

# **A Beginner's Guide to Presenting and Presentation Software**

## **Introduction**

This document has been written to provide some guidance to potential speakers at Redditch u3a Interest Group Meetings (where the display of information is required to support the talk). Not everyone joining the u3a will have given presentations prior to retirement. It can be very daunting, but it is hoped that this guide will provide some basic information to assist new presenters.

There are four sections to this guide:

1. Types of presentation and equipment
2. Tips for presenting
3. Available software
4. Tips for presentation slides

## **1. Types of Presentation and Equipment**

What is a presentation? A speech is a talk or address, for example the best man's speech at a wedding. A presentation is also a talk but includes the use of some sort of visual aid, for example using images, graphs and video recordings.

Some presentations are informative and educational, for example, university lectures, conferences and training courses. There are others which are persuasive and decision-making; these would include, for example, business sales and investment decision meetings (think about the Dragons' Den TV programme). Generally, u3a Interest Group meetings fall into the informative category and the audience is attending because they want to enjoy what you have to say.

Over the years the technology available for presentations has dramatically changed. This is particularly true in the teaching classroom where we can all remember the blackboards and the chalk dusters! Flip charts and white boards have been used both to present information and to capture the content of meeting discussions. During the 70's and 80's, text and drawings would be written or printed onto acetate film or transparencies and projected onto a screen. Similarly, 35mm slides would also be projected onto a screen. The use of laptops linked to electronic projectors has now added more flexibility into presentations including the use of online/virtual meetings via Zoom, Webex or other available tools. Today, you can turn up at a meeting with your presentation on your laptop, connect it to the projector or TV screen and off you go.

## **2. Tips for Presenting**

The location for presentations can be vary in size from large university lecture halls to smaller conference/meeting rooms. Most u3a Interest Group Meetings take place in medium/small meeting rooms. The Group Leader will usually provide access to the projector and projector screen (and possibly speakers if the playing of sound/music is required). As a presenter, you would need to have your presentation on a laptop or on a memory stick (if a laptop is available at the venue).

Here are some words of guidance on preparing to give a talk (before the day of presentation).

- Liaise with the Interest Group Leader or meeting organiser in advance of the day of the presentation (agree date, start time, location, content and any other relevant information)
- Agree on the length of the talk (will there be a tea break, will there be time for questions)

- Check the room set-up in advance of the day if possible (e.g., size of room, where to stand, how many attending)
- Check availability of audio-visual equipment (projector, screen, possibly microphone)
- Prepare your presentation including prompt cards or use “presenter view” within the software programme. Whereas some confident speakers can talk without any prompts or reminders, less experienced speakers may benefit from having some brief notes (or prompt cards) with them just in case their pattern of thought is lost.
- When possible, bring a backup of your presentation on a memory stick (just in case anything happens to your laptop or for some reason it is not compatible with their audio-visual system).

Although the use of online virtual meetings is less now than during the various lockdowns during 2020 and 2021, they are still used by some u3a Interest Groups and they have their own particular preparation requirements, namely: -

- Have a practice session using the virtual meeting software (e.g., Zoom or Webex) with the meeting organiser if possible
- Check length of talk and whether there will be time for questions (either during the talk or at the end)
- Check your room lighting and background. In particular try not to sit with your back to a window and it is possible to blur the background so that any untidy shelves are not clearly seen!
- Be aware of any potential noises during the meeting (e.g., noisy pets or door-bells)
- Have a script or prompts for each presentation slide in front of you (if needed).

There are many commercially available courses that provide presentation skills training. Some of you may have completed a course during your time in employment. Most cover the basic skill of presenting including the structure of the talk and include opportunities to practise while being recorded.

Presentations generally have a beginning, a middle and an end usually along the following lines: -

- An introduction – give an outline of the talk (contents list) – sometimes with an “ice-breaker” to warm-up the audience if the presenter is confident to deliver it. “Ice-breakers” are a way of making an initial interaction with the audience maybe by way of a question (e.g., how many of you have heard about this topic?) or even a funny story.
- The main body of the talk – good mix of images but do not overdo the words or bullet points in the presentation.
- Summary or conclusion at the end the presentation
- Always give a “Thank you for listening” at the end
- Answer any questions (within the agreed time).

Being nervous before a presentation is normal but know that you have done everything you can to make the presentation a success. Here are some tips to presenting.

- Preparation – prepare well, know your subject, stay calm (and remember to visit the toilet before starting the presentation)
- Smile – show that you are enjoying the presentation
- Breathe – try to maintain normal breathing pattern
- Voice – the level of speaking will depend upon the size of the room, the acoustics and whether you have a microphone or not. If possible, practise in the room with someone standing at the back.
- Pace of speaking – don’t speak too fast, allow natural pauses, pause to take a sip of water
- Body language – keep your head up and use your hands to make gestures or point to the screen (but don’t overdo it).

Your confidence will grow through a presentation and with the number of presentations completed and you will develop what works best for you.

### **3. Available Software**

Over recent years the software tools for giving presentations have evolved to provide much support to the presenter.

Presentation software provides a way of displaying information to support you.

It can: -

- Generate images that can be projected onto a screen
- Can include text, photographs, images, graphs, animations, sound and videos
- Can be shared via internet to a larger audience (e.g., via Zoom, Webex)
- Converted to pdf format from distribution after the presentation.

Although not covered in this guide, please be careful on the use of images and photographs taken from the internet as they may be subject to copyright. Please refer the u3a guidance on copyright and licences for further information.

There are many different presentation software packages on the market. Several factors may influence your choice, namely cost, how often you would use it and whether you already have it as part of an integrated suite (e.g., Microsoft Office or Apple iWork). Microsoft Office PowerPoint is widely used but other software packages are available. The following comments about the format within presentation slides will apply to all packages.

### **4. Tips for Presentation Slides**

When preparing a presentation, please take note of the following aspects: -

- Use a common font throughout (unless you want to highlight a fact or detail)
- Select the appropriate size of font (see later)
- Carefully choose the background colour and colour of text
- Avoid too many underlines, italics, shadows and clip art
- Don't overuse animation.

There is no hard and fast rule to selecting a font, but Arial, Calibri, Verdana and Tahoma are "safe and usually transferable". Avoid using the more elaborate fonts as they may not be readable from the back of the room.

The size of font needs to be picked to be readable and depends upon the number of words on the slide. Typically, I would use 36 point for headings and 28 or 24 point for bullet points. The usual 11 or 12 point used for normal documents and reports would be too small.

The choice of text colour against the background colour is important. It is easy for words and numbers to be lost against the background. White text on black background (or vice-versa) will always stand out, but sometimes a blue background with white text is easier on the eyes. Avoid colour clashes for example, red text on green background or light blue text on purple background.

There is an "infliction" jokingly called "Death by PowerPoint". Presenters who are new to all the many features of presentation software can sometimes overdo their use. Too many fonts, too many colours, busy backgrounds and too much animation can easily distract the audience and the message in the slide is lost.

Finally, here are three things to remember and take away from this guide on presentations.

1. Do your preparation
2. It's ok to feel nervous
3. Keep it simple

Finally remember that you know your subject and the audience are there because they want to listen to you.

Good luck