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**Novice Speaker**

## *The short talk*

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The importance of professional speaking as a skill can no-more be emphasised than within the training expectations of the podiatric surgeon. This article in fact has been produced for a workshop at the 2020 annual Podiatric Surgery Conference. The detail here, while brief, is an overview and can be matched to any talk for any professional meeting. Meetings tend to have Chairman to keep a sense of order and time where multiple speakers are engaged.

**It is not PowerPoint at fault but the person using PowerPoint**

# **A need for emerging training in public speaking**

There is an expectation of all trainee podiatric surgeons to not just be able to represent themselves at professional meetings but to showcase their department as part of our national training scheme. It might seem curious that no formal training has been introduced within the College of Podiatry, save perhaps personal guidance from tutors. For the most part the idea of copying remains the most likely way that youngest, or not so young, trainees gain experience. Delve a little deeper and the

chance arises that for the older members of this group of professionals that we mirrored the speakers that came from the USA with their slick 35mm dual projection slides.

# **Short talks**

The short talk suffers most from lack of insight by many speakers and yet conferences in podiatry are fast following models that emulate the TED talk.

Because of the short span of audience concentration, the **T.E.D.** talk has observed a rule to talk for no longer than 18 minutes.

TED stands for *technology, entertainment and design* and came about in 1984 being conceived by Richard Wurman in the USA.

Greta Thunberg, the teenager who brought global warming into focus at the age of 15 was respected for her passionate and punchy presentation. She used a TED talk without slides. The talk went viral using a single theme. Her message was clear – *the environment is being ruined for the next generation. Don’t leave it later to do something, do it now!* Many other well know orators use TED talks to convey similar well themed messages.

And so as a novice it is unlikely that you will be invited to give a plenary talk allowing 40 minutes, and by today’s standards is super generous. The time allocation is often set between **10-15 minutes[[1]](#endnote-1)**.

As a general observation, from experience, short talks are far more challenging than long ones, purely as the timer ticks and there is less allowance for slippage. Additionally, the short talk speaker may be exposed to poor chairmanship or the ever greater fear from the speaker beforehand who has no sense of timing and allows their talk to overrun. Truncated talks are a nightmare to manage when you have planned to the exact minute.

If we consider the slides as a ‘deck of cards’, we suddenly find it all too easy to overpopulate the talk.

## **Following your Peers**

We emulate others who we respect and there is nothing at fault with this philosophy. The difference between an experienced speaker and a novice is like trying to swim the English Channel after only completing your 25 metre certificate. Consultants and other speakers may undertake regular talks on a circuit, and will have presented for years. Their easy style is drawn from dogged hours of preparation marinated in the experience of performing podiatric management daily for several decades.

# **The Ground Rules**

Those expected to give a conference talk may find some assistance in knowing that there are ground rules that can guide and improve technique whilst instilling confidence. Your talk boils down to following a few rules your presentation run smoothly.

Packing a subject into a short period of engagement becomes the first obstacle. What to keep in? What to leave out? Avoiding being too superficial or risking overshooting. These are just some of the concerns novices will experience.

**Don’t use a text slide to make up for lost words**

That slide of a podiatric condition just begs to be included; *but is it relevant, and will it bring value to the talk?*

It is all too easy to spend a disproportionate time on ***IMAGES*** rather than develop the narrative. To compensate for time lost, those spoken words are placed as chunks of sentences onto our slides. This act can raise the veiled hope that the audience will read what we might not have said and therefore save time on our delivery. This does not work!

## **Obstacles**

One of your next obstacles is fear, stage fright and those so called nerves. The fear of adverse judgement, forgetting to say something you later regret omitting is only part of the scenario. Letting down your colleagues in the department hangs heavily on your subconscious state. As the day draws ever closer doubts dismantle your confidence. From your perspective when all seems fine and the talk should hang together, your brain stops functioning and the words fail to come out. Then, confronted with anxiety about performing well, you have a remote control for your slide programme in one hand. As the slides accidently fast forwards several slots your presentation sequence is knocked off course. You glance up at the screen and panic as your try to reverse the slide.

Unfamiliarity with this plastic box of tricks makes you realise that you are not familiar with the technology which you now find incredibly sensitive to touch. You wrestle for control and lose the plot.

Finally, that slide you are looking for is identified and you turn to read the words so carefully crafted in different styles and colour with a sprinkling of bullet dots, dashes, hashes and ticks. The words give you comfort as you read the slide. In turning away from the audience, as any actor would tell you, your voice is lost. Any effort that you have made to read from your ***TEXT IMAGE*** creates distraction. With hands ever clutched to their social media gadgets the disinterested delegate, having scanned the very slide you intend to read, drift to their mini key pad on a Smart phone. As wonderful as social media tools are they can be the bane of the conference speaker.

Plan your talk as a story which means it has a start, middle and end.

# **The Three P’s**

There is only one way to produce a talk that engages and retains the audience’s attention and that is to produce a talk designed to resonate interest with a well honed delivery.

**Plan, Prepare and Practice = Quality Presentation (delivery)**

This mantra fits all talks but in this article we will keep to the proposed 10-15-minute slot.

## **Plan**

Ensure that you start to plan your talk well ahead of the date of the conference. Last minute preparations are a sure way to make you look like an amateur.

The subject matter and title should be prepared carefully, selecting material that fits the meeting’s need, the audience, adds value to the clinical practice of colleagues.

Avoid old material or unnecessary recapitulation. Your audience can access older material without your help. Plan your talk as a story which means it has a start, middle and end. *Tell them* (the audience) *what you intend to tell them, tell them, then remind them what you said*. This is an old teacher’s viewpoint.

***Research***

It may take you more than 30 hours to assemble content for a new talk. Don’t be shocked by how much time you may need. Think of this as writing up a research paper. Attitudes to how much time to spend is personal and some may need more, some less.

You need to include the most recent references. The material you gather is rough and part of your initial preparation.

Allow for more material than you need and when you plan. Do not include anything that does not fit the title and flow. The collection of more material can be used for question time, as this is where you can wow your colleagues. Don’t put everything in.

***The Story Board***

The slide deck can be used as a draft story board to plan your talk, but if you prefer, draw your story out on paper. Forming a pictorial story is one of the positives behind PowerPoint, now perhaps the most popular system podiatrists currently use.

Film directors use a story board to highlight the key stages of a story. The sequence of your points can be organised so when you plan the delivery you have an aid memoire. PowerPoint is user friendly but don’t go mad!

***The Most Powerful slide***

Your deck will have a title, images, maybe some text and blockers (black slides). The latter should be used to allow you to speak without any interruption from images or text. This is the ultimate slide that delivers your personality and personal message. Used wisely it is the most powerful slide in the deck.

engage your audience with something different

## **Prepare**

***Staying on track***

The content comes from your initial research so ensure that it is appropriate and in proportion with your theme. You can drop and pick up at any point your preparation and planning. This allows you to juggle other parts of your life-work balance. DO use a diary to set out your target objectives to stay on track;

|  |
| --- |
| 1. Title, summary of talk completed by? 2. Story line completed by? 3. First run through completed? 4. Completed editing of slides and practiced talk by? 5. Final run through during last week… |

***The Start***

Prepare a powerful start. It may be only 1-2 minutes long but engage your audience with something different. Give the talk a direction and offer up a single message or theme.

Use a blocker and find an anecdote that relates to the direction of the story, or provide a quality image that resonates with the story line but avoids overlapping with what you wish to say.

Avoid jokes as a rule of thumb. They can be used only if they add to the talk. Avoid pictures of family, holidays, colleagues in embarrassing poses. It is easy to insult your audience with such inclusions that are rarely relevant. And, moreover do not use jokes for your maiden talk.

With only ten to fifteen minutes only ***one theme*** can be handled, and ***one key message*** at most. Provide more than one theme and the audience will be lost in a short talk.

You will find the effort to prepare the start of the talk is disproportional to the remaining sections. The end must also be carefully considered to avoid the talk flattening out.

The middle section is where all the detail sits. So in some ways you introduce the material with an opener to highlight the value. Deliver the material substance and then conclude with picking out the most salient areas that the talk has provided.

***Slides to fit***

The slide deck must fit the narrative without duplicating the spoken message. Visual material in image form should re-inforce what is said to emphasise your story.

**Don’t learn your talk, learn the order in which it should be assembled for your delivery.**

## **Practise**

Once the material you have researched has been edited and refined bring together both the content and slides. If you fail to practise you will not see where your talk becomes stuck, irrelevant, and difficult to deliver. Continue to practise until you find that the talk runs smoothly.

If you are talking for 10 minutes, plan to finish in 8.5. If you are delivering a talk for 15 minutes, then plan for 12 minutes.

Not all chairman are good at keeping time and not all speakers are good at staying within their allocated slot. Never find yourself running out of time and then having to rush.

Clicking slides faster does nothing for your audience to speed up for lost time. Always cut out material that is superfluous. Where there is no clear message, cut it out; either narrative or an image, or both. Removing unhelpful images can cut time back in your favour.

***Slides & bullet points***

Remember this rule…

Every slide must have a purpose, a value. One point, one slide. Don’t expect a slide to tell more than one point. Do not rely on slides for your talk, especially text. Avoid bullet points before speaking and use these for summary only. Do not read out bullet points.

If bullet points are used animate each line so only one line is visible at a time. PowerPoint allows this facility and it is underused. I you have to use bullet points, then:-

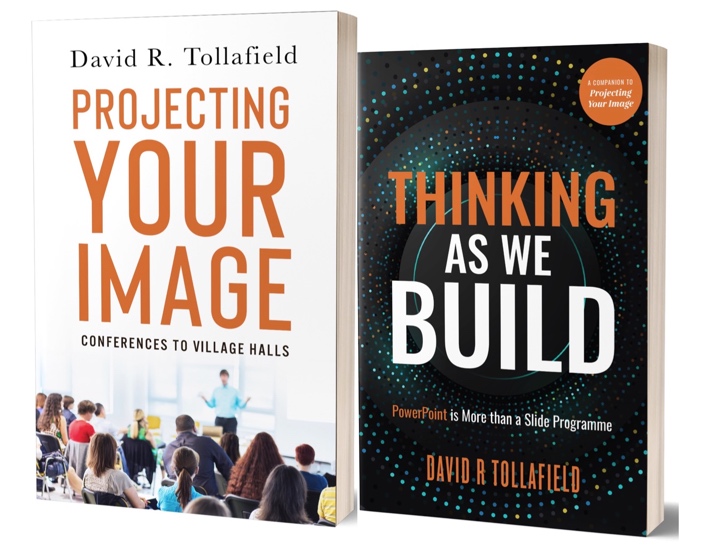
**The maximum number of bullet points should be five. In any line use no more than five words. And so the rule of five is established.**

While the rule above is a suggestion it is even better to avoid bullet points altogether.

***End note***

These are brief notes to guide the novice but for much greater detail join a workshop or use the two reference books below available from [AMAZON BOOKS](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=TOLLAFIELD&ref=nb_sb_noss_2) as these have been written with the podiatry audience in mind, although not exclusive to podiatry speakers.

Even if you are not a natural speaker, with good planning, preparation and practise you can achieve a real sense of satisfaction and achievement.



1. The College of Podiatry, Surgical Faculty talks for novices are currently 10 minutes so even shorter than a traditional TED talk. You may be told not to use more than 10 slides but the real advice is do not use text slides as images can be helpful and often allow a talk to move faster if woven in with words. The advice for a novice is to not rely on the deck of slides and have a back card system. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)