

PRESENTATION SKILLS FOR STUDENT ARCHITECTS

This workshop can take different forms depending on the circumstances of the presentation to be given. These include preparing to present outline design ideas to a live client, presenting at a year portfolio review, presenting for a final 'crit', reporting on research findings to co-workers on a project and presenting to fellow students at an interim crit. It has been tried with different numbers of students ranging from 8 to 50 and run in several Schools of Architecture. The shortest version lasted 1.5 hours; the longest lasted a working day. In each case feedback has been collected from students and tutors. A selection of student comments appears at the end of these notes.

The notes are intended as a resource for design tutors who want to give their students additional help with the development of this important skill.

Starting points in devising the workshop

Presentations work better if students have thought about their purpose, prepared for them, practised what they will say and show and got some feedback. Students know this, but rarely allocate the time. Setting aside time for the workshop close to the date of the live presentation allows them both to do the preparation and get help from fellow students.

Learning principles used in designing the workshop

- Get students active in developing something which has immediate application so that skills learned are put into practice immediately
- Draw on the students' own experience of what makes a presentation effective
- Students work collaboratively, increasing opportunities of learning from each other.

Aims

- Raise awareness of the importance of words as well as drawings in conveying design intentions; recognise when it is useful to speak and when the drawings will speak for themselves.
- Recognise presentation objectives and audience needs as key determinants in deciding what to say and show.
- Understand the importance of preparation and the stages to go through in preparing an effective presentation.
- Introduce and practice some simple skills in preparing and delivering a presentation

Workshop agenda

This is the full day version. What goes in any individual workshop will depend on how much time you can allocate and the purpose of the presentation. The notes outline the rationale for each step, working methods used during it and time allocation. Throughout there is an emphasis on what the students do. The tutor's role is principally to give task briefings and keep the students on target.

Step 1:

Tutor gives a brief **outline of the workshop** and the **intended outputs**. This helps students know what is expected of them and demonstrates good practice in presentation.

Time - 3 minutes

Step 2 Problems In Communication:

As a workshop warm up, students do a listening/drawing exercise which demonstrates some of the difficulties in making yourself understood and shows how dialogue leads to better communication. Sitting back to back in pairs and using pre-prepared drawings of intersecting geometric shapes, students take it in turns to describe and draw the drawing. Initially, the student who is drawing is not permitted to ask questions. In the second turn, questions are allowed.

Debriefing from the exercise should link what the students have just experienced in trying to follow a description of an unseen drawing to what their audience has to do in listening to their presentation. Lessons learned should focus on helping the audience understand through talking with their needs in mind, providing a clear structure, giving signposts to remind the audience where they are.

Suggested time: 20 - 30 minutes

Step 3 What Is The Purpose Of The Forthcoming Presentation And Who Is The Audience?

Tutor briefs students to work on this question in groups of 3 - 5. The idea is to get them to think about why they are giving the presentation – e.g.

- to communicate research findings to fellow students who need the information for their own projects
- to persuade tutors to give you a good mark
- to present an issue on which you're stuck in order to get some help

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Note - our experience is that students find this initially hard to do, possibly because so often they are doing things because they have been told to! It's worth persevering with the exercise until the penny drops.

Students are also asked to think about the audience for the presentation, who they are, what they already know about the subject, what frame of mind they are likely to be in and the implications of all this for the presentation.

The tutor takes one suggestion from each group in turn, noting each down on a flip chart as a reminder of the purpose of the presentation and audience factors. The sheet is pinned up as a reference source as the workshop goes on.

Suggested time 25 minutes

Step 4 How Long Have I Got?

A very short input on time allocation from the tutor to make sure everybody understands this key point.

Step 5 'Golden Rules' For The Effective Presentation

Tutor briefs students to think about what constitutes an effective presentation, drawing on their own experience of giving and receiving presentations. They work for a short time in small groups, agreeing 4 or 5 'golden rules'. The tutor facilitates a large group session and builds up an agreed list on a flip chart. This sheet is also pinned up for reference.

Note - It is important that the tutor avoids the temptation to contribute too much. It is much more effective if it comes from the students.

Suggested time 20 minutes

Step 6 Developing The Presentation: Deciding The 'Must Says'

Short input from the tutor, referring as far as possible to what came out of the warm up exercise and the 'golden rules'. Students are reminded that:

- we don't retain much of what we have heard
- attention spans are short. People typically listen attentively at the beginning of an utterance, then their attention is diverted to thinking about what has been said.
- therefore audiences need all the help you can give them. This means a making a limited number of points, and providing a clear structure that helps the audience follow

Brief to the students: decide the key points your presentation must include - the points you want your audience to remember.

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Students work on this individually for 5 - 10 minutes, writing each key point on a separate post-it. (This helps to order the points at a later stage in the workshop.)

Then they share these with a partner as follows:

Student A outlines his/her key points and student B listens carefully. The delivery is timed.

Student B paraphrases back what s/he has heard, without other comment

Student A listens and decides whether these are indeed the key points and whether they have been understood and amends accordingly.

The process repeated with roles reversed.

Note: students find this a useful exercise both for isolating the essentials of their presentations and for understanding the value of careful listening and paraphrasing.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Step 7 Developing The Presentation - Putting The Key Points In An Order Which Helps The Audience

Tutor briefs the students to order the points in a sequence which helps the audience, using the post-its. This can be done individually or in pairs.

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Step 8 Developing The Presentation - Creating A Story Board

Tutor briefs the students, working on their own, to devise a simple story board on an A1 sheet taking the ordered key points as the framework. Each key point is expanded with subsidiary points and a list of the drawings to be used. The end product should be a clear summary of what the presentation will contain, drawings and spoken account with a note of how much time to allocate to each section.

Note: this activity often shows students that they need to do additional drawings or select other material from their portfolios.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Working in groups of 3- 5, students summarise their story boards to fellow students who are asked to give constructive feedback. Each student gets 5 minutes practice time and 3 minutes feedback. This is a preliminary dry run for the presentation, though at this stage it is still in outline form. Part of the feedback session includes a 'Jargon Eliminator'. Students are asked for comments on the language used with suggestions for alternative non architectural phrasing, if this is one of the needs of the audience.

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Students are also reminded to check drawings for clear labelling, North points and so on.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Step 9 Working Up The Notes For The Script

Tutor briefs the students to turn the story boards into simple notes they can use during the presentation, suggesting some options - cue cards, file cards etc. The emphasis should be on each student finding a personally comfortable method.

Time as necessary

Step 10 Check Back Script As Produced Against Purpose Of Presentation And 'Golden Rules'

Tutor encourages everyone to go back to the sheets produced earlier and use these as a check that their presentation is meeting these requirements.

Suggested time - 10 minutes

Step 11 Deciding On Strategies For Managing The Difficult Bits

These need to come from the students and might include the introduction, handling questions, how to conclude. Students work in threes to do this, using each other as a resource for ideas. Alternatively, this can be done in a plenary session.

Suggested time - 5 minutes per student

Step 12 Practice - Either To Video, Or To Each Other.

Video is very useful indeed, but hard to manage in big groups. (You might be able to set up a separate session for students who really want to try it) We have found it is perfectly effective to get the students in small groups to act as audience for each other.

The tutor introduces some simple rules about asking for and giving feedback. We start by asking the presenting student to summarise what they thought they did well before asking for similar positive feedback from the audience. Then we ask for suggestions for what should be done differently. Criticism is expressed as specific suggestions for improvement rather than generalised disapproval.

Note: It is important that the tutors don't dominate this session. Their role is to get the students to take responsibility for this themselves, ensuring that everybody makes a contribution

Time as necessary

A sample of student feedback

Feedback is collected at the end of the workshop and at the end of the presentation: one thing they have learned from the session and one suggestion for improving it. This prompts reflection on what has been learned and refines the workshop for future reruns.

“Preparation for 5 minute presentation was very useful - structured presentation is generally lacking. We could have done with this in 1st year, week 1!”

“Will think more about whether I'm actually getting the message across in crits. Doing this has made me realise that other people might interpret my ideas differently when they seem perfectly clear to me”

“Helps to take a step back and clarify what I've been struggling to do in the design process”

“Very helpful for showing how to end a presentation - always been a problem for me.”

These materials were originally generated by the Clients and Users in Design Education (CUDE) project which was funded from Phase 1 of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Fund for Development of Teaching and Learning.

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