

Insight Sheet

Topic: Project Presentations

Presenting one's work in person is a basic skill for design professionals. It is not, however, an innate skill for most people. But it can readily become a learned skill. I have seen students over the years go from the most self-conscious, stammering fools in front of an audience to seniors whose confidence in presenting is inspiring. They started just like you. With equal doses of tips, critiques and self-motivation they took a dramatic step toward becoming professionals. You can too.

This Insight Sheet will provide you with many, many of the best tips from a decade of so of helping landscape architecture students gain skills in presenting their drawings and slide shows. If you **ONLY** accomplished the items on these pages you would already be far ahead of most of your peers. Allow me to say that again. If you **ONLY** would achieve the points listed here you would be far ahead of most of the competition. The mistakes are that consistent, and the failure rate for assimilating these tips is that great.

If, as you prepare to present, you are feeling nervous or even scared ask yourself this: *who in the room knows more about your design/solution than you?*

The audience is there to hear of your ideas, your process, and your solutions. **YOU** are the expert on your design. They want to learn from you. So take your time, go through it step-by-step, and show them why your design is the one they should choose.

Do...

- Say your name (yes, **EVEN** if they all know you—practice it so it is your habit)
- Wear a watch to keep track of time [if you are old enough to vote, drive, go to war, and drink, you are old enough to monitor your own time during presentations.]
- Explain the goal, then the reasoning, **THEN** the solution [almost **ALL** students jump to the solution, and then backpedal as they try to justify it—that is not how we design, and it is not how we should present]
- Clarify where the project is (ideally using a site location map)
- Make use of those Inventory/Analysis sheets (they were supposed to have informed your design—why not demonstrate that you learned from them?)
- Consider planning out the actual order you will go from one drawing to the next, as well as when you will point to each picture/drawing
- Use note cards if it will help you (but don't read from them verbatim)
- Remember that almost every audience question is either 1) searching for clarification about your design, or 2) is really a leading question so the person can state something. As in your mind which they are doing, and respond appropriately.

Don't...

- Explain the solution, THEN the reasoning/goal
- Forget to: say what you're going to say; say it; say what you said*
- Be nervous—who knows more about your design than you? No one! Share why it meets the goals so well.
- Say “I want/ed” [why would a paying client care if you “wanted” that plant, or that pavement—explain why it was the right choice if you are asking them to pay for it!]
- Say “I liked” [why would a paying client care if you “liked” that plant, or that pavement—explain why it was the right choice if you are asking them to pay for it!]
- Say “uhmm”
- Say “just”
- Turn your back to the audience
- Forget to make eye contact w/ ALL the audience (look from person to person)
- Stuff your hands in your pockets
- Fidget
- Degrade your work w/ self-deprecating comments or by pointing out mistakes—be smart!
- Slap your hands on your legs
- Forget to tuck your shirt in
- Use a monotone voice – tell us what is important
- Pin your drawings up too high for you to reach
- Forget to ask for questions @ the end
- Ramble on and on when answering a simple question—*get to the answer*. They may be just baiting you to make an observation (and if it's a professor this is probably being done to illustrate an important point...so prepare to listen and learn).

These are good “don'ts” for any presentation, so you may want to make and keep a copy of this list to review prior to future presentations.

NOTE: be sure to take time to practice. Remember what it was like to complete your project just before presenting. Manage your time appropriately or relive the last presentation.

* this traditional flow of presenting is timeless and tested. Open the presentation by stating what you will be presenting. Then go through the meat of it. Then recap by restating what you've shared. Simple. But rarely will a student do it.