Speaking at Medical Meetings:
Presentation of a Paper

1. Aim of a presentation

Researchers and scientists are permanently searching for a chance to present results of their work at various international conferences, seminars and other working meetings. When giving a presentation it is essential to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve, e.g. to inform the audience about essential facts, to explain your attitudes, or persuade them about your proposals. The presentation of a scientific paper requires a special preparation, both linguistic and material. You may know the subject of your talk thoroughly, but your presentation may be incomprehensible for a number of reasons.

2. How to make your presentation successful

Speaking in public is stressful for many people. And speaking in public in a foreign language is doubly stressful and poses particular problems. There are only few of us that are born orators but speaking in public is a skill we have to learn. It is quite common that your mouth stops producing water and your tongue becomes very dry. Advice: Do not forget to take a glass of water at the speaker’s desk to prevent extreme dryness in your mouth.

2.1 Speaking

When speaking it is important to try to be clear, interesting, concise, and confident. The lecturer may, for instance, try to overcome nervousness by speaking too quickly, too silently, too cautiously, or even in an exaggerative way. The talk may be read verbatim instead of presented in a more loose-textured way. The way a person speaks can influence the audience’s understanding.

2.2 Way of speaking

Speed is the second major factor in making ourselves understood. People learning a foreign language (particularly in the early stages) find that the speakers of that language seem to talk fast. But the same thing can also happen in reverse: native listeners sometimes have difficulty in understanding a foreign speaker’s English and say it is because they talk too quickly. Speed
is a crucial aspect of successful performance in meetings in a foreign language. The speed of speaker’s talk has to be appropriate, with clear pronunciation of all expressions. Also the appropriate loudness of your speech is very important.

2.3 Logical sequencing

When preparing the paper keep in mind the type of audience you will address, the amount of information you want to deliver. A research, technical or scientific paper is not the place for creative or artistic writing, but for the organized, logical, deliberate dissemination of knowledge. Short, clearly worded sentences are preferred. Presenters should formulate sentences independently, in their own words, while complicated linguistic and lexical structures should be avoided. When presenting a professional topic, oral referencing is assumed, not reading from a pre-prepared displayed window.

2.4 Structure of a presentation

Structurally a talk is divided into several sections, at least into three: the beginning, the body of presentation and closing the presentation. At the beginning it is usual to greet an audience. You can also thank the chairperson. (Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen). After greeting phrases the presenter introduces the topic of the presentation (no details). Tell the audience what you’re going to say, say it, then tell the audience what you’ve said. A presentation should have clear and coherent structure and cover the points you wish to make in a logical order. Also, when you need to move from one section to another or even from one point to another, there must be some signal to the listeners that this shift is taking place. Outline structure of your talk and provide guidelines on questions. Towards the end of a talk it is necessary summarize the main points of your presentation. It is not reasonable to introduce more information in the final section. At the end of presentation thank the audience for their attention and invite questions. Be ready to answer questions in a polite and diplomatic way if necessary.

2.5 Way of presentation delivery

Stand rather than sit and be aware of any gestures that might irritate your audience. Be enthusiastic when presenting, show your interest in the subject matter to carry your audience along. Keep eye contact with your audience in order to pick up signals of disinterest in which you can cut your presentation short.

2.6 Non-verbal behaviour

Remember that our spoken messages may be supplemented (or even changed) by the unspoken, non-verbal elements that are often called ‘body language’. Lack of eye-contact with the audience, a rigid stance on the platform, inappropriate facial expression, unnatural gestures, and monotone delivery can completely ruin your presentation. Of course, speakers cannot look at everyone in the audience all the time and so they seem to adopt one of the various alternatives:

a) look at one person all the time;
b) look at some people most of the time;
c) look at nobody e.g. by looking over the audience’s heads at the wall;
d) look at all the listeners some of the time.

The most effective and least obvious strategy may be to try to remember to look at different individuals at different points in the presentation. This is not easy; most of us tend to pick out one person in the group – for example, one who happens to nod or to look interested early on – and to continue to direct our gaze at them. Taking option d) could have the positive effect that
everybody feels they are getting individual attention. However, there is a risk that in making a conscious effort to distribute eye contact as equally as possible among the listeners, we end up doing it too mechanically, ‘sweeping’ the audience from left to right and back again like a radar dish. If you decide to use some form of visual aid, e.g. the power-point, don’t forget to talk to the audience, rather than looking only at the visual.

Not only eye contact with the audience is important, but also the total impression of the speaker. Be aware that shifting the weight from foot to foot, scratching in speaker’s head, touching the nose or any other part of the speaker’s body can leave rather negative than positive impressions of your presentation.

2.7 Using visual aids

Use your visual aids with confidence. Visual aids (poster, video, power point) provide your audience with time to absorb information from them and are a useful support to a spoken presentation; in particular they are an effective means of showing relationships, presenting statistical data or summarizing information. They should be used as an integral part of the presentation. They cannot simply be pinned on the board or displayed on the screen without being used at all. On the other hand, keep in mind: firstly, they are intended to aid your oral presentation, not to dominate what you say; secondly, they are visual, so they need to be clear, simple and legible. There must not be too much information because the details must be well seen from the distance.

2.8 Using notes

The notes should be organized in a brief form containing the information that is absolutely necessary for the presenter. The best way is to prepare a set of small numbered cards that can easily be held in the hand. It is not good to have the whole script in the hand because the needed information is often difficult to find and looking for it causes holdups and has a negative influence on the presentation. If the paper is read, therefore, instead of using notes, special preparation is necessary to make it varied and interesting, and to give a sense of real interaction with the listeners.

2.9 Rehearsal

Timing is critical. Practise your presentation. This will give you a chance to identify weak points and check the timing because it can be critical if time limit cannot be fulfilled. At a meeting the presenters usually share an approximately equal portion of the allocated time for individual presentations. Bear in mind that you have no more than 15 - 20 minutes for your talk. In general a presentation takes about 25 - 50 % more time when you do it for real than when you rehearse it. Rehearse means not just to read it but to practice giving the talk aloud as you would in front of the audience. Time yourself; most people underestimate how long the presentation will take. Knowing in advance how much detail to cut out is a great advantage.

If you are using a projector, power-point or flipchart, you need to display the visual aid long enough for the audience to read and understand the information. Make a point of checking that the audience has had enough time to take it in before you move on to the next item.

2.10 Frequent mistakes of Slovak students

There is huge phonetic interference between English and Latin medical terms. Check the pronunciation of all expressions you are not sure in English but you know from Latin. A few examples:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aorta</td>
<td>[eɪˈɔːtə]</td>
<td>aorta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determine</td>
<td>[dɪˈtɜr mɪn]</td>
<td>určiť</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examine</td>
<td>[ɪɡˈzæmɪn]</td>
<td>vyšetriť; skúšať</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fatal</td>
<td>[ˈfɛtəl]</td>
<td>fatálny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>femur</td>
<td>[ˈfiː mər]</td>
<td>femur; stehnová kost’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fracture</td>
<td>[ˈfræktʃə]</td>
<td>zlomenina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humerus</td>
<td>[ˈhjuːmərs]</td>
<td>humerus; ramenná kost’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>procedure</td>
<td>[prəˈsiːdʒə]</td>
<td>procedúra; postup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>region</td>
<td>[ˈriːdʒən]</td>
<td>oblast’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The more important problem is the **word stress**. If we produce a word with reasonably correct pronunciation but with incorrectly placed stress, the listeners are likely not to understand what we said or to understand something different to what we meant. Examples are the words:

- **desert** [ˈdezət] (púšť) versus **desert** [dɪˈzɜːt] (utieť, dezertovať);
- **eligible** [ɪˈlɪdʒəbəl] (vhodný) vs **illegible** [ɪˈlɛdʒɪbəl] (nečitateľný);
- **impotent** [ɪmˈpətənt] (bezmocný) vs **important** [ɪmˈpɔːtənt] (dôležitý);
- **invalid** [ɪnˈvælɪd] (neschopný pohybu) vs **valid** [ɪnˈvælɪd] (neplatný);
- **object** [ˈɒbdʒɪkt] (vec) vs **object** [əbˈdʒɛkt] (namietať);
- **project** [ˈprɒdʒ ɛkt] (projekt, schema) vs **project** [prəˈdʒɛkt] (premietať)

where the difference in the sounds of the two words is less important from the point of view of comprehension than the correct placement of the word stress.

Check also the English **spelling** of similar words of the same Latin origin that exist also in Slovak: špecifikovať = specify not specificitate; identifikovať = identify not identifier; unifikovať – unify not unifycate; klasifikovať = classify not classificate; verifikovať = verify not verifycate, etc.

In oral performance, sentences in the **active voice** are preferred to sentences in the passive voice. The passive voice is more typical for the written form of academic papers. Instead of:

- The samples were analysed,
- The rats were injected with the drug,

say:

- We analysed the samples.
- We injected the drug into the rats.

### 3. Useful phrases

**Signalling a start:**
- **Right, ladies and gentlemen. Shall we begin?**
- **OK, I'd like to begin by ...**
- **Right then, everybody ...**

**Greetings:**
- **Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen (not *Gentlemens)***
- **Dear colleagues.**
- **I'd like to say how happy I am to be here today.**
- **Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen**
I’d like first of all to thank the organizers of this meeting for inviting me here this evening. It is also a particular pleasure for me to pay my first visit to this beautiful city.

Introducing yourself:
- My name is Alena Šťastná. I am a language teacher at Jessenius Faculty of Medicine.
- I’d like to introduce myself. My name is ...

The objective of your presentation:
At this point the speaker introduces the topic of the presentation, but without going into details. Any slight changes which have been made to the title or topic of the paper should be introduced here.
- The title of my presentation is ... / In my presentation I will be talking about ...
- In my presentation I would like to inform you about ...
- My topic today is ... / My objective this afternoon is to inform you...
- My purpose / My aim today is to introduce you to... / I’m here today to give you...

The length of time your presentation will take:
- My presentation will last twenty minutes. / I will talk for fifteen minutes.

The body of presentation:
At the beginning of this part it is necessary to say to the audience how the presentation is going to be structured (i.e. which parts the presentation consists of, how they are divided, etc.). Advice: It is useful to use power-point.
- My presentation is split into three key areas: ...
- I have divided my talk/topic into three sections: ...
- My first point concerns ... / The first part of my talk will concern ...
- I’d like firstly to talk about ...
- My second point concerns ... / The second part will concern ...
- My third point concerns ... / In the third part I deal with the question of ...

Or we can use the following listing expressions:
- Firstly, ..... secondly, ..... thirdly, ..... and finally/lastly or
- First / To begin with ... Second / Next / Then / After this ...
- Finally, I’d like to talk a little about ...

Saying when your audience may ask questions:
- There will be time for questions at the end...
- Please feel free to interrupt me as I go along.

Opening the main section:
- Let me start by posing the question .... / I’d like to begin by suggesting that ...
- I’d like to start by drawing your attention to ... / Let me begin by noting that ...
- What I want/intend to do is to talk about ... / I want to look at ... / I’d like to review ...
- I want to discuss ... / I’m going to analyse ... / I want to cover ... / I’d like to talk about ...
Moving to a new point:
When the speaker wants to move to a new point, it is important to signal this to the listeners with a ‘breathing space’. They are given the opportunity to reflect for a moment on the previous point and prepare for a new one. Pausing for a few seconds is a useful way of dividing one section or point from another. This can be accompanied by one of several verbal expressions:

- Let me turn now to the issue of ... / I’d like to turn now to the question of ...
- I’d like now to move on to ... / Let’s look now at the question of ...
- Let’s now move on to ... / I’d like to go on to ... / This brings me to ... / I now want to ...

Elaborating a point:
Some points need to be elaborated in more details or expanded into a main issue. Here are some ‘elaborating’ expressions:

- I’d like to look at this point in a bit more detail.
- Let me elaborate on this point ... / Let’s look at this problem in a bit more detail.

Giving examples:
Some points have to be explained in more details by giving some extra examples. This can be done by means of the following expressions:

- For example, ... / As an example, I would like to mention / to show you ...
- This is an example of ...

Adding:

- In addition ... / I might add that ... / Furthermore ... / Moreover ...

Postponing:
Sometimes during a talk you may need to delay description of a point until later on. Certain expressions indicate that you will not deal with a particular topic immediately, but will return to it later in the talk:

- I’ll be returning to this point later ... / I’ll be coming back to this point later ...
- As I’ll show later ... / I’ll come on to this later ... / As will be shown later ...
- Later I’ll come / I’ll be coming on to ...

Referring back:
A speaker, during the course of a talk, may refer to some previous point or theme. This is a useful device, because it gives a sense of continuity and wholeness to the presentation. By referring back, a speaker may repeat important information and provide greater coherence to the development of the talk.

- Let’s look back for a moment ... / To go back to ... / As I said before ...
- As I mentioned earlier ... / I’d like now to return to the question ...
- Getting back to the question of ...
- Coming back now to the issue which I raised earlier ...
- Can I now go back to the question I posed at the beginning?
Highlighting:
There is a group of expressions which may help the speaker to bring certain points to the foreground. They have the effect of verbally underlining an issue or creating unusual contrast for a particular point.
- The interesting / significant / important thing about ... is ... / The thing to remember is ...
- What you have to remember is ... / What we have to realize is ...
- What I find most interesting about ... is ...

Introducing visuals:
- I'd like you to look at this graph. / Let's have a look at this model.
- Let's turn to this map. / To illustrate my point let's look at some diagrams.

Dealing with interruptions:
- Perhaps I could return to that point later on? / If I might just finish?
- If you'd allow me to continue?

Indicators:
This group of expressions serves to indicate that a point of section has been satisfactorily completed and that a new point will be made. Alternatively, it may simple provide the speaker with a kind of springboard on which to pause before continuing.
- Okay ... / Right (then) ... / Good ... / Now (then) ... / Well (now) ... / Well (then) ...

Closing the presentation:
Towards the end of a talk it becomes necessary to sum up. The main aim of the talk should be recalled and major points touched upon. Usually, the summary contains one or two sentences of the previous content. Obviously, it would be unwise to introduce new information in this final section. It is more useful to provide information about future speaker’s work or research.
- In conclusion I would like to say ... / Just before concluding I'd like to say ...
- To sum up I would like to say that ... / To summarise my main points ...
- To end my presentation I would like to tell you that ... / Let me end by ...
- I'd like to conclude by reminding you that ... / I'd like to finish ...
- I would like to conclude my presentation by saying that ...
- In conclusion, may I remind you ...

Asking for questions and discussion:
- That’s all I have time for. Any questions?
- I think I’ll stop there to leave time for questions.
- That covers the main points. If you have comments or questions, I’ll be happy to hear them.
- Time is getting short so I’d better take questions now. / Feel free to ask me questions.
- I would be (more than) delighted / pleased to answer your questions.
- If you have any questions, feel free to ask them. / I'm sure you have many questions ...
- You no doubt have many questions ... / If there are any questions ...

Playing for time:
- That’s an interesting question. / I’m glad you asked that question.
- You've raised an important point there. / That's a difficult question.
Handling difficult questions:

Questions and answers are not always straightforward. It can sometimes happen that the speaker is not able to answer a question from the audience. It is not appropriate to simply say 'I don’t know'. There are some other ways out of this difficult situation.

- *I am sorry, but this is not my area.*
- *I am sorry, but I am not able to answer your question at the moment. Please contact me ...*
- *I am sorry, but I haven’t got any more information about this problem at the moment.*
- *I think I have to focus on (Y) rather than (X). / It’s too early for me to say whether ...*
- *I don’t have enough evidence to show that ...*
- *That’s not something I’ve had time to deal with, but ...*

Thanking for attention:

- *I would like to thank you for your attention.*
- *I’ll finish there. Thank you (for your attention).*
- *And let me finish there. Thank you.*
- *I’d like to thank you all for your participation.*

4. The structure and content of a power-point presentation

These instructions concern both the structure and content of presentation. Here are the most important ones:

- The presenters are advised to work preferably with foreign language materials and avoid translating Slovak texts into English if they want to avoid committing lexical, grammar or stylistic errors. In original texts proper English with the right vocabulary and sentence structure etc. is used.
- The information should be valid and based on the latest scientific research.
- The visual part of the presentation has to have a balanced text and graphic form. Too many visual and sound effects disturb the perception of the performance of the presenter.
- In the first slide, there must be name of the topic, name of the presenter and affiliation to an institution he/she is representing. In the second slide, there is a brief content introduced.
- Sources of each material used must be cited to avoid the presenter being accused of plagiarism.
- It is important to edit the visuals. There is nothing worse that compromises the professionalism of a presentation than seeing grammatical or spelling mistakes in the visuals.

Here is an example of a well-balanced presentation:
Correlation of inflammatory parameters and clinical symptoms in patients after septoplasty

MUDr. XXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX
Clinic of Otorhinolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery
University Hospital Martin
Jessenius Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University

Content

• Anatomy
• Septal deviation
• Causes
• Diagnosis
• Treatment
• Post-operative care
• Possible side effects
• Literature review

Anatomy of nasal cavity

• two chambers with a total length of 10 cm and a height of 5 cm
• surface area about 150 square cm, volume about 15 ml
• each of the two nasal cavities is demarcated by the nasal septum (osseous and cartilaginous parts) and a lateral wall on which the inferior, middle and superior nasal turbinates are located
• below and laterally from each turbinate - nasal passages = inferior, middle and superior meatus. Every meatus receives openings (ostia) either of nasolacrimal or paranasal duct
Nasal septum deviation

- Displacement of the nasal septum to one side
- **Severe deviation** – causes blockage of one side of the nose and reduce airflow = breathing problems
- **Symptoms** – most septal deformities result in no symptoms
- **Signs and symptoms of deviation**: obstruction of one or both nostrils and consecutive breathing difficulties, **nosebleeds** (dry mucosal surfaces), **facial pain**, **noisy breathing** during sleep, awareness of the nasal cycle (normal alternation of slight obstruction on one side), **preference** for sleeping on a particular side.

Causes

- A condition present at birth - some cases
- Injury to the nose - Trauma to the nose most commonly occurs during contact sports, rough play such as wrestling or automobile accidents.
- The normal aging process may affect nasal structures, worsening a deviated septum over time.

Diagnosis

- **Patient’s past history**
- **Physical examination**
  - anterior rhinoscopy
- **Supportive imaging methods**
  - X-ray, CT scan
Treatment

- **Conservative treatment with nasal sprays**
  including decongestants, antihistamines, or nasal corticosteroid is often used before considering a surgical approach = symptomatic therapy

- **Only curative therapy** – surgical septoplasty nowadays performed in general anesthesia

- **Possible complications** - Nasal septum perforation, incomplete correction with persistent nasal symptoms, external nasal deformity, septal hematoma and septal abscess, scarring inside the nose and nose bleeding, adhesions and synechiae between septal mucosa and lateral nasal wall, saddle nose (over-resection of the dorsal wall of the septal cartilage), dropped nasal (resection of the caudal margin)

Postoperative care

- **Specific, done by a surgeon**

- **Includes:**
  - nasal splints – (prevention of septal hematoma, minimize swelling, stabilize the cartilaginous septum in the new position, prevent synechiae)
  - nasal packing – (routinely used to prevent postoperative hemorrhage and septal hematoma, helps to stabilize the remaining cartilaginous septum)
  - antibiotic prophylaxis – (prevention of postoperative infections, upper airways are physiologically contaminated with bacterial flora)

Possible side effects

- **Nasal splints + nasal packing** – most of the patient report local discomfort and increased lacrimation, some report headaches, toothache, ear pain + unpleasant removal

- **Broad-spectrum antibiotics** – dysmikroba in digestive organs and consecutive digestion problems (mostly diarrhea)
Conclusion

- Septal splints routinely used and considered as a valuable alternative of nasal packing.
- Most authors reported no significantly increased occurrence of postoperative local complications in patients without nasal packing. Nasal packing should be reserved only for patients with higher risk of postoperative bleeding.
- Commonly used antibiotic prophylaxis provides no benefit for patients without severe comorbidities. Bacteremia can occur relatively often after septoplasty, reasonable use of antibiotic prophylaxis in patients with cardiovascular problems.

References


Thank you for your attention.
References:


