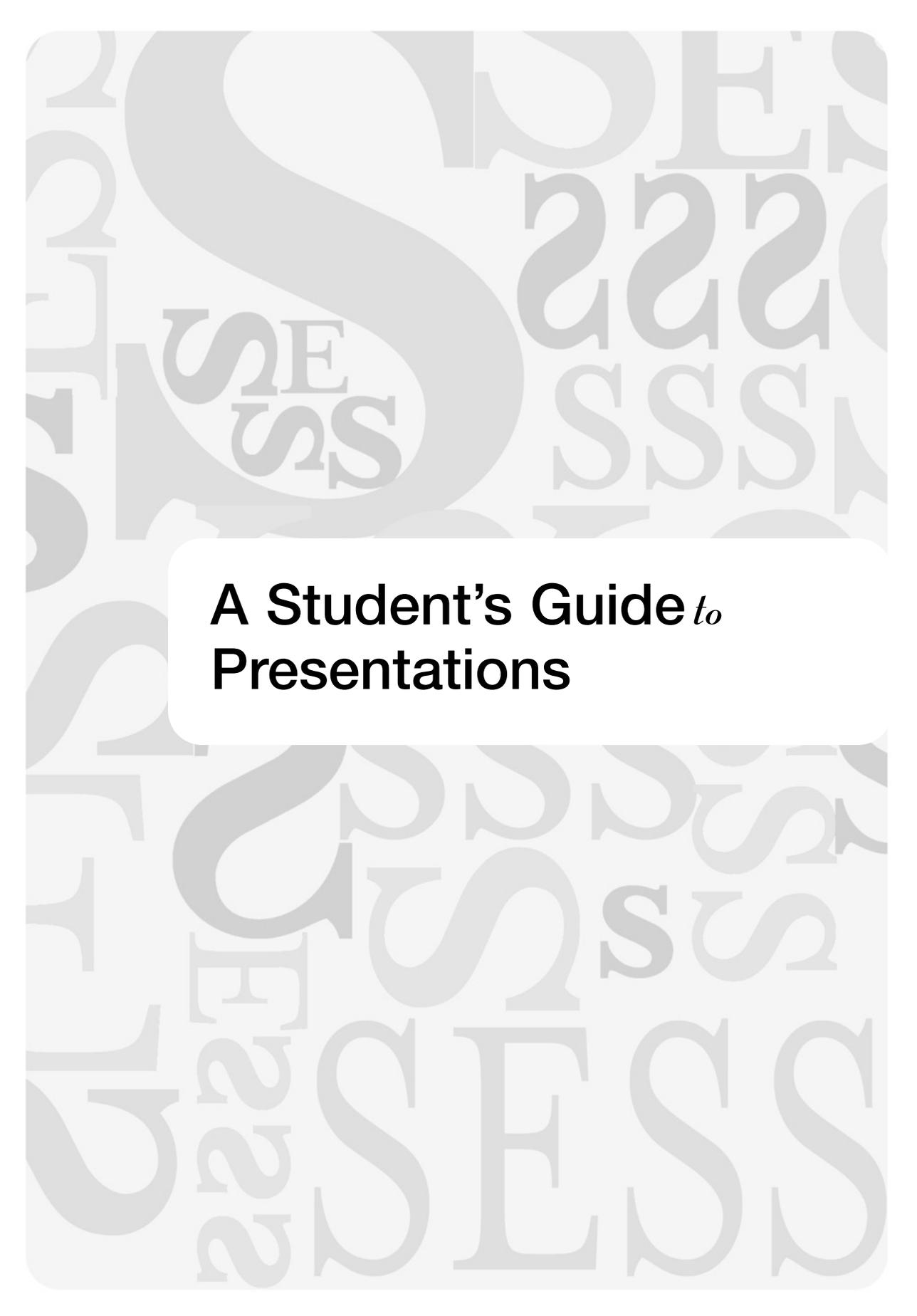


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**A Student's Guide to
Presentations** *Making your
Presentation Count*

Barbara Chivers & Michael Shoollbred



**A Student's Guide *to*
Presentations**

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Barbara Chivers and Michael Shoolbred



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Barbara Chivers and Michael Shoolbred
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Introduction

If you are a student in further or higher education and are sometimes asked to deliver presentations, you will find this book useful. Student presentations are used increasingly on educational courses to encourage students to be more active in their own learning. Many student presentations are used by tutors to assess student understanding, knowledge and progress in modules, and at important stages on academic and vocational courses. Presentations also help students to prepare for employment in organizations that place an increasing value on effective presentation skills. During the last few years we have noticed an increasing trend for presentations to be used by employers as part of their recruitment and selection procedures. This book aims to support you when you are preparing and delivering these presentations. We hope it will help you to cope with what is often a stressful part of your course.

How to use this book

We have tried to write this book in a style that is easy to read and understand. We realize that when you are busy preparing your presentations, most of your time will be used researching and reading about the topic, rather than on how to deliver good presentations. We also recognize that you will probably not be able to read the book in chapter order so each of the specialist chapters provides a concise guide to the theme and closes with a brief list of Key Principles for that theme. Frequent links are made between all chapters where they are relevant. We do suggest however, that you begin by reading Chapters 1 and 2 which provide a context for all of the other chapters.

Chapter summaries

- **Chapter 1 Why do a Presentation?** describes the many purposes, problems and benefits of student presentations. In the final part of this chapter, we outline six examples of student presentations. These are structured under several headings that will help you to identify parts of each example similar to your own experiences. You may be able to construct an example close to your own experience by using these different parts.
- **Chapter 2 What Makes an Effective Presentation?** outlines the characteristics of effective presentations and is intended to be used as an overview to encourage you to create a presentation that is effective, rather than just working to complete your presentation.

- **Chapter 3 Improving Individual Performance** suggests how to improve your own performance during presentations. This is a frequent cause of anxiety for students but this chapter will help you to become more confident.
- **Chapter 4 Presenting as Part of a Group** concentrates on how to work well in a group. Group presentations are used frequently on academic courses. This chapter explains the benefits and problems in group working and suggests techniques for working well together.
- **Chapter 5 Ten Steps for Preparing your Presentation** is a useful stand alone chapter on the tasks you need to work on to complete your presentation. It does however make useful links to all of the other chapters.
- **Chapter 6 Understanding your Audience** encourages you to think about who will be watching your presentation and why they are there. You may think this has little relevance to a student situation but we think you will find many useful points to consider in this chapter.
- **Chapter 7 Developing Content and Structure** advises you how to research and choose relevant content. It also discusses how to create a structure that helps the presentation to be understood by the audience.
- **Chapter 8 Creating Visual Aids and Handouts** discusses how you can use these items to improve your presentation.
- **Chapter 9 Using PowerPoint Effectively.** Many students overuse PowerPoint, resulting in tedious presentations. This chapter helps you to think about the best ways of using it to enhance rather than dominate your presentation.
- **Chapter 10 Learning from Presentations** explores how you can learn through delivering or watching presentations. Most presentations are used for some learning purpose and thinking about this will also help you to improve your communication and presentation skills.
- **Chapter 11 Delivering a Presentation as Part of an Interview** is the final chapter and has been included as a response to the increasing trend for including presentations as part of an interview for job recruitment. This chapter draws on student experiences to help you deliver effective presentations in an interview situation.
We have included three Appendices.
- **Appendix 1 Presenting Numbers Effectively** provides a list of key points about how to use and present numeric data in your presentations.
- **Appendix 2 Copyright and Plagiarism** is a brief outline of the main points needed to comply with good academic practice.
- **Appendix 3 Presentation Skills Guidelines** is a useful checklist of key points from all of the chapters.

Finally, this book is a practical guide that is informed by our research and experience of working with students giving presentations for a variety of purposes. We hope the book helps you to enjoy giving presentations and to use them as opportunities for improving your knowledge and your communication and presentation skills. We welcome feedback on the contents with suggested improvements for future editions.

1

Why do a Presentation?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Reading this chapter will help you to:

- develop your understanding of the purposes of student presentations
- accept the benefits of delivering these presentations
- understand some of the reasons why presentations can be stressful
- recognize different examples of student presentations

This chapter provides a general overview of student presentations. Even though these presentations are very diverse, it is useful at this stage of the book to construct a general understanding of student presentations. We suggest that you read this chapter as an introduction to the book, before deciding which of the other chapters have relevance for your needs and situation.

Student presentations usually involve an individual or group of students presenting to academic staff, student peers or other invited audiences. Understanding the true purpose of your presentation can help you to prepare and deliver it more effectively.

Student presentations might include:

- Group and individual presentations for a given topic as part of a module assessment.
- Seminar presentations giving a paper to an academic or your peers for the purpose of teaching or showing evidence of your understanding of the topic.
- Providing an overview of some research carried out by you or your group.
- Demonstrating the use of a piece of equipment or software such as PowerPoint to show that you have developed the essential skills to use it appropriately.

- Dissertation-related presentations and Vivas to demonstrate your ability to manage a research project.
- A job interview where you have been asked to present for several minutes on a given topic.

We outline some examples of these later in the chapter. We hope you will find them useful for improving your understanding of the factors that need to be considered when developing your presentations. To help you achieve the learning objectives for this chapter we have divided it into four parts:

- 1 Purposes of student presentations.
- 2 Pressures and problems of giving presentations.
- 3 Benefits of student presentations.
- 4 Examples of student presentations.

1 Purposes of student presentations

There are many reasons why students are asked to give presentations and these will be influenced by your academic course and situational and organizational factors. The purpose and circumstances of your presentation will influence its style, content and structure. Most presentations will involve a combination of purposes but it may be helpful to think about the different features of each of these presentations.

Student presentations may be given for the purposes of:

- Advocacy/persuasion
- Training
- Teaching and learning
- Informing
- Assessment

By exploring these purposes, we can begin to understand the style that will need to be developed.

Advocacy/persuasion

This presentation usually involves persuading members of the audience to take some action or make a decision. Examples could include:

- support a cause
- join a student society

- vote for an individual to take up a role on a committee
- buy a product or service
- choose the best candidate for the job

This type of presentation will need a combination of relevant factual content delivered in a convincing and confident style. You will need to communicate clearly and succinctly. Some emotions such as enthusiasm or passion may be used in your delivery if you think this is appropriate, but you need to make sure that you do not embarrass yourself or the audience. You may also have to deal with some emotional reactions from the audience such as anger or ridicule. You will need to give a confident performance and deal effectively with their comments, manage the crowd and limit any negative reactions. As with all types of presentations it is crucial to keep control, especially when there are contributions and responses from the audience. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3. Example 6 at the end of this chapter involves some advocacy by persuading the recruitment panel that you are the best candidate for the job.

Training

This type of presentation includes examples where students may demonstrate their skills in the use of equipment and also their skills as a trainer or teacher. These types of presentations may be used to practise, demonstrate and eventually assess the level of these skills and techniques. Examples include:

- Demonstrating the use of a piece of equipment
- Demonstrating a medical procedure
- Training someone in the use of a software package
- Training a novice to use a piece of first aid equipment
- Demonstrating your communication skills as a trainer
- Demonstrating professional practice such as an interview technique, counselling skills or classroom management techniques.

In many vocational and professional courses, students have to learn the skills to use a range of equipment or demonstrate their communication skills. Presentations can also be used on these courses as opportunities for practice and rehearsal before the student is formally assessed and expected to perform in real life situations such as during their placements or probationary periods in employment.

Many first aid courses use this technique so that the participants can develop the key skills needed for proficiency. Health courses such as radiography are examples where the student will have to demonstrate the use of the equipment to a high level of proficiency before they work with patients.

Nurses and other health professionals need to learn the training techniques to communicate effectively on health promotion programmes. These techniques can be developed and practised in this type of presentation which can offer 'safe spaces' in which to develop these skills.

If you can think of presentations as opportunities for your own development, they may seem less daunting to you and indeed, this approach may help you to gain more benefit from preparing and delivering your presentations.

Immediate feedback can be an integral part of this type of presentation especially on the occasions when no formal assessment is given. The tutor may interrupt the session to ask for clarification or suggest an improvement that could be rehearsed several times until the student becomes more confident. Members of the audience may suggest ideas and changes for improvement. Role playing may be used so that students explore the skill or issue from a range of perspectives, then share ideas in a plenary session. Training presentations should result in learning for all the participants but we discuss this below. Examples 4 and 5, at the end of this chapter, are this type of presentation.

Teaching and learning

Almost all presentations should have some elements of teaching and learning as part of their purpose. However for the purposes of this book it is useful to explore this as a specific purpose and to do this we have chosen a few examples where presentations are used for:

- Developing a deeper understanding of a topic or text
- Covering specific areas of the curriculum in more detail
- Explaining an experiment or cooking process
- Inviting a visiting expert to speak on a given topic

The content of this presentation is usually focused on a topic area relevant to a course or module being studied. This may involve new research and knowledge that extends how the topic has previously been taught by the tutors. It may also involve 'repackaging' knowledge already covered or further exploration of the topic by looking at different perspectives. An example of this could be where a group of students are asked to present on the topic 'Globalization' from the different perspectives of a farmer in a developing country, a small manufacturing organization in England and a multinational organization that has offices on four continents. Sometimes, these types of student presentations are used to explore areas of a curriculum in greater detail than has been covered in lectures. This helps the presenters to develop deeper knowledge and the audience to broaden their understanding of the topic and may be the reason why the

academic has included presentations in the module. All of the examples at the end of this chapter incorporate some teaching and learning but Examples 2, 3 and 4 have a strong teaching and learning purpose.

Informing

In some circumstances this could be seen as similar to teaching but the aim of this type of presentation could be to communicate as much information as possible in the time available. The purpose of the presentation may be to:

- Describe a new policy
- Outline a set of instructions
- Give a progress report on some research or development

This type of presentation is used in many organizations where students or employees are expected to report progress at key stages of a project. It provides evidence of ongoing work and can be used as a subtle measure of control where individuals work to meet deadlines set for the submission dates for these progress reports. Many employers expect academic courses to have provided opportunities for students to develop their presentation skills so that they could communicate effectively in the organizational environment.

For a student situation, a Viva could have this purpose where the function is to present your research aims and results then answer questions from the audience. Examples 1 and 5 in this chapter describe this type of presentation.

Assessment

Student presentations are frequently assessed and may be awarded a percentage of the marks that contribute to the overall module mark and credits. However, some presentations may not be assessed but used as an opportunity for students to practise and further develop their presentation skills, without the anxiety of earning marks for the quality of their performance. There is a tension here for students, as most presentations need quite a lot of preparation time. This time may only be seen as worthwhile if it earns marks towards the completion of a unit or module of study. Equally, it can influence students to withdraw from non-assessed presentations or use a minimum of effort for such events, seeing them as less important for their learning and achievement. This focus on marks earned, rather than experience gained, may influence some tutors to only use assessed presentations.

Use of assessment can have a positive advantage. For some students, presentations offer opportunities to earn a higher proportion of marks than they might achieve for the

written part of their assessment. They may be better communicators and presenters in their use of speech, visuals or technology than in a written mode. These students may feel they need this book less for the general ideas about presentation skills but can use it more for the suggestions about content development. We cover assessment in all the examples at the end of this chapter but discuss assessment in more detail in Chapter 9.

2 Pressures and problems of giving presentations

We intend this book to provide you with positive advice and encouragement but we do recognize that presentations are not always popular with students. We think it will be useful to outline some of the problems to reduce or even remove your fears.

- **I would prefer to write an essay rather than deliver a presentation!**

You may think presentations are more difficult to deliver than having to complete an essay or report for an assignment. They can certainly increase your anxiety levels and you may think that you actually have to work harder for a presentation than for an assignment. Whilst this may not be true, your higher anxiety levels may cause you to believe this and you may not use your time as effectively in the preparation, because of this anxiety.

You may feel more nervous about reading your work aloud in a presentation than the more private situation where an academic reads your written work alone and no-one from your peer group sees the quality of your work.

We discuss how to deal with this in Chapters 3 and 5. You might also find some useful advice in Chapter 6.

- **I only seem to learn from the content of my own presentations but not when I have to listen to other students. There is no point attending the other presentations!**

This is a frequent complaint from students and a real challenge to academics for how to use presentations as a good learning experience for everyone involved. We hope that using this book will help to eliminate this attitude but it is useful to remember that if you feel like this, so will your audience, therefore, think about what you can do to make sure that they learn something from your presentation and find it interesting! Chapter 10 will be useful to help with this problem. Chapter 6 provides some useful tips for keeping the audience involved and Chapter 7 will encourage you to think about developing content that is interesting and relevant to modules being studied.

- **I do not know enough about the topic to give a presentation!**

Presentations can also be stressful if you are asked to present on a topic about which you have only a limited knowledge. In these situations you may need to use a large amount of preparation time to develop new knowledge before you feel confident enough to prepare and plan the presentation. Whilst you may see this as stressful and

a disadvantage of presentations, in some circumstances, this is exactly why they are chosen as a method of assessment. They force you to develop new knowledge and to prepare well for the event. Use Chapter 5 to help you with this.

- **There is so much information on the topic I cannot decide what to include and what to leave out!**

In this situation, you may feel overwhelmed by the size of the topic and experience feelings of panic when you have to make decisions about the content. There will probably be some guidance and advice in tutorials to help you decide what to include and what to leave out. Chapter 7 will also help you to cope with this situation.

- **I am nervous of using technology in public**

To some extent, this is less of a problem for the younger students who will probably have developed higher levels of ICT skills at school, compared with mature students who may be less experienced. Using technology may be a real problem for mature students. Some presentations are designed to provide opportunities for practice. We outline an example of this within the purposes section on Training, earlier in this chapter. Chapters 8 and 9 will also be useful to help you deal with this problem and will help you to use technology to improve the presentation.

- **I am always nervous about speaking in a public situation**

Most people feel nervous about the public performance required for a presentation, even if the audience is only one or two people instead of a larger group. Whilst good preparation and rehearsal will help to reduce some of the nerves, it is only through practice that you will learn to use your nervousness in a positive way that helps your performance. Chapter 3 gives some useful tips. Some students say they feel more nervous when presenting to other students on their courses than when presenting to people who they do not know such as for a job interview. You may find it useful to think about whether judgment by your peers may seem more daunting than by strangers. Whichever preference you have, we discuss how to deal with an audience in Chapter 6.

- **Group presentations are usually a problem. I feel that I do more of the work than other group members!**

You may experience higher anxiety levels preparing for and delivering a group presentation than for an individual presentation. Problems with group behaviour may divert attention away from the real preparation tasks and more time can be spent arguing or discussing what needs to be done instead of actually doing the work needed to complete the preparation. These are discussed in Chapter 4 which offers suggestions for how to work well together.

- **I think I could earn higher marks for an individual presentation than for a group presentation!**

Sometimes this is experienced by students who have previously had problems working for a group presentation. You may believe that you could earn higher marks because you are more capable than other group members, or that the group pressures divert energy away from good content development. Whilst this may be true in some

situations, many tutors use group presentations as opportunities to develop the team working and project management skills that many employers say are essential in the workplace. On many academic courses the assessment procedures are monitored and adjusted to make sure that final marks reflect the true ability of the individual student rather than the group members, so a group mark may only be a small proportion of the total marks for the module.

In spite of these concerns, presentations are a frequent experience in education and you will probably have to deliver several on your courses, so it is useful to recognize the benefits as well as the problems. When presentations have been completed, students frequently claim to have enjoyed the experience and report feelings of exhilaration and a sense of achievement. We discuss these benefits briefly below.

3 Benefits of student presentations

As with the variety of purposes, the benefits of student presentations will be influenced by the situation but they can be summarized as providing opportunities for:

- Student-centred participation in their learning
- Developing new knowledge and different perspectives on a topic
- Practice in a known environment/situation
- Increasing confidence to speak and present in front of an audience
- Improving marks earned for a module assessment
- Developing a wide range of communication and presentation skills
- Preparation for skills needed in the workplace
- An exchange of roles and perspectives from audience to presenter

Student-centred participation in their learning

Presentations offer variety and challenges that contrast with regular delivery by an academic lecturer. Students can sometimes be more willing to learn from the poor and good performances of their peers than from their tutors. Presentations can also be used as an effective form of peer learning. By taking responsibility for preparing and delivering a presentation, you take an active role in the process of your learning.

Develop new knowledge and perspectives on a topic

Presentations offer opportunities for developing skills and knowledge together. This process can strengthen learning and enthusiasm for further knowledge. If the presentation

is effective, the audience should have learned something new and increased their interest about the topic. We sometimes remember information when we have heard it from an unusual source or one that is different. Tutors can learn new ideas from student perspectives which can influence their teaching and delivery.

Practise in a known environment/situation

Presentations offer opportunities for students to practise performing in a fairly safe environment. When you have to prepare several presentations on a course, you will begin to develop the essential skills and transfer these from presentation to presentation. The academic environment will probably be familiar to you. You might present in rooms where you attend lectures and other events and this can help to reduce some of your anxiety. If the audience is made up of other members of your cohort, they may be supportive because they can empathize with your feelings.

Increasing confidence to speak and present in front of an audience

Well-managed presentations, as part of academic courses, can be used developmentally to improve both skills and confidence levels. You may be able to demonstrate your personality in a way that is not possible as a passive listener in a lecture. Presentations can help you to be noticed and stand out from the rest of the group. They enable you to show your individuality. You can learn to deal with nervousness in a positive way that can help to reduce your fears and anxieties. With regular practice, you will improve your confidence and enter employment with some of the interpersonal and communication skills that employers value.

Improving marks earned for a module assessment

Sometimes, presentations give you opportunities for earning a higher percentage of marks than for written work alone. Students who prefer to speak rather than write, may be better communicators and presenters in their use of speech or visuals than in a written mode. This is because presentations use different intelligences in addition to the linguistic intelligence needed for essays and reports. In our experience some students are quite confident for their presentations and work better in group situations than on their own. These students may earn a higher total mark for the module where there is a combined assessment of presentation and written report, especially when the presentation earns up to 40 per cent of the module mark.