**Tips and tricks … for preparing a presentation for a scientific meeting**

The EAO’s annual scientific meeting features some of dentistry’s best-known speakers, discussing a variety of scientific and clinical topics. One of the goals of a successful scientific meeting is to bring together established speakers with those who have an important scientific or clinical message, but are at an earlier stage in their career. Getting this mix right is the key to creating a vibrant meeting that showcases emerging talent alongside established expertise.

Giving a presentation to a highly knowledgeable audience can be daunting. There are several criteria for success. The audience should be able to understand and follow the speaker’s arguments throughout; they should find the presentation entertaining; and they should be left with a clear conclusion and some practical take-home messages that they will retain for the future.

My approach to structuring a presentation is a little different from most people’s. It involves identifying a story that I can use as an analogy to help explain the clinical problem. The goal is to make the clinical and scientific elements easier to understand and remember, and also to add some humour. I have adopted this approach based on positive feedback from previous presentations. Several years ago I spoke about the criteria for selecting different implant systems and structured my presentation around a skier and their choice of skis. I linked the different types of skis to choosing the best implant for different situations. After five years I still meet people who recall the presentation and remember the skiing analogy. I think it made it easier for them to remember the clinical arguments, and hence achieve the learning objectives of the session.

As an invited speaker, it’s normal to be given a topic to speak on (rather than having the freedom to choose one yourself). For me, the first stage is to identify an appropriate story to illustrate the topic. I look for something with a strong narrative sequence that ends with a clear conclusion. I’m aware this approach is unusual and most colleagues start with the cases they have in mind and build a presentation round these. I prefer to do the opposite and match the cases to the narrative thread, breaking down the process of preparing a presentation into five stages:

1. **Choosing a story that I can use to illustrate my argument.**
2. **Identifying clinical cases that are relevant to the theme of the presentation but have not proceeded optimally.** This means finding cases where the outcome could be improved by following the recommended protocol.
3. **Gathering evidence for the treatment protocol and carrying out a literature review.**
4. **Identifying clinical cases that support the evidence-base and which illustrate a successful outcome.**
5. **Ensuring the presentation finishes with a clear conclusion.**

Using a story to support an argument can enhance associative learning. The audience is more likely to remember the non-clinical storyline, which then triggers a recollection of the associated clinical content.

I also believe a presentation often works best if it is formulated as a question that needs to be answered. The subject of my presentation at the EAO’s Dublin meeting was ‘Is hard and soft tissue grafting the key to success?’. Asking a question means the audience will clearly understand what is being discussed, and will expect to hear a series of arguments and a clear conclusion.

There are certain other techniques that can be helpful if you are preparing a presentation and don’t have much experience of conference speaking. To create a logical sequence of slides and to remind yourself what you want to say next, consider including a question at the bottom of each slide. You can then start the next slide by answering the question on the previous one. This technique works better than making notes to yourself or preparing a manuscript to read from. It is generally difficult to maintain the audience’s interest if you simply read out pre-prepared text.

Another technique is to include one or two complete sentences in each slide which you can then read out when the slide is displayed. This will provide the main framework for each slide, allowing you to elaborate on this core information without further notes.

When you have created the first draft of your presentation, go through it and see if any slides can be removed. If you repeat this process several times, you will probably find that several slides are not strictly necessary and your presentation still works without them. A presentation can be considered perfect when no more slides can be removed. This excellent piece of advice was given to me by Dr Franck Renouard. It is a powerful technique for making sure your presentation doesn’t include any unnecessary information that distracts from the main theme.

Bear in mind that your audience may have a short attention span and that people will also leave and join the presentation part way through. Introducing intermediate conclusions will make it easier for the audience to retain information. If your argument is divided into three parts, summarise after each part then give an overall conclusion at the end.

If you are an inexperienced speaker, I recommend that you rehearse your presentation by yourself, speaking out loud as if to a live audience and using the slides you have prepared. You may discover that your presentation takes more or less time to deliver than you expected. You can then refine it and re-rehearse it to make sure it is the right length.

Speaking at a scientific meeting can be daunting at first, but with preparation and experience it is enjoyable and rewarding. I hope these pointers will help those who are new to speaking at conferences gain the skills to become future presenters at EAO meetings.

Ronald Jung is Vice Chairman of the Department of Fixed & Removable Prosthodontics and Dental Material Sciences at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. He is a former member of the EAO Junior Committee and was elected to the EAO’s Board of Directors in 2012. At the EAO’s 2013 meeting in Dublin he gave a presentation entitled ‘Is hard and soft tissue grafting the key to success?’. This was part of the plenary session on ‘Extended defects in the aesthetic zone – dreams, nightmares, reality’.