

Guidelines For A Successful Conference Presentation

by

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As a member of the National Art Education Association, you can contribute significantly to the organization by sharing your best ideas, teaching strategies, or lessons at national and/or state association conferences. The strength and diversity of presentations at state and national art education association conferences depends completely upon the willingness of the membership to be actively involved. Too often members with good ideas do not share at conferences with their colleagues. Perhaps this lack of sharing is based upon the erroneous assumption that their ideas, lessons, or teaching strategies are already common practice. Perhaps this unwillingness to share is a result of stage fright. Whatever the reason, presenting at conferences is a professional commitment that should be the responsibility of all members. This article provides guidelines to help plan a successful conference presentation and to encourage all NAEA members to share their knowledge about successful art teaching.

Choose A Topic

Select a topic with which you are knowledgeable, comfortable, and in which you are interested. Your enthusiasm stemming from your personal interest in the topic will be contagious and engaging to your audience. Possible topics include:

- Theory into practice.
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- Thematic instructional units.
- A presentation of teaching strategies to improve learning.
- An activity or lesson that was especially successful for your students.
- An explanation of something unique about your art program such as collaborations with the larger community.
- Successful advocacy efforts.

Prepare Visual Aids

Consider your audience. As art educators, most of us are visual learners. Visual aids are critical for most conference presentations. Visual aids can include slides, posters, study prints, charts, transparencies, handouts, actual student work, or any other visual images.

If preparing slides for a presentation, tailor what you photograph to the subject of your presentation. Take slides of students working or of the artwork itself. You might want to take two or more slides of each image: one to show during your presentation and another to use elsewhere for possible publication. The practice of taking two slides is less expensive than having duplicates made later. The image quality will also be better.

Prepare Handouts

Participants always appreciate meaningful handouts, so think about what information you would most like to receive and plan accordingly. Handouts can be short—two pages, front-to-back on one sheet of paper, if the information

is succinct and pertinent. Begin with the title of the presentation then outline the information in the order in which it will be presented. Use a format that summarizes the information with short paragraphs. List any important references or resources—books, websites, or videos and explain where or how to locate or purchase them. Many of the audience members will want to use the same resources and will appreciate such information. Include full bibliographic documentation, especially if you have quoted a source in your presentation or on any handout. If you use an image on a handout or have a poster made specifically for your presentation, research the image for copyright restrictions and get permission to use the image from the copyright holder. Provide your name and how participants can contact you.

It is often difficult to know how many participants will come to your presentation. We usually bring about 50 handouts for each presentation. If we run out of copies, we take names and addresses and mail copies after we return home. You can certainly choose if you want to follow this procedure.

Plan the Actual Presentation

Plan your materials in a logical order. Gather together everything that you will need and assemble your visual aids and handouts. If you are using a slide projector or other audiovisual equipment, practice using the equipment while you rehearse your presentation in front of a mirror or before a small audience of friends or family. It is very important to practice your presentation out loud before the conference, even if you can only read it aloud to yourself. Often a well-written text will need a number of adjustments in order to make it conversational when read aloud. It will be helpful to read your text more slowly than usual and clearly pronounce each word so the audience can make the connections you want them to make. The opportunity to read in front of other people before the conference will help you decide the pace at which you need to present without reading too quickly or reading so slowly as to bore the participants at the conference.

If you are using a slide projector, place your slides in a slide tray in the order they will be used. Not all conferences provide supplemental equipment such as slide projectors or extension cords. Either take your own or check with the conference organizers in advance. You may also want to take a small flashlight in case the lighting in the room is not bright enough for you to see your notes and show slides at the same time. In addition, if you need equipment such as a computer or LCD projector, you will most likely need to arrange and pay for it yourself. If you need such additional equipment, contact the conference planners. They can put you in touch with the audiovisual company contracted for the conference,

Giving the Presentation

Arrive at your assigned presentation room a few minutes early to become familiar with the room, light switches, electrical outlets, and thermostat. If you are using audiovisual equipment, check that the equipment is working properly. Start on time and end on time as a courtesy to both your audience and to presenters who may also be using the room before and after you. Briefly introduce yourself and your topic then proceed through your planned outline. As a general rule, do not distribute your handouts until near the end of your presentation. This will prevent people from simply taking a handout and leaving before your presentation or reading the handout during your presentation.

Be aware of your audience at all times and be very flexible. Every presentation is different. Relax and enjoy yourself, giving a presentation should be rewarding for both you and your audience.

A Final Tip

If you are nervous about giving a presentation alone, give one with a partner. Presenting with a partner is often easier, more informal, and provides dual voices for the audience.