

15 Tips for Successful Presentations

1. Snazzy titles don't make up for a lousy idea. Outcomes, content, description and title: developed in that order. A creative title may be helpful to lure people in, but if it's not backed by substantial learning outcomes, people will wish they were at another program. Be thoughtful about your learning outcomes. Consider:
 - a. What information do you want participants to gain?
 - b. What emotions do you want/need to stir?
 - c. What resources are you offering that they cannot get elsewhere?
 - d. How tangible are your learning outcomes?
 - e. How can outcomes be obtained outside of the Conference?
2. Don't plan a program or presentation that you wouldn't want to attend yourself.
3. Not every title has to have a colon: some titles are good on their own.
4. Make sure your program description matches your program. Changing learning outcomes, content, or presenters greatly changes the program. Cartwheels are entertaining, but substance matters: it's good to provide an interactive workshop, but you have a responsibility to educate the audience. Meet your responsibility.
5. When you conduct your workshop, don't assume your audience actually read your description. It's never a bad idea to review your outcomes to make sure everyone is on the same page as to what you'll be doing.
6. Know your audience. Be specific about the level of knowledge and experience of the participants. You can target experienced professionals, graduate students, and others. Remember that even though you select a target audience, anyone can attend your program. Prepare for the audience you expect to come, but also be willing to be flexible.
7. Only submit 12 proposals if you think you can do 12 workshops. While the chances of getting all your proposals accepted are relatively low, know your capacity to do a good workshop and to do multiple good workshops.
8. Prepare your program ahead of time. Have someone you trust review your content preferably before submission, but absolutely before you present. Participants can see right through a program that was thrown together in the hotel lobby 10 minutes before the presentation. Great presenters who are not prepared can still produce a bad workshop. You owe it to your audience to prepare well even if you are the best presenter ever.
9. Remember that the program or curriculum development experience is a professional development opportunity in itself! Think about who you want to learn from and with during that process. Don't be afraid to ask "seasoned professionals" to partner on a program proposal. If you're a little "green" ask someone to submit with you. Make sure they are someone who will support your own development as a professional. If you are a "seasoned professional," reach out to "young" professionals with opportunities to present. You have a responsibility to mentor future generations of the profession.

10. Use universal and inclusive language and terminology, and appropriate grammar. Everyone sitting in your session may not understand the “alphabet soup,” so be sure to clarify and explain. Do not use second person, quotation marks, exclamation marks, etc.

11. Build in the opportunity to either work in a group or turn and buzz with someone about the concepts or topics being presented or discussed. It helps participants make it personal and walk away saying, "I can use this," rather than "that was good information."

12. Presenters often come off as a little arrogant as if they know it all. Be humble. Some folks in the room might very well run circles around you either presenting or as topical experts. If we approach sessions like they will be contributors to the presentation rather than attendees, the outcome is usually better.

13. If you are presenting on a best practice at your university, make sure you cover how you can apply this program to another institution. Or, do some research on schools that are doing similar programs and share how it has worked elsewhere. Your audience can become very limited when the idea or concept is only being presented in one model (small institution or large public, etc).

14. If you are going to use a PowerPoint, use it wisely. A PowerPoint should enhance your presentation, not detract from it. Avoid overloading slides with information. Do not use strange audio or visual effects, as they can distract from your program and the real information you are trying to convey.

15. Handouts should include enough information to let the audience members know what they took part in, who did it, and how they can contact that person for more information.