and are confident in presenting and answering questions on.

THE FORMAT

PowerPoint is generally the industry norm for presentations but there are many other options so consider what you feel is most relevant for the audience and position. Flip charts can be a really useful tool if you are looking for audience participation, OHP's are a bit out-dated now but a simple paper presentation can have its merits if you are not confident with IT or if it's a very small audience.

Whichever you decide, check what facilities the company will have available. If you do use PowerPoint, check which version the company has (.ppt or .pptx) or save two copies just in case. Again, check if they have a projector and computer/pc to plug a USB memory stick into or alternatively, email the presentation ahead, or bring your own laptop. If you are using a projector – make sure you know how to hook up the IT, start the projector and change the AV output, usually the:

|  button.

CONTENT

For the purpose of this guide we will focus on PowerPoint presentation as this is what we recommend for most business & scientific interview presentations.

The basics – make sure you have a clear start, middle and end.

The start

This will include the title page which states the title of the presentation, date and your name

Next have an introductory slide. This could either be a contents slide or a simple slide which highlights what the presentation is going to be about

Middle

This will be the bulk of the presentation and discussion points/information.

The end

Always include a summary or conclusion slide to highlight the key points of the presentation and have a final slide to make it clear that your presentation is over with either “thanks for listening” or “questions?” Etc..

FORMATTING

Slides – use a simple slide style – plain white works well if you are going to incorporate lots of images and graphs/data/logo’s etc..

Font – choose a simple and easy to read font such as aerial, calibri or verdana or alternatively if you are looking to mimic the company’s corporate identity they will have a company font which is usually the one the website or literature is written in so select that one.

The font colour will depend on the slide background but if you are using a plain white I would recommend not using black font as it’s a bit harsh. Soften it by using a dark grey or blue as it’s much easier on the eye. If you are using a colour background, use a font colour that is significant contrasting enough to make the text stand-out on the slide.

Keep your font size consistent throughout the presentation – having slides with different size fonts looks messy and can be confusing on the eye. Having a consistent font throughout the presentation looks much smarter, is easier to follow and shows good attention to detail.

Amount of information on each slide – be careful that you don’t try to squeeze too much information onto each slide. The point of a presentation is for you to present so there is no point having the presentation as your script. Using bullet points is an excellent way to summarise your statements but try to keep to 1-2 lines of text per point. Each slide should contain a few to several statements which are summaries of what you are saying or points which you will talk around. Too much text on a slide can be difficult to read and confusing and can result in losing the attention of the audience.

Visuals – are an important part of the presentation as they create a visual distraction from pure text and helps to keep the audience engaged so try and include pictures, logo’s, graphs, data charts, graphics.

BUT, make sure they are relevant and high quality. Anything less and your presentation could resemble a school project. Also make sure the image is of high enough resolution – small images that have been stretched look pixelated and cheapen the presentation.

Graphs and data are great to include but make sure that can be read - if you can’t read the figures or data labels then it can distract the audience.

Using the company's logo as a footer throughout the presentation is again another good idea but make sure you get the right logo and don't try to adapt it in anyway. If you are talking about a product, then a good quality picture helps

Animations – flying text and dissolving images do have their place in presentations but personally I try to avoid them. There is a very fine line between looking professional and being a mess or distracting. Whilst I have seen some excellent animated presentations, they are very difficult to pull off so unless you are a pro with PowerPoint I would avoid. If you must use animation – keep it as simple as possible.

Humour? – or anecdotes are an excellent way to keep the audience engaged and adds a personal element to the presentation which can help make you stand out from your competition. However, don't go overboard – most companies are looking for somebody with a personality and a good sense of humour but they don't want a joker. But do be really careful with this as what one person find funny, somebody else might take offense so only use if you are certain it's relevant, clean and non-offensive and won't alienate the audience.

DELIVERING WITH IMPACT

Nerves can take over and hinder your performance. Also – when you are nervous you are more likely to rush & this will make you feel even more nervous. To help control your nerves, take two deep breaths before you start, breathing out for as long as possible to help release tension and encourage you to slow down when you start to speak.

To help sound more confident (even if you are not feeling it) take your time over each word you say, so that you don't rush or snatch at any words. This will help you to speak at a steady pace and allow your interviewer to follow easily. Pause at the end of your sentences – to help control your speed and allow yourself to take a breath before the next sentence.

Keep eye contact with your audience; don't keep looking at the screen when you are talking as nobody can hear what you are saying. You should know your presentation word for word so take a glance at the computer/projector-screen at the beginning of each new slide if necessary but the keep looking at the audience when you speak.

Try not to use laser pens or pointers if you are nervous – trying to highlight something in this way can highlight shaky hands and your nerves. If you have written your presentation well and it's clearly formatted you shouldn't need to highlight anything.

Whether you are sitting or standing, ensure that your posture is both strong and comfortable. Make eye contact with your interviewer(s) whilst speaking. The key time to look at someone is at the end of your sentence as this helps cement the message in that sentence. If you look away at that moment you may appear hesitant and your words will lack conviction.

Practise, practise, practise! Confidence in delivering a presentation comes from being word perfect and knowing your subject matter well. Don't just read it to yourself; deliver it to a family member or friend and ask for honest feedback. Make sure that it fits within the allotted timescales.

Time limit – keep within the time limit as this is often used as a measure of your ability to keep good time as well as follow instructions. Its also there for a reason so running significantly over can have a big knock on effect which won't reflect well on you.

Naturally if you are being asked questions all the way through this will mean that it will run but make sure if you deliver the presentation without interruptions it's within the time limit. If you don't get given a time limit always ask – but then state at the beginning of the presentation how long it'll last.

Take control of your audience by stating at the beginning whether you are happy to take questions through the presentation or that you are happy to answer any points at the end. This not only shows confidence, but it also relaxes the audience to know they are welcome to interrupt if they wish. I always find questions through the presentation makes for a better presentation as it engages the audience more & helps to promote discussion.

PRINT-OUTS

It's a really good idea to print out a paper copy of the presentation to give to each interviewer at the beginning of the presentation (print out a couple of extras for anybody who might get invited along). There are several reasons for this:

- Appeals to people with different learning & communication styles (particularly the theorists)
- Easy for the audience to see graphs/data charts
- Permanent reminder of you and your work after you have left the interview
- Demonstrates good organisation and attention to detail
- Solves the problem if there are any IT disasters as you can simply go through it on paper
- If the room isn't set-up or is inappropriate for a projector it's better to do on paper than having the interviewers huddle round a laptop screen

Getting it printed & bound professionally will certainly add impact but can be really costly and really isn't essential if you have a decent inkjet printer. I would recommend investing in good quality paper (heavy weight) and stapler but this should work fine.