

UDC 811.11

**SIGNPOSTING THE ORGANISATION OF A PRESENTATION**

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*The article focuses on “signposting” phrases used to help guide the audience through a presentation.*

By giving a presentation at a conference, you inform others of the results you have achieved. This may enable you to increase your chances of getting feedback on your work, establishing new contacts, collaborating with other research groups, and maybe of even getting more funds so that you can carry out better research. A presentation is also an opportunity to talk about factors that you probably wouldn't mention in your paper, e.g., ideas and conjectures, negative results, unfinished work—all of these might stimulate useful questions and feedback from the audience [1].

As the main function of an academic presentation is to provide information, it is vitally important that the information is presented clearly. Planning a well-structured presentation is not enough. When you actually give your presentation, you must make its structure clear to the audience. You may have a plan and know the structure of your talk, but the listeners do not know it unless you tell them. They need to be guided through the spoken information. To do this you need to use signposts and language signals. They give an advanced view of the organisation of the whole presentation or its next section. They tell the listener where you are in the presentation, where you are taking them next and where they have just been. They may signal either: the topic of the whole talk, the beginning or end of a section of the talk, a new point in a list, a contrasting point, an example, or a point of special importance [2].

The function of signposting and language signals is important. If the main points of your talk are well-organised and clearly signalled, you are well on the way to making an effective and clear presentation.

**1. STRUCTURING A PRESENTATION**

The way we receive and absorb information in an oral presentation is very different from how we get it by reading a paper. When we read, we control how fast and in what order we want to absorb information. We can scan the whole paper quickly if we wish, and we can skip certain parts. If a written paper is well organized, we are guided by the section headings and paragraphs and we can see how the points fit together.

While watching a presentation, we have no control over what or how or in what order the presenter will give us this information. So in your preparation, everything you do should be oriented to making what you say easily and immediately understandable to the audience [1]. This is achieved through a clear structure and easy-to-follow explanations.

The “classic” presentation structure includes the following sections [3]:

A. Introduction – 1. welcoming and thanking the audience, 2. introducing yourself, 3. creating a positive emotional atmosphere;

B. Outline – 1. the title/subject of your presentation, 2. the purpose of your presentation, 3. a plan, 4. when the audience may ask questions(during/after your presentation), 5. the length of time you will take, 6. special “hooks” (a problem to think about, amazing facts, stories);

C. Main body – the main parts of your presentation announced in the outline;

D. Summary – summarizing the key points briefly;

E. Conclusion – 1. your recommendations, your outlook, etc., 2. thanking the audience, 3. welcoming the audience to ask questions.

It is important to introduce each new section and thus highlight the logical structure of your presentation. Although the logic of your presentation is clear to you, it won't necessarily be clear to your audience. Using the right transition phrase (or signposting) will help to guide your listeners.

**2. INTRODUCTIONS AND OUTLINE**

How you introduce yourself and how the audience react to your introduction determine at least 30% of the success of your presentation. The following phrases come from standard expressions used in introductions to presentations. Each set of phrases is given a heading [4].

**Welcoming and thanking the audience**

Good morning / afternoon ladies and gentlemen / colleagues. My name's ...

Ladies and gentlemen. It's an honour to have the opportunity to address such a distinguished audience.

It's my privilege today to be talking to you about...

Good morning. Let me start by saying just a few words about my own background. I started out in...

I'd like to welcome you all here this morning.

**Introducing institute/department**

I am a PhD student/researcher/technician at...

I am doing a PhD/a Masters/some research at...

I am part of a team of 20 researchers and most of our funding comes from...

The work that I am going to present to you today was carried out with the collaboration of the University of...

**Telling the audience what point your research has reached and in what context it is**

What I am going to present is actually still only in its early stages, but I really think that our findings so far are worth telling you.

We are already at a quite advanced stage of the research, but I was hoping to get some feedback from you on certain aspects relating to...

Our research, which we have just finished, is actually part of a wider project involving ...

**Topic of presentation**

As you all know, my presentation today will focus on ...

What I'd like to present to you today is ...

As you can see from your hand-out, I'll be concentrating on ...

Today's topic is ...

**Relevance of topic**

My topic is of particular interest to those of you who ...

Since you'll all have to deal with this particular issue soon, my presentation will help you in ...

Today's topic will be very important for you because ...

**Personalizing the topic**

You might be interested in why I chose this particular topic.

I should tell you how I became interested in this topic.

There is a personal story connected to the topic of today's presentation.

The first time I thought about this issue was when I ...

**Parts and Sequencing**

I've divided my presentation into three parts ...

I'll focus on three major issues ...

I'll look at three points in particular...

Firstly, ... secondly, ... and thirdly ...

First, we'll look at...; then we'll ...; and finally, we'll take a look at...

Point one deals with ..., point two ...; and point three ...

I'll start out with ...; next I'll move on to ...; and I'll end with

**Visual aids**

To illustrate my points, I'll rely mostly on overhead transparencies.

I've prepared a number of graphs and a short promotional video.

My presentation will be accompanied by PowerPoint slides.

**Timing**

My presentation won't last more than 25 minutes.

It'll take me less than half an hour to cover these points.

This will take about 25 minutes of your time.

**Questions during a presentation**

If you have any questions, feel free to interrupt me at any time.

Please share your questions with us as they come up; I'll be happy to answer them right away.

**Questions after the presentation**

I'd like to ask you to hold your questions till the end.

There will be time for questions after my presentation.

Since the subject matter is rather complex, I'd appreciate it if you'd save your questions until after the presentation.

We will have at least fifteen minutes for questions during the question and answer period.

To save time, could we leave questions until the end?

**Creating a positive emotional atmosphere**

It's an honour for me to have the opportunity to address such a large number of you today.

I am delighted to be with you this afternoon to open this conference.

I am deeply touched by that warm welcome.

When the audience are already focused on you, it is time to move on to the main body of the presentation.

### 3. MAIN BODY

The way of moving from one slide to another, and from topic to topic, is crucial. For the audience it should be like following a map, and you need to make it very clear to them whenever you make a turn. Also, at each turn it is helpful if you summarize for them what you have told them so far. Those in the audience who missed a previous turn now have an opportunity to get back on the right road. In a presentation, these moves or turns are called transitions [1]. Let's consider some "signposting" phrases used to help guide the audience through a presentation.

#### **Moving on to the main body of the presentation**

Okay, so let me start by looking at ...

So first I'd like to give you a bit of background.

To start with, I'd like to consider...

#### **Introducing a new element or topic**

As far as x is concerned ...

Regarding x ...

#### **Moving to the next point**

Let me now move onto the question of ...

This brings me to my next point ...

So we come to...

The next point I'd like to make is about...

#### **Referring forward**

I'm going to do X, Y, and Z.

I'll go into a bit of detail for each concept.

I'll explain this in a moment/I'll talk about that later.

As we will see later ...

#### **Referring backward**

As I said before ...

Remember I said that ...

The concept I mentioned earlier ...

As I mentioned a moment ago ...

To return to my earlier point ...

If we go back to this slide ... (shows an earlier slide)

#### **Sequencing**

There are three things to consider. First... Second... Third...

We can see four advantages and two disadvantages. First... Second...

Let's look at / consider two options... One way to solve the problem is.. Another is...

There are four stages to the project. At the beginning... later... then... finally...

I'll describe the development of the idea. First the background, then the present situation, and then the prospects for the future.

As we see, the "signposts" above signal the audience that you want move on to the main part of your presentation, its next point, change direction, refer to an earlier point, repeat the main points, give a wider perspective, do a deeper analysis or depart from your plan.

### 4. ENDING. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The conclusions are an essential part of a presentation – you want to remind the audience of your most important points and leave them with a positive final impression, which will then encourage them to read your paper and contact you in the future. In a ten-minute presentation, your conclusions should probably last around one minute – in fact, you should only need three or four sentences. It is vital to prepare your closing and know exactly what you are going to say. Ending suddenly by saying "that's it" or "thank you" does not create a good impression. First, stand confidently and look directly at your audience. Signal that you are coming to an end. This is important as it get them to concentrate on the final points that you want them to remember. State your conclusions clearly and a little bit more slowly than in the previous part of the presentation – try not to be in a rush to finish [1]. Here are some signposts.

#### **Warning audience that presentation is near the end**

Okay, we're very close to the end now, but there are just a couple of important things that I still want to tell you.

#### **Final summary**

Well that brings me to the end of the presentation. So, just to recap ...

**Telling the audience where they can find further information**

I am afraid that I don't have time to go into this in any further detail. But you can find more information about it on this website (which is on the back page of your handout).

**Thanking the audience**

Thank you for your attention.

**Inviting the audience to ask questions**

You are welcome with your questions.

If you would like to know more, I shall be glad to answer any questions.

So, let throw it open to questions.

**What to say when you don't understand a question from the audience**

Sorry, could you repeat the question more slowly please?

Sorry, could you speak up please?

Sorry, I didn't hear the first/last part of your question.

Sorry, I still don't understand – would you mind asking me the question again in the break?

**Interpreting the questions**

If I'm not wrong, I think what you are asking is ...

Can I just be sure that I understand? You are asking me if ...

So your question is ...

**Avoiding difficult questions**

I'm not familiar with the details regarding that question.

I can't give you an exact answer on that, I am afraid.

That's a good question and I wish I had a ready answer, but I am afraid I don't.

I am not sure there really is a right or wrong answer to that. What I personally believe is ....

**Commenting on audience questions**

I know exactly what you mean but the thing is ...

I take your point but in my experience I have found that ...

You're quite right and it is something that I am actually working on now.

You can exploit useful phrases to deal with difficult questions, to react when you don't understand a question, to extricate yourself from difficult situations in the question and answer part of your presentation.

**5. CONCLUSION**

It is important that you structure your speech and use linking words and phrases to make your presentation sound logical. Using the most appropriate phrase in different stages of your presentation will give you confidence when you move from slide to slide and topic to topic. Signposts, language signals and transitions will also enable you to deal with unexpected situations and with difficult questions that the audience may ask you. You don't need to learn all the phrases listed in this article, just choose the ones you find easiest to say and remember.

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UDC 80=111

**CHRISTMAS SYMBOLICS IN CHARLES DICKENS' LITERARY WORKS**

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*The article deals with the description and analysis of Christmas symbols portrayed in "A Christmas Carol" and "A Christmas Tree" by Charles Dickens. The writer's contribution in the establishment and development of Christmas traditions in Great Britain is explained.*