

# How medical students can thrive when making a presentation

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Making an academic presentation, particularly during medical school, can be a student's first exposure to public speaking for an audience of medical professionals. Getting it right, requires practice and feedback.

Erica Marsh, MD, is a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Michigan Medical School. She began her career presenting research as a medical student and in her role as a faculty member and mentor has worked with many medical students on their presentation skills.

For students interested in the research conducted by their peers, the AMA Research Challenge semi-finals take place virtually Oct. 20-22. The event, which is free to attend, offers the opportunity to explore research in a variety of topics and specialties, provide advice and feedback. AMA members can also score posters to help decide the five finalists who will compete for a \$10,000 grand prize that will be determined in December.

For students looking to hone their presentation tips, Dr. Marsh offers these key insights.

## Format matters

Medical students will have academic opportunities to present research that come up through the course of training, such as presenting a case or a putting together a slide deck and oral presentation on a disease. Presenting research is a natural evolution of that public speaking and lecture skill set. Dr. Marsh said that in any presentation format, the key is to understand expectations. That means knowing the time allotted and what type of visual components, such as a slide deck or poster, are expected.

"Most research presentations you make as a student are going to be in the five- to 15-minute range so you want to consolidate information and related key messaging down to methods, results and

conclusion,” she said. “Your mentor ideally will be able to share pearls that are going to be key for a specific meeting or format.” “A poster presentation is going to be different than presenting to a seated audience. In that format, you have one or two minutes to speak to your audience before they move on.” Learn how you can make your poster presentation stand out at a conference.

## Write but don't read

Having a few notes is fine, but reading from a script throughout your entire presentation is going to make it more difficult to engage the audience.

“In the beginning it may be helpful to write what you are going to say, but you should work toward having enough familiarity with the content and slides to be able to tell a story,” Dr. Marsh said. “If you do have things written in the event you do get nervous or stumble, it's fine to have a few bulleted notes available to follow.” Learn about the winning projects from the 2020 and 2021 AMA Research Challenge events.

## Anticipate questions

“I try to work with my mentees to anticipate the questions that will be asked and be comfortable with them,” Dr. Marsh said. “You can't anticipate every question, but you can prepare yourself for the likely ones. You also want to prepare yourself for the question that you don't know how to answer.”

In instances in which you simply don't have an answer for a question “it's always fine to say ‘that's a really good question. I don't know the answer but I will work to find that out,’” Dr. Marsh said.

Find out why judges pick top research projects.

## Pare it down

If you have too much material, your presentation can come across as rushed. “Having too much material is a common mistake,” Dr. Marsh said. “Speaking too fast, which is often driven by nerves or having too much material is another one. [As is] not being familiar e Gain insight on how medical student research can resonate with residency programs.

## Virtual presenting basics

As more presentations, including the finals of the AMA Research Challenge, move to virtual formats, it's important to double-check on the basics, Dr. Marsh said.

"It's important that if you have access to an HD camera, to use that," she said. "To make sure you know where the camera is and that you look at the camera during the presentation versus just the screen. It's important to set yourself up and practice with Zoom or whatever video platform you're using so you understand the presenter view versus the slide view versus the editing view."