

# Conference Papers: How to Prepare and Present

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So, you've got something important to say, 15 minutes to say it, and you have a sense that your career prospects might hinge upon your performance. If you've never delivered a paper before, the pressure can be intense. Over time, you'll develop your own methods to prepare and style of presentation, but if you haven't had a lot of experience, you might consider the following suggestions:

**Cut it down:** You may be working from a dissertation chapter, or maybe with an extensively developed idea. You'll have to whittle down to the core of your argument and be very selective about the evidence.

**Make it linear:** Your written work may be complexly argued, with many allusions to earlier or coming points. In a verbal presentation, it's easier for the audience if the argument is more linear, with clear signposts about the direction.

**Break it up:** Remember that the audience is listening, not reading, and that it's easier if you have shorter and more straight-forward sentences than in your written work.

**Decide about reading or extemporaneous speech:** This is an individual decision. Some people read very well, but for others it's better to talk through most the paper, reading only selected passages. Consider what you'll do best with and decide which parts of the paper will be read or delivered extemporaneously.

**Practice, but don't over-practice:** Presentations can sometimes go in unexpected directions, to the chagrin of the presenter. Practice can reduce this risk and will also help you approach the fifteen-minute ideal length. But over-practice can take the fun out of it. My general rule of thumb is that once a conference paper is prepared, I shouldn't go over it more than twice.

**Attend to the set-up:** Check out the room, visualize your position in relation to the audience and any presentation equipment you'll be using. Make sure that all equipment is working properly and seek expert help in good time if it isn't.

**Feel welcome:** During the conference session remember that we have come to listen to you because we are interested -- in the subject and in you. We are hoping to learn something interesting and to engage your ideas. Assume the sympathy of the audience, look us in the eye, project your voice; make it easy for us to leave with a sense of what's interesting about your work.

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