Guidance for speakers at RCEM conferences and study days

Introduction
How to give a great talk

Firstly, thank you so much for offering to give your time, energy, wisdom and enthusiasm to the conference and in particular to the delegates. The RCEM events team want every presentation to be as good as it can be, and although there will always be variations between presenters and events there are a few best practice points that can help everyone optimise their performance.

The following tips are based on the experience of the RCEM events team, feedback from past conferences and from lessons learned by experienced conference presenters.

A great talk starts with great preparation. Cultivate your idea. Decide on the key messages that you want to pass on to your audience. Think of your audience. They may be mainly emergency physicians, but increasingly our events include nurses, paramedics and Allied Health Professionals. Make sure that your talk is relevant to them and emphasise what your talk means for their practice.

Why does this matter?

As a college we recognise that getting the time and funds to attend our events is difficult. Many delegates will be personally funding or part-funding their attendance. We want to give the best possible experience and that means the best possible presentations. They have invested in you by virtue of their attendance, and we want you to invest in them by delivering your best possible presentation.

We know you already have a good sense of what we are trying to do at RCEM events and conferences; we want you to engage with the audience in an interesting and ideally interactive style. That may be a bit different from the traditional conference monologue and death by PowerPoint that most of us have been subjected to in the past.
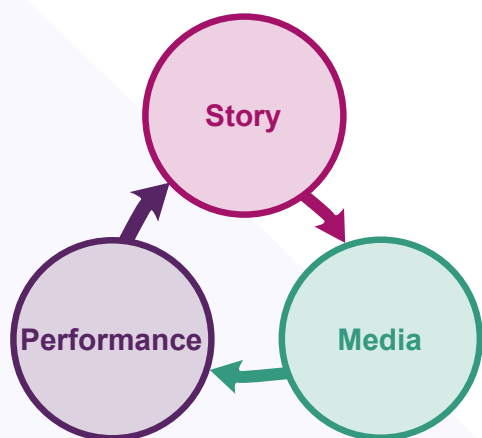
Think of your talk as **three components** that come together to make a great presentation and please make sure you prepare in all areas.

These are based on Ross Fisher's work on presentation skills on the P Cubed website.

The Story
What you are trying to say

Be absolutely clear about why you are presenting. Why are you passionate about this topic and why have you spent so much time preparing - **share the passion!**

Stories can be very powerful ways of helping the audience to relate to your message, allowing them to not just 'think' about its importance but to 'feel' it. Remember though, telling a good story is not the goal. Its merely a way to help you achieve your goal, which is to communicate your message effectively.

Be balanced. As well as trying to sell your ideas and your research, talk about the counter-arguments and any reasons why the audience might doubt what you're saying. Carefully plan the structure of your talk.

Keep it simple. Make a list of what you want to include then be ruthless and cut it back to what's most important. Tell the audience why your message is important to them using examples that they can relate to.

Make sure your **facts are accurate**. Cite your sources but don't screenshot abstracts or references on the screen. They are rarely readable in an auditorium.

Be mindful of the audience. This is especially important for non-EM speakers. Too simple and your talk will come across as patronizing, too complex and the audience will switch off.

The media
Slides, video and audio

Design does matter. Design can bring the content to the fore, simplify and purify the message. It should be **brain friendly and engaging** and it should create a memorable impression from which more meaning is derived.

Use media sparingly and only to illustrate key messages. Don't annotate or write your script of the talk using your slides. Remember that delegates can either listen to you or read the text on the slides. not both. We want them to listen to your message and not spend their time reading. Many great talks would work just as well if the delegates closed their eyes and just listened. In other words make sure that your story is very clear.

Enhance your message by **varying the type weight/boldness** and even colour of the words to increase contrast and emphasis your message.

Please make sure you respect **confidentiality and copyright**. Remember that your slides may be publicized widely through social media. If you use images that are not your own, make sure you obtain the necessary permission. If the images are published under a Creative Commons licence, attribute the source as specified in the licence.

Use a classic font/type style that suits your style and the message you are delivering and stick to it (don't change fonts). The classics like 'Helvetica Neue' work well and have proven themselves over and over. You can vary the weight of your font though, or use the conference template, if there is one.

Please **don't put lots of text on your slides** or reproduce huge tables. If you think that you are going to say the words 'I apologise for the busyness of this slide' during your presentation then change the slide. Remember that your slides are just an accessory to help provide a visual stimulus when you deliver your talk.

Don't over-do the Powerpoint/Keynote. **Don't crowd the slides.**

Form follows function. Does the picture and colour palette match your style and message?

"If your audience is **reading**, they're not **listening**."

TEDx

The Performance
Getting up there and delivering the talk

Don't read your talk. Preparing a script can be helpful but reading from a script is excruciating for the audience. Rehearse, rehearse and then rehearse some more!

Practice presenting **with an audience**. Ideally a colleague who can give helpful feedback.

Engage with the audience. Try and get them thinking during your talk by asking them to consider what you are presenting e.g. use rhetorical questions. Wherever possible make them **active participants** in the talk.

Once you've practiced you talk many times and got your timings right - turn your media off and **practice the talk without media.** This is a great way to practice timing, consistency and flow.

Arrive early with a copy of your presentation in more than one format and speak to the audio-visual team about your requirements. Ideally insist on seeing the presentation work in the room that you will be presenting

Consider how you **stand, move and look** on stage. Modify this depending on the topic and venue.

Video yourself presenting and look back at it with a colleague. What do you do that works well e.g. stand tall and look at audience, and what does not work e.g. constantly moves around stage without purpose.

Less is more. Shave the content down and be sure you are under time. Going over time has a knock-on effect for other speakers and delegates. Don't do it.

Check **well in advance** that the venue can display your presentation using the right computer program and right screen size.

Visit the room where you are presenting well in advance. Decide where you are going to **sit/stand/move** during the session.

Final thoughts

A great conference relies on great presentations. Both presenters and delegates want sessions to be valuable, engaging and useful. We hope that you find the tips and links here useful. If you need further advice please get in contact with your session or study day lead, or email **events@rcem.ac.uk.**