

Public Speaking and Presentation Skills

Public speaking is an important part of an academic career. Even if you imagine yourself out in the field gathering data, working in a laboratory, or sequestered in an archive, much of your time will likely be spent teaching—perhaps at the front of a large lecture hall—and, whether or not you teach, you'll need to present the results of your research to your colleagues, in industry as well as in academe. While some Teaching Assistants get the chance to lecture in front of a large audience, most teach smaller recitation or lab sections. Many graduate students present papers at conferences, and most look ahead to the day when they'll need to give a job talk as part of the interview process. All of these may be frightening prospects. Speaking in public is a common fear, but it's one that TAs need to confront to be successful in the classroom and at conferences. Fortunately, public speaking is a skill that can be learned and a task which becomes easier with practice.

This spring, the TA Project will be offering a series of classes to help TAs with their public speaking and presentation skills. Over the course of several meetings, the program will address the public speaking challenges presented by conference papers, job talks, and the classroom, and will also cover the use of technologies such as PowerPoint in making presentations. Participants will have the chance to develop and practice their skills and will be eligible for a certificate from the TA Project. Registration information will be available on the TA Project website (<http://taproject.rutgers.edu>) in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, here are some tips to help you feel more comfortable and to be more effective as a public speaker.

Before the Presentation or Lecture

Before making a presentation, you may have the desire to write out word-for-word exactly what you plan to say, so that you know you are perfectly prepared. This is usually not a good idea. You'll end up reading to the audience instead of speaking to them, which will be monotonous, to

Teaching with Technology Certificate Programs

The TA Project and the Teaching Excellence Center will again be offering a series of workshops designed to develop your technological skills and enhance your teaching. Graduate students who attend four workshops in either area will earn a certificate.

Core Classroom Technology

- Basic PowerPoint
- Electronic Communications
- Turnitin (plagiarism detection)
- FAS Gradebook and Privacy Issues
- Excel Spreadsheets for Grading
- Detecting Plagiarism and Cheating

Web-based Teaching Applications

Prior experience creating websites is required.

- Web Design Using "Contribute"
- WebCT - Posting files
- WebCT - Quizzes
- Scanning Documents, Creating PDF files and Copyright Issues
- Online Group Projects and Journals
- Web Design and Accessibility Issues
- Detecting Plagiarism and Cheating

Space is limited. For more information or to register, call the TA Project at 932-7747 or email tapweb@rci.rutgers.edu, or register online at <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/ta/>.

Public Speaking...

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listen to, and you'll lose their attention. You'll be unable to make eye contact with your audience, or if you do occasionally look up from your script, you may lose your place and have trouble finding it again quickly. Instead of writing out your presentation word-for-word, prepare bullet points, an outline, or some other form of brief notes, with keywords and specific examples you plan to use.

Practice your presentation as frequently as you can—in front of the mirror, to your pets, to friends or roommates. The more familiar you are with your material, the more comfortable you'll be during your presentation. In addition, you may think you know how long it will take you to talk about a given issue, but until you actually practice saying your material out loud, you won't know for certain. If you practice in advance, you can work on your timing and make sure that you don't have too much or too little to say in the allotted time. As you gain more experience discussing or lecturing on issues in your field and talking about your work, the less preparation and practice you'll need to do.

If possible, familiarize your-

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self with the room in which you'll be speaking or teaching, so you know what to expect. Consider whether there is a desk or a lectern and whether you'll have room to move around, and how much you will need to project your voice.

Choose an outfit that makes you feel confident and professional, and plan to bring a bottle of water—your mouth may become dry if you are nervous.

General Tips on Delivery

- Make frequent eye contact—watch your audience and gauge their responses.
- Modulate your voice—vary your pitch and tone instead of droning in a monotone.
- Speak loud enough for everyone to hear you, but don't shout at people. Vary your volume to emphasize a point.
- Enunciate clearly.
- Be sure you are speaking slowly enough; nervous people often speak quickly.
- Try to avoid frequent repetition of words such as "okay" or "um."
- Allow your enthusiasm for your material to come through.

During the Presentation

Try to channel your nervousness into positive energy so you will deliver a lively presentation. Concentrate on your audience and your presentation rather than on yourself and your nerves. Speak to a few people in the room infor-

mally before you begin the presentation; it will make you more comfortable with your audience.

If you write on the board, make sure it is legible. Walk to the back of the room to see if your writing is visible. Give your audience/students time to write down the material, and step to the side so you don't block what you've written.

Remember that even in what is often referred to as a lecture class, it isn't necessary that the instructor spend the entire period lecturing, even in a very large lecture hall—interrupt a lecture to pose questions to the audience, to take questions, or to engage in small-group activities or a writing exercise. Change tasks every twenty minutes or so to keep your audience engaged.

Accept that you may make mistakes, and remember that it gets easier with experience.

If you really want to improve your presentation skills, consider utilizing TAP's videotaping service, so you can see and hear for yourself how you appear to your class. For more information on videotaping visit the TAP website at tapproject.rutgers.edu.

Get In Touch!

Tap Office:

<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>

Graduate School - NB:

<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>

TA Helpline: 932-11TA

Technology and the TA: End-of-Semester Concerns

The end of the semester is usually a hectic time for TAs in their dual roles as student and instructor. Teaching Assistants must deal with their own academic deadlines during the same period that student demands on their time are likely to increase and final papers and exams need to be graded. Information technologies have the potential both to compound end-of-semester difficulties and to alleviate them.

Email

At the end of the semester, students may flock to your office hours and flood your email inbox with questions and concerns. If you spend some time during class discussing the format of the final exam, reviewing end-of-semester procedures, and letting students ask questions about the exam or final paper, you may be able to ease students' anxieties and minimize the number who need to contact you with questions. Email can be an efficient way for you to communicate with students; a student may be able to avoid meeting with you during busy final office hours if all she needs is a brief response to an emailed question, and you may be able to write boilerplate answers to questions that arise frequently, so that you don't have to formulate an individual response to every question.

Responding to email, however, can also turn into an over-

whelming burden if you don't set limits. Let students know that they can expect a timely response to email, but not an immediate one. Give them a specific time frame when they can expect to hear from you—within 24 or 48 hours, depending on what your schedule can bear. Be clear that you will answer reasonable questions, but that students shouldn't expect you to recap a lecture they missed or give them extensive feedback on a draft of their final paper.

It's a good idea to save email from students and your responses in case of a grade dispute or a complaint about a paper or exam. (Of course you need to be sure that any information you provide is accurate.) If you are teaching lab or recitation sections, keep the instructor in charge of the course informed about the kinds of questions and concerns you're hearing from students.

Academic Integrity

The Internet has made plagiarism extremely easy. There is an endless store of information for students to cut and paste directly into their papers, and papers are available for sale online—cheating no longer requires even the minimal effort of retyping. The Internet, however, has also made it easier than ever to detect plagiarism. If you suspect that a student has cut and pasted parts of a paper, you can type the exact phrase, sentence, or paragraph into a search

engine such as google.com to see if it appears in any web sites. Rutgers also has a license for Turnitin.com, a web-based anti-plagiarism resource. Contact the Rutgers Continuous Education and Outreach office (<http://ce1766.rutgers.edu>) about access to Turnitin. Of course, instructors need to try to prevent plagiarism from occurring in the first place. Talk to your students about academic integrity and what is expected of them in terms of citing other people's work, and inform them that you will follow up on any suspicions about their papers.

During exams, don't allow students to have their cell phones anywhere near them. Many instructors don't realize that students can use their phones to cheat, even when they aren't talking on them. Students have been caught text-messaging each other during exams and using cell phone cameras to take pictures of exams. Similarly, students should not be permitted to use their PDAs or listen to MP3 or CD players.

For further information on preventing and catching Internet plagiarism and cheating on exams, see the December 2003 issue of *TAPTalk* (<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu/publications/taptalk/dec2003.pdf>).

TA
Helpline
Call
932-11TA
Monday-Friday
between
the hours
of
8:30 am - 4:30 pm

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Call 932-11TA for details

The Master Faculty Observation Program

TAP has assembled a select group of outstanding faculty members who have volunteered to provide graduate students with the opportunity to observe their classes. The names, teaching schedules, and contact information of these veteran teachers are listed on our website. Earn a certificate by visiting three or more classes. For more information, visit:

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu/MFOP.php3>

Sign up for the Peer Observation Program!

Having a class observed by a peer can be a great way to gain valuable feedback about your teaching. The Teaching Assistant Project offers the Peer Observation Program to any interested TA. You will be put in contact with a fellow graduate student teacher and provided with helpful materials for giving constructive criticism. For details, or to sign up, visit the website!

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu/pop/pop.html>

Teaching Assistant Project

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