Tips for Annual Conference Presenters

The following are some general tips to help you in your role as a presenter at an IAIA annual conference, in addition to the specific instructions provided to you directly from your session chair.

Before the Conference

- Read and review all information and instructions provided by your session chair.
- Familiarize yourself with the conference and the other presentations in your session by reviewing the final program.
- Edit your slides ruthlessly. At first you might have a huge amount of information and will wonder how you're ever going reduce it. That's OK. Keep editing until you've pared your message down to the bare essentials.
- Have a practice run-through. There's nothing like reading it out loud to ensure your message makes sense before you actually deliver it. Try recording your presentation on video — this way you'll be able to review with an accurate eye and notice whether your speech matches up with your slides.
- Have someone else look at and listen to your presentation. If you don't know anyone who can help, an online writing assistant like Grammarly can help you address any problems.
- Use a timer when you practice. Your session chair will tell you ahead of time how much time you will have to speak, and on-site will notify you if you have reached the limit.
- Be prepared for nerves. If you find presenting difficult, it can be hard to be calm and relaxed about doing it. One option is to start by concentrating on your breathing. Slow it down, and make sure that you're breathing fully. Make sure that you continue to pause for breath occasionally during your presentation, too. In general, people worry too much about nervousness. Nerves are not a disaster. The audience expects you to be nervous. It's a natural body response that can actually improve your performance: It gives you energy to perform and keeps your mind sharp. Just keep breathing, and you'll be fine.

Preparing your Presentation

- Start strongly. The beginning of your presentation is crucial. You need to grab your audience's attention and hold it. Your session chair will introduce you, so don't waste time explaining who you are.
- Smile and make eye contact with your audience. This also helps you to feel less nervous, because you are talking to individuals, not to a great mass of unknown people.
- Have a compelling introduction that briefly sums up what you're going to talk about and why it's useful or relevant to your audience.
- As a general rule, people are not very interested in talks about organizations or institutions. Ideas and stories fascinate us. Don't talk about your company; rather, talk about the problem you're solving.

- Tell a story. People respond to stories. Everybody creates narratives, it's how we understand the world. Find the story in what you want to say.
- Ask a question. Rhetorical questions are a great way to frame a topic and introduce ideas. Pre-empt other questions. What will your audience want to know next? Of course you want to spark interest and debate after your talk, but make sure no one has to ask an obvious question.
- Keep it short and sweet. This applies to the presentation as a whole and each word you use. Stick to short words and avoid jargon.
- Focus on your audience's needs. Keep in mind what the audience needs and wants to know, not what you can tell them. Also watch focused on your audience's response, and react to that.
- Offer evidence and use examples. The body of your presentation is where you present the facts, quotes, and evidence to back up your main points.
- Sum up with key takeaways. The conclusion is where you loop back to your original statement and give the audience some key takeaways on how they can put into practice what they've learned. A call to action is the best way to wrap up your presentation with strength and impact. What do you want your audience to do next?

Avoid "Death by PowerPoint"

- Remember the 6-6-6 Rule: Maximum 6 words per bullet, maximum 6 bullets per slide, maximum 6 text slides in a row. The fewest words and effective imagery will have the most powerful effect.
- If you need to provide more information, create a handout and give it out after your presentation, or end the presentation with your email address so people can follow up with you.
- A good design can make or break a presentation. If you do not have the budget for a designer, tools such as Canva will help you make great slides, and Pexels or Unsplash offer royalty-free images. Format for perfection. A crooked line or a pixelated graphic will put some people off, as it will look like you haven't tried very hard (or worse, that you aren't very professional).
- Use color sparingly. Bright colors can dazzle, but too many can be offputting. Use the colors most relevant to your message. Stick with one or two (not counting black and white) for your palette so it has a consistent look and feel.
- Stick with one font and one size throughout. A high-contract, easy-to read sans-serif font is generally best. A good guideline is a minimum of 30-point text. Do not use ALL CAPS, *italics*, and other enhancements that clutter.
- Images inspire. Don't fall back onto boring stock photography and clip art. Consider using your own personal photographs or explore creative commons sources like Flickr for more relatable imagery. (Just be sure to check the terms of the license.) A simple graph or illustrated chart to illustrate your main point can be worth a thousand words.
- Research suggests that video is 95% more compelling than text. A clip should be short – no more than 60 seconds. Don't use videos—particularly corporate ones—that sound self-promotional or like infomercials; people are conditioned to tune those out. Anything with a soundtrack can be off-putting.
- Limit transitions and builds (animation). Bullet points should not be animated on every slide. For transitions between slides, use no more than one or two different types of transition effects and do not place transition effects between all slides.

On the day

- Arrive early. Plan to be at your session a minimum of 20 minutes before the session starts, in order to meet your chair, get last minute instructions, and load and test your slides.
- Take everything you need. Remember your memory stick, your notes, and your handouts, if you have any. Be prepared to give your presentation in case power or technology fails.
- Watch your session chair to keep your presentation within the time limit.
- Enjoy yourself! People came to listen to what you have to say. If you are passionate about your topic, they will feel it.