

# ACVS SURGERY SUMMIT: Tips for Speakers

*The ACVS Surgery Summit endeavors to highlight excellence in research, innovation, and clinical advances. We believe that the content presented at each meeting is of value to our profession. This document was developed to help researchers, residents, and Diplomates prepare and present their material more effectively at professional meetings.*

*In order to improve the quality of presented material, lectures presented at the ACVS Surgery Summit will undergo peer evaluation by the Continuing Education Committee. This information will be used primarily for Surgery Summit planning purposes, but evaluations will be made available to speakers upon request. To learn more about the lecture evaluation process, please visit [www.acvs.org](http://www.acvs.org) and look under the Surgery Summit tab.*

## **Introduction:**

Anxiety associated with public speaking is sufficiently common to have its own field of study. Not surprisingly, fear of negative evaluation by peers and social scrutiny are the driving factors of this anxiety.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, speaking skills can be learned and improved.

## **Preparation:**

Resist the urge to procrastinate getting your lecture organized until the last minute. Ideally, start to prepare lecture materials 6-8 weeks prior to the presentation date.<sup>2</sup> Things to consider in lecture planning include the following:

1. **Audience:** Lectures should be presented at a Diplomate level. Knowledge of basic disease processes should be assumed, with greater attention given to novel techniques and clinical or cutting-edge practices. Resist the temptation to recycle professional student-level lectures.

2. **Time Frame:** Be aware of the time limit assigned to your lecture. Longer lectures allow more in-depth coverage of a topic, but require greater effort to maintain the audience's attention. Shorter lectures require that the speaker organize his or her time precisely to effectively communicate the topic.<sup>3</sup> Aim to plan, prepare, and practice for 75% of the allotted time. Ending late suggests poor planning.<sup>4</sup>

Audience attention span is approximately 15 minutes. For longer lectures, plan to change pace, ask the audience a question, interject a case example or video, or otherwise "wake up" your audience at this point in a longer lecture.

3. **Content:** Lectures are traditionally organized into a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.<sup>2,3,5</sup> All parts of a lecture should work together to convey important information. The introduction should outline specific points that are addressed in the body and are reiterated again in the conclusion.
  - **Introduction** (15-20% of total time)
    - a. Presents background information
    - b. Outlines content and objectives
    - c. Justifies relevance of topic or study
    - d. Hints at results and conclusions
  - **Body** (50-75%)
    - a. Materials and methods, results
    - b. Highlights key findings
    - c. Emphasis based on audience
  - **Conclusion** (15-20%)
    - a. Reiterates main points
    - b. Take-home message
    - c. Significance/future directions

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## Visual Aids:

PowerPoint (Microsoft Corp, Redmond, WA) has become a ubiquitous part of academic lecturing. While it allows easy incorporation of images, videos, sounds, and other multimedia into a professional visual format, errors in presentation design can detract from the content of a lecture. PowerPoint can be a useful tool, but it is often used as “handrail to cling to” for people terrified of public speaking.<sup>6</sup> Disorganized presentations with PowerPoint are still bad. Excessive use of distracting animation, poor color choices, and small font size are among the many sins that can be committed through PowerPoint. Tips for PowerPoint presentations are summarized below<sup>6,7</sup>:

### 1. General:

- Landscape orientation
- Estimate one slide per minute of lecture. Don't spend less than 10 seconds or more than 2 minutes on a slide.
- Avoid unnecessary animations and sound effects—distracting!
- DO use sound and video for educational purposes
- One idea or concept per slide
- Avoid patterned backgrounds
- Preview slide show on projector to check text visibility, image contrast and clarity
- Know version of PowerPoint available at meeting to ensure compatibility

### 2. Color:

- Limit color regions to max of four
- Be consistent
- Consider psychological effects
  - a. Blue background preferred
  - b. Avoid reds and yellows

- Avoid red/green and red/purple/blue combinations—12-25 % of Caucasian men are colorblind
- Text color should complement and be distinguishable from background
  - c. Dark blue background with white/light yellow text works well
  - d. Consider black background with white text if many radiographs
  - e. Black/dark blue text with white background
- Preview colors with a projector, as colors often appear darker in large rooms and lighter in smaller rooms

### 3. Text Slides:

- Text should emphasize points only
  - a. No more than 6 lines per slide
  - b. No more than 6 words per line
  - c. Max 25 words/slide
- Standard sans serif fonts preferred
  - a. Arial
  - b. Arial Unicode MS
  - c. Comic Sans MS
  - d. Calibri
- No more than two fonts, except for occasional emphasis
- Font Size Recommendations for Variable Room Sizes<sup>7</sup>:

# Seats	Heading	Main Text
<50	32 point	24 point
<200	36 point	28 point
>200	42 point	36 point

- Spell check! Grammar and spelling errors are distracting and unprofessional.
  - Use predominantly lower-case letters
- ### 4. Pictures: PowerPoint lends itself to topics that are better explained with graphics, video, and pictures than with text.<sup>1,6,7</sup>

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- Choose pictures and art that reinforce your message!
- Avoid excessive images and clip art
- Use good quality images only
- Magnify, crop, and center images to highlight desired point
- Remove or mask client/patient information
- Adjust images for contrast and brightness as needed

## 5. Tables and Graphs:

- Avoid presenting too much data on a single slide
  - a. Max 4 rows for 2-column table
  - b. Max 3 rows for 3-column table
  - c. No more than 8 bars in bar graph
- Include percentages and absolute number on slides with pie charts
- Avoid copying complicated tables or charts from written publications

### **Presentation:**

The effectiveness of a presentation depends on the ability of the presenter to communicate with the audience. Effective visual aids will not replace poor communication.<sup>4</sup> Some basic rules of presentation follow:<sup>2-4</sup>

1. Focus on Objectives: The rule of “Tell ‘em what you’re going to tell ‘em, tell it to them, then tell ‘em what you told them” applies here.
  - People will remember no more than 5 key points
  - The presenter must determine and communicate key points appropriately
2. Practice, practice, practice: Rehearsal allows the speaker to gauge the length of the talk (and adjust accordingly), plan for pauses, and become familiar with the slides. Familiarity allows the presenter the

ability to modify the presentation for questions and to lecture more “fluidly”.

- Ask a colleague to act as a test audience to assess speed, tone, mannerisms, and PowerPoint effectiveness
- Think of questions that might be asked ahead of time
- Practice giving the presentation out loud, saying it differently each time.

3. Game Day: Stage fright is a negative term for excitement.<sup>4</sup> Visualization of success is the most useful mechanism to control nerves. Aim to communicate passion and confidence. Delivery tips:

- Carry notes if you need them, but don’t rely on them. Reading from notes makes speakers appear unprepared.
- Don’t read from slides, but do point out key features on pictures or tables.
- Speak slowly
- Make eye contact with the audience and talk to more than one area of the audience.
- Smile. Use humor if you are comfortable with it, but ensure that it is comprehensible and inoffensive to the audience.
- Vary the pitch of your voice. A conversational tone is best.
- Avoid awkward pauses and distracting mannerisms (“umm”, “like”, “er”, etc.)
- Use a microphone

### **In Summary:**

- **Start preparing early**
- **Organize material**
- **Identify key and “take home” points**
- **Use PowerPoint as a visual aid rather than a script**
- **Keep slides simple; only include material that highlights your message**
- **Use images rather than text**
- **Rehearse and seek feedback**
- **Keep to the allotted time period**

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## References:

1. Croft RJ, Gonsalvez CJ, Gander J, et al: Differential relations between heart rate and skin conductance, and public speaking anxiety. *J Behav Ther Exp Psychiatry* 35:259-271, 2004
2. Hardicre J, Coad J, Devitt P: Ten steps to successful conference presentations. *Br J Nurs* 16:402-404, 2007
3. Hoffman M, Mittelman M: Presentations at professional meetings: notes, suggestions and tips for speakers. *Eur J Intern Med* 15:358-363, 2004
4. Collins J: Education techniques for lifelong learning: giving a PowerPoint presentation: the art of communicating effectively. *Radiographics* 24:1185-1192, 2004
5. Di Leonardi BC: Tips for facilitating learning: the lecture deserves some respect. *J Contin Educ Nurs* 38:154-161; quiz 162-153, 175, 2007
6. Stein K: The dos and don'ts of PowerPoint presentations. *J Am Diet Assoc* 106:1745-1748, 2006
7. Collins J: Education techniques for lifelong learning: making a PowerPoint presentation. *Radiographics* 24:1177-1183, 2004

## Helpful Links:

### Preparing Successful PowerPoint Presentations

Online tutorial for effective PowerPoint use in the classroom that includes five short videos discussing different ways to use PowerPoint to support learning. <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/powerpoint/>

Prepared for presenters at a specific conference, the guidelines may be useful to others as well. Scan down to the section on "General PowerPoint Tips" for a list of tips for preparing effective slides. <http://www.jsemconference.com/2006/PPTGuidelines.pdf>

A very useful, well-illustrated, chatty guide to giving a talk, including directions for the construction of effective PowerPoint slides. Links to more online resources for using

PowerPoint effectively (or with "Death by PowerPoint") are embedded in the text and listed at the end.

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/powerpointadvice.htm>

"Creating Effective PowerPoint Presentations" by Michael A. Russell and Walter M. Shriner (Mt. Hood Community College)--another guide to designing PowerPoint presentations with a list of further resources at the end. <http://www.gst-d2l.com/TLC/TLCProj.html>

Tips for Creating and Using Effective PowerPoint Presentations (Canadian Cochrane Centre).

A concise list of guidelines for success with PowerPoint. <http://www.cochrane.org/resources/PowerPointTips1.pdf>

### Resources for Giving Effective Presentations

Links to 10 excellent articles with information and examples that will lead to successful presentations.

<http://librarygarden.blogspot.com/2008/02/talk-good-giving-effective.html>

"Chronology of Your Successful Conference Presentation" by Dave Paradi—week by week guide through preparation and presentation.

[http://www.thinkoutsidetheslide.com/Conference\\_Success.pdf](http://www.thinkoutsidetheslide.com/Conference_Success.pdf)

Designing Smart Lectures (University of Minnesota, Center for Teaching and Learning Services). Offers two video workshops, one on large lecture classes and the other on principles of good lecturing. Also includes information on planning, delivering, and evaluating lectures.

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/lectures/index.html>

Improving Lecturing Skills: Some Insights from Speech Communication (Indiana University, Office for Learning Resources). Pluses and pitfalls of lecturing. plus ways to improve as a lecturer.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~teaching/allabout/pubs/lectskills.shtml>

Delivering Effective Lectures (JHPIEGO, an affiliate of Johns Hopkins University). Techniques for planning, delivering, and evaluating effective lectures, including interactive lectures.

[http://www.reproline.jhu.edu/english/6read/6training/lecture/delivering\\_lecture.htm](http://www.reproline.jhu.edu/english/6read/6training/lecture/delivering_lecture.htm)