

# Notes and Ideas for Chairing an Educational Event

## Preparation

PALES	
Purpose	Organisers need to match the speaker to the audience, and ask: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What does the organiser want from the speaker?</li><li>2. What does the audience want from the speaker?</li><li>3. What is the speaker capable of doing?</li></ol> If these 3 points line up then all will be well, otherwise there may be problems.
Audience	Homogenous or mixed professional groups? The group's level of knowledge? Changing the thoughts and feelings of audience members may lead to a change in behaviour. This is most likely if they interact and engage with activities.
Logistics	Timings, room size v audience size, room acoustics, etc.
Equipment	Projector, flipchart, etc, workbooks, case studies, feedback sheets, etc. Ensure everything is prepared in advance.
Set-up	Arrive early, arrange chairs, check materials, check projector, sound, etc.

## Dealing with Anxiety of Speaking

Everyone has some anxiety about talking in public, and this is normal. An aroused physiological state is characteristic of both stress and pleasure, so the nervousness and fear of failure can stimulate focus, energy and opportunity. "The body's reaction to fear and excitement is the same ... so it becomes a mental decision: am I afraid or am I excited?"

The key to feeling confident when speaking is to **practise in advance**.

- Think carefully about your specific audience
- **Practise** speaking privately in advance, try out words, phrases, until you feel comfortable
- Arrive early, walk around the stage, auditorium, adjust temperature, sit in some audience seats, get used to the physical environment
- **Practise** using the laptop, remote control gadget, software, etc, and try them out well in advance, preferably in the actual venue
- Have glass of water nearby, slow breathing, stretches before speaking, adopt confident posture before starting, see TED talk by Amy Cuddy, [www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en)

Audiences get bored and hostile quickly if they see you have not prepared. They forgive minor slip ups if you have good points and have made an effort. Preparing well gives us a feeling of being in control: train the butterflies to 'fly in formation!'

## Performance

- greet the speaker beforehand, confirm length of session, and when speaker must stop
- start on time
- introduce yourself
- explain your purpose and content: 'hook' the audience
- introduce the speaker positively: engage the audience
- keep the session active and dynamic: involve the audience
- project your voice so that people at the back can hear you

## Manage the Room

If large room with few people, invite them to sit together near the front, to create a group. Speak to some participants, identify friendly people, those who will help, involve some of them.

## Eye contact

Maintain eye contact with the audience, scanning around all areas of the auditorium, so that everybody feels you are looking at them personally. Avoid turning away from the audience.

## Tone of voice

We can choose to emphasise a particular word in a sentence. People who are nervous often talk in a flat monotone voice, but even emphasising one word makes the argument more compelling.

As an exercise, draw a line, similar to an ECG, denoting where the emphasis comes in a sentence, and try saying the sentence several times, emphasising one word at a time. For example, "I believe all people should have the right to laugh today."

## Words

Avoid verbal fillers such as "umm" and **practise** leaving a silence. Fillers just annoy the audience and prevent listeners from processing what they have heard.

## Keeping participants attentive

Do not waste time talking about the back story (I first heard about ... etc) as nobody is interested.

Take control: eg ask people to switch off phones, stop audience members from talking too long or asking long question, etc. The rest of the audience will appreciate sorting these problems out.

For a large audience we need to be 'bigger than we are' with louder voice, more dramatic hand gestures and upbeat pace. Notice the audience, and adjust to their mood and their response.

**Enthusiasm really matters** and overcomes small things going wrong.

**Always end early** so that everyone remains engaged until the end and do not switch their focus to worrying about picking up a child, getting to surgery, etc. This starts at the **planning** stage.

## Technology

Good use of technology can be really helpful:

- monitor/iPad in front of you – so you can see what's going on behind you on the screen
- countdown timer – or clock, or a colleague holding up signs e.g. '5 minutes', red and yellow cards
- remote control – enables freedom of movement, rather than stand next to laptop
- microphone – if needed, practise, and hide the wires
- lectern – decide whether to stand behind it, or move away from it

## General points

Be enthusiastic and appear confident: the audience is always attuned to **how** you say something, even if they do not retain the words you say.

Superficial things count, e.g. colour of shirt, appearance, manner, posture, attitude, etc. Avoid making distracting movements with hands, avoid distracting mannerisms and tics.

## Closing the Session

The way the session ends is crucial for translating the learning into future action. Plan this carefully, and if running late, consider omitting some content in order to ensure a good ending.

- finish a little early (never finish late), may need to non-verbally signal to speaker
- summarise what the group has achieved
- list unanswered questions or unresolved issues
- provide some quiet time for personal reflections, **during** the session (not afterwards)
- consider what evaluation you want, and do it **during** the session (not afterwards)
- end with an enthusiastic comment, so people leave feeling upbeat