

How to win presentation medals

Having been to many tens of thousands of ophthalmology registrar presentation competitions and seen the types of presentations that consistently impress the judges, as well as the ones that fail to make the grade, I feel it is my humble Christian duty to pass on my experiences to the younger generation in a bid to encourage an environment in which clinical excellence can flourish. Much like a one man clinical governance machine. Here are some handy hints for the registrar in need of that all-important win to bolster their CV.

Tip 1: Clinical relevance

I shall start with the most important topic of all; clinical relevance. It is vital to choose a topic of research and thus presentation that has absolutely no clinical relevance whatsoever, real or accidental. If the judges feel that your presentation is in any way applicable to the daily life of an ophthalmologist and might end up changing practice in a small but real way then you can kiss that medal goodbye. Choosing to explore the molecular structure of a protein that was once found in the lens capsule of a Yemeni child with a syndrome so rare it doesn't appear on the NCBI website is of course the best case scenario. I appreciate this is difficult though so other ideas to get your mind going might include attempting to describe an obscure branch of the complement cascade or drug side-effects so rare that they have never been previously documented.

Tip 2: Include lots of new acronyms

For extra marks it is advised to start using the new acronyms from the outset without explaining what the letters stand for, or mentioning them only very briefly and with embarrassment. The foolish among you might think that overuse of acronyms will confuse an audience but whilst this is always true, the important thing is that the presenter pay the audience the compliment of assuming that everybody knows what they stand for rather than insult them all to their faces by using simple English.

As a follow-up to this make sure every sentence in your presentation contains at least one acronym that renders basic comprehension impossible without knowing the meaning of said acronym.

Tip 3: Always mention at least 19 genes, whatever your topic

Even if your presentation is about improving the flow algorithm of a glaucoma clinic if all your staff call up that morning to say they can't come in to work due to a swine flu pandemic, mention at least 19 genes. These can be any genes, as without knowing what the acronyms stand for the audience can only be impressed by your choice of genes. They may or may not be relevant to your topic of presentation but so long as the genes you choose carry long names with numbers and letters, along with possibly a hyphen, then you might as well sit back and let the points roll in. A common error is attempting to explain any relationship between gene frequencies and your topic. Don't. Put up a hugely complicated graph with multiple lines criss-crossing and be sure to skip to a completely different graph before the audience comes close to working out what the purpose of the slide is. Let the genes do the talking.

Tip 4: The 'busy slide'

No presentation has ever won a prize in the collected history of ophthalmology without having a 'busy slide'. This is a powerpoint slide that contains at least 1500 words in font size 8 or smaller. If you want to further increase your chances of winning then you may consider two or three busy slides. The best method of introducing a busy slide is without any warning and as you see the junior trainees' faces drop you have a window of two seconds, possibly three, to say knowingly to the audience 'this is a busy slide'. You will win much respect by saying this, and even more so if you talk about a completely different topic while the busy slide is up thus causing the audience to have to choose between listening to you or attempting to read the slide by squinting their eyes to create a pin-hole effect.

Tip 5: The false finish

Judges love a false finish. If you have been lucky enough to get your hands on as obscure and irrelevant a topic as winners tend to do and followed all of my advice thus far, then nail your victory to the mast by pretending to wind up your presentation but then move on to an even duller topic. Try and do this a few times during your presentation and then when the end of your presentation finally does arrive be sure to spring it on everyone as a sudden surprise. Another sure fire winning way of ending your presentation is by gradually decreasing the volume and pitch of your voice until it is mostly inaudible. It worked for all the best 80s hits and it works with 21st century ophthalmic presentation medal winners.

Tip 6: The fear factor

Be sure your boss is a feared old stalwart of the Eye Department and have him sit in the back row huffing and puffing through everybody else's presentations. Nothing impresses the judges more than raw fear for their own careers.

Good luck my friends. Everybody craves that medal but only one can have it. Possibly two, if the scores are tied. Whilst winning is indeed glorious and failure difficult not to take personally, be assured that much of what takes place in such competitions is determined by factors completely outside of your control. Try not to let failure depress you and get ready to start again anew. It is the taking part that counts. Getting yourself seen. Don't become disillusioned. I haven't, as you can see.

SECTION EDITOR



Gwyn Samuel Williams,
ST6 Ophthalmology,
Singleton Hospital,
Swansea, UK.
E: gwynwilliams@doctors.org.uk