



Dos and Don'ts of Presenting Conference Sessions

Presenting at a conference can be an exciting opportunity to share your research, insights, or expertise with a relevant audience. Here are some guidelines to help you deliver a successful conference presentation:

Before the Conference:

- **Attend the AMPO Group Meeting:** AMPO staff will coordinate a group meeting with your session moderator and any other presenters in the month leading up to the event. This is the time to discuss timing (session and presentation time allocation), order of the presentations, pronunciation of names, preferred introductions etc. It is imperative that you attend.
- **Plan and structure your presentation:** Develop a clear structure for your presentation that includes an introduction, main points or findings, supporting evidence, and a conclusion. Ensure that your presentation follows a logical flow and is easy to follow. Use headings to guide the audience through the different sections.
 - Also include an introduction slide with a brief introduction to your MPO. Many attendees may not be familiar with your region, so include a map, population, and a few key/fun facts.
 - The number of slides in your presentation should be reflective of your time allocation.
- **Create compelling visuals:** Utilize visual aids, such as slides or multimedia elements, to enhance your presentation. Keep slides clean and uncluttered by using bullet points, graphs, images, or diagrams to illustrate key concepts. Avoid overcrowding slides with excessive text (less is more). Use high-contrast colors to ensure readability. Refer to the attached PPT Checklist to ensure your slides meet accessibility standards.

- **Prepare for questions:** Anticipate potential questions or areas of inquiry that may arise from your presentation. Develop concise and well-thought-out answers to address these queries. Be open to feedback, alternative perspectives, and discussions during the Q&A session following your presentation.
- **Practice and seek feedback:** Rehearse your presentation multiple times to become familiar with the content and delivery. Practice in front of a mirror, with your colleagues or record yourself to assess your body language, vocal tone, and timing. Seek feedback from colleagues, mentors, or peers to refine your presentation and incorporate suggestions for improvement. Don't read your slides but use notes to add context to the main points.
- **Submit your presentation on time:** Organizing a national conference is no small feat! Be respectful and submit your presentation on time allowing AMPO staff to save it on the session computers well in advance. AMPO staff will provide a presentation due date prior to the conference.

During your Session:

- **Arrive Early:** Arrive 15 minutes early to your session room so you can circle up with your moderator and fellow speakers to review timing, order, and any other logistics.
- **Know your audience:** Conference attendees come from all corners of the country, representing small, medium, and large MPOs. If possible, develop your presentation so attendees, representing a variety of disciplines and areas, can relate to the content. Make sure your presentation is organized in a way that is applicable for all sizes if possible. Understand the background, interests, and knowledge level of the audience you'll be presenting to. Adapt your content and delivery to suit their needs and ensure maximum engagement.
 - One option is to begin your presentation by asking a quick poll question or show of hands to better understand your audience. An example of a question could be: "Today I'm going to discuss the work we've been doing to create an Equity Index for project prioritization – can I have a show of hands for those who already have some sort of equity index at their agency? Ok great, for those of you who don't have one, can I have a couple volunteers share what barriers you're facing – is it staffing capacity or technical knowledge etc.?"
- **Engage the audience from the start:** Begin your presentation with a captivating opening to grab the audience's attention. This can include sharing an interesting anecdote, posing a thought-provoking question, or presenting a surprising statistic. Engage the audience from the start to create a connection and generate interest.
- **Keep it concise and focused:** Be mindful of time constraints and aim to deliver your presentation within the allocated time. Avoid overwhelming the audience with

excessive information such as complex formulas or too many slides. Remember the number of slides should reflect your allocated time. Focus on the key points, main findings, or key takeaways that you want the audience to remember.

- **Use visual aids effectively:** Utilize visuals such as slides, charts, or images to enhance your presentation. Keep the visual design clean, clear, and uncluttered. Use legible fonts, appropriate colors, and visual elements that support and reinforce your message. Limit the amount of text on each slide and use visuals to illustrate or emphasize important points.
 - For specific guidance on PowerPoint presentations, see below.
 - If using videos, do not rely on streaming at the conference, instead be sure to embed the video within your PPT and test it on-site prior to the session.
- **Communicate clearly and confidently:** Speak clearly and audibly, ensuring that your voice reaches all attendees. Maintain eye contact with the audience and use body language to convey confidence and engagement. Speak at a moderate pace and pause appropriately to allow the audience to absorb your message.
 - **Use a microphone:** It may feel awkward to use a microphone if you're not used to it, but using one ensures your voice is amplified and clear for all attendees. This helps individuals with hearing impairments or those who speak English as a second language to better understand you. Hold it close to your mouth and check that attendees in the back can hear you when beginning your presentation.
- **Use storytelling techniques:** Incorporate storytelling elements to make your presentation more engaging and memorable. Share relevant anecdotes, case studies, or personal experiences that illustrate your points and make them relatable. Use storytelling techniques to captivate the audience and create an emotional connection.
- **Encourage audience interaction:** Foster audience engagement by encouraging questions, comments, or discussions during or after your presentation. Invite attendees to share their perspectives, ask for clarification, or offer their insights. Maintain the audience's interest by incorporating interactive elements such as rhetorical questions or conduct brief polls or surveys.
- **Stay calm and confident:** On the day of your presentation, take deep breaths, maintain a positive mindset, and project confidence. Visualize a successful presentation and remember that you are well-prepared and knowledgeable on the topic. Nervousness is normal, but channel it into enthusiasm for delivering a great presentation.
 - Pro tip: Embrace the Power Pose! Power posing uses body language to trick your brain into feeling more confident; think arms outstretched, shoulders back, and hands on hips. Look closely and you may notice an AMPO staff member or two that does this before speaking...

Remember, each conference presentation is an opportunity to share your knowledge and contribute to your field. By preparing thoroughly, engaging your audience, and delivering your message with clarity and confidence, you can make a strong impact during your conference presentation.

Avoid the pitfalls of presenting:

- ⊗ **Don't read directly from your slides:** Avoid reading your presentation word-for-word from the slides. Instead, use the slides as visual aids to support your main points and engage with the audience through eye contact and effective communication.
- ⊗ **Don't overwhelm with text:** Avoid overcrowding slides with excessive text. Keep your slides concise, using bullet points or key phrases to convey your main ideas. Use visuals and graphics to enhance understanding and engagement.
- ⊗ **Don't speak too fast or too softly:** Pace your speech appropriately, ensuring that your audience can understand and follow along. Speaking too quickly or softly can make it difficult for attendees to comprehend your message. Practice and adjust your delivery to maintain a clear and audible voice.
 - Pro tip: If you're prone to filler language like "Umm", try replacing it with taking a deep breath. It will naturally add a pause and allow you to gather your thoughts without adding language that makes you sound unsure of yourself.
- ⊗ **Don't ignore time limits:** Respect the allocated time for your presentation. Going significantly over the time limit can disrupt the schedule and inconvenience both organizers and attendees. Practice and time your presentation in advance to ensure it fits within the allocated time frame.
 - Pro tip: It's common to get in front of a group and lose all sense of time. Most sessions have a podium, set a timer on your phone, and place it on the podium next to the laptop so you can keep track of your time.
- ⊗ **Don't forget to rehearse:** Practice your presentation multiple times before the conference. Rehearse in front of a mirror or with a trusted colleague to refine your delivery, timing, and overall presentation style. Rehearsing helps build confidence, identify areas for improvement, and ensure a smooth and polished performance.

Avoid accessibility pitfalls when presenting:

- ⊗ **Images:** "These are examples of X." On the slide are several images that represent examples of X. If an audience member has visual impairments, then that member

doesn't know what the examples are. Instead be sure important graphics or visual aids have accompanying descriptive text.

- ⊗ **Video 1:** "Let me show you a video demonstrating process Y." The video is narrated but has no captions. If an audience member has any hearing impairments, then that member does not know what the narration is.
- ⊗ **Video 2:** "Let me show you a video showing Z in action." The video has no narration, but just some background music. If an audience member is blind or has low vision then Z's action is not known.
- ⊗ **Graphs:** "This graph shows that some growth of W over time." A blind or low vision audience member will not have any idea of the magnitude of the growth or the time period.
- ⊗ **Pointing:** "Look at this equation that shows the relationship between X and Y." The speaker is using a laser pointer. A blind or low vision audience member will not know what the equation is or what the relationship is. A deaf audience member who is watching the interpreter might not catch to where the laser is pointing.
- ⊗ **Allusion:** "You never know who you might meet." The slide shows a picture of the speaker and the President of the United States shaking hands. A blind or low vision audience member might not know who the speaker is meeting.
- ⊗ **Animation:** "Watch how our algorithm manipulates the data." There is no narration to help blind or low-vision audience members understand the algorithm.

Source: Making Your Conference Talk Accessible, Richard E. Ladner, University of Washington. Published: October 18, 2015

By avoiding these common pitfalls, you can deliver a successful and engaging presentation that effectively communicates your message, captivates the audience, and leaves a positive impression at the conference. For more information on how to make your presentation accessible, please reference: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3085564>.

Checklist for a Good PPT

- **Keep it visually appealing:** Use a clean and professional design for your slides. Choose a consistent color scheme, fonts, and layout throughout the presentation. Avoid excessive animations, distracting transitions, or busy backgrounds that can detract from the content.
 - **Use legible fonts:** Select fonts that are easy to read, even from a distance such as sans-serif fonts like Arial or Verdana. Avoid using too many different fonts in a single presentation to maintain consistency. Use bold or italic formatting sparingly for emphasis. Use a **font size of at least 22 points** to ensure readability and avoid using decorative or script fonts that may be difficult to decipher.
 - **Use white space effectively:** Allow for ample white space (negative space) on your slides to make the content more visually appealing and less cluttered. Avoid overcrowding slides with excessive text or images. Embrace simplicity and let the content breathe.
 - **Provide sufficient color contrast:** Ensure a strong contrast between text and background colors to aid individuals with low vision or color blindness. Everyone loves to use **green and red together** to indicate low/high or good/bad, but it is not colorblind-friendly. Use a color contrast checker to verify that your chosen color combination meets accessibility guidelines.
 - **Avoid relying solely on color to convey information:** Use icons or visual cues to represent ideas, concepts, or actions. Icons, patterns, or text labels can help simplify complex information, make it more visually appealing and ensure that all users can understand the content, even if they have difficulty distinguishing colors.
 - **Use effective charts and graphs:** Present data or statistics using clear and well-designed charts or graphs. Choose appropriate chart types that effectively represent your data and make it easier for the audience to understand. Label axes, provide legends or explanations, and consider highlighting key data points for clarity.
 - **Utilize alt text for images:** Add alternative text descriptions (alt text) to all images used in your presentation. Alt text provides a textual description of the image content, allowing screen readers to convey the information to individuals with visual impairments.
 - **Provide a transcript for video:** If you have a short clip or video embedded in your presentation, be sure to print off a handful of transcripts and offer those to the audience. This will ensure attendees with hearing impairments can participate better. Conversely you can also enable closed captions on videos.

- **Maintain visual consistency:** Ensure a consistent visual style across all slides. Use consistent formatting for headings, subheadings, and body text. Align elements and maintain a consistent spacing throughout the presentation. This helps create a cohesive and professional look.
- **Use clear and concise content:** Keep your text concise and use **bullet points** or short sentences to convey your main ideas. Avoid overcrowding slides with excessive text. This helps guide the audience's attention and makes the content more memorable.
- **Limit the number of slides:** Avoid creating too many slides for your presentation. A general rule of thumb is to aim for around one slide per minute of presentation time. Condense information and focus on the most important points to keep the presentation concise and engaging.
- **Apply animation and transitions judiciously:** Use animation and slide transitions purposefully to enhance the presentation without distracting the audience. Consider using subtle animations to reveal content or highlight important elements. Avoid excessive or flashy animations that may overshadow the message.
- **Proofread and edit:** Check your presentation for spelling or grammatical errors. Ensure that all text is readable and free from typos. Take the time to review and refine your content, making sure it is clear, concise, and error-free.
- **Practice with your presentation:** Rehearse your presentation while displaying the slides. This will help you ensure that the flow between slides is smooth, timing is appropriate, and the visual elements align with your speaking points.

Remember, PowerPoint should enhance your presentation, not overshadow it. Keep the focus on your message and use visuals strategically to support and enhance your content. By following these guidelines, you can create a visually appealing and effective PowerPoint presentation.