

ENSURING YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED TO PRESENT

Before you head off to the interview, check with your contact at the institution to be sure that you'll have what you need upon your arrival. A computer and projector are standard equipment for interview presentations, but it never hurts to double-check that they will be available. Will you need other equipment? Will you need speakers? Make sure you let your contact know of any special needs in advance of presentation day. A remote "clicker" to advance the slides is useful and gives you freedom to move about during the presentation. You should ask if one is available, or check to see whether your school or current employer has one you can borrow. Will you want a podium? Some speakers prefer to use a podium, while others prefer to work without one.

Will you be using a microphone? Is one available? If your voice doesn't project well, you should request one. If you're not used to using a microphone, try to get your hands on one beforehand so that you can get some practice. Are you accustomed to your "microphone voice"? If you've never heard yourself broadcast over a public address system before, you may not recognize your own voice! Everyone's voice sounds different over a set of speakers from what they hear inside their own head.

Make sure you will have the correct version of your presentation software and any other software you will need. Remember, some newer software releases are not backwards-compatible. If you've used the latest version of a program to prepare your presentation, some of the newest features may not "translate" to the version you have available on presentation day. If you are using PowerPoint, there is a free viewer available from Microsoft that will let you project and print your presentation, but not edit it (Google "PowerPoint viewer" to be taken to the Microsoft download page). The viewer is small enough to fit on your flash drive with your presentation.

Make sure you ask your contact about Mac vs. PC. The morning of the presentation is not the time to worry about incompatible hardware! For better or worse, PCs are becoming the industry standard, so Mac users are more likely to need to arrange for appropriate equipment. Many libraries prefer Macs, however, so PC users should not necessarily assume that a PC will be available. You can always avoid the issue entirely by taking your own laptop with you. If you are going to rely on your own computer, however, make sure you know how to connect it to projection equipment and which keystrokes you must hit in order to get your presentation to actually project.

Are you planning a live demonstration? Will you need a live Internet connection? Be sure to ask about these things well beforehand. Make sure your

examples work and that they demonstrate what you want them to show. When you get to the presentation location, run through your examples again quickly before the audience arrives in order to be sure they work on the local library's version of the resource, especially if the search platform is different. Many databases are available on multiple host platforms, so be sure you know what is being used at the interviewing library and how to use it.

WHAT TO EXPECT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE PRESENTATION

You should receive a schedule for the day of the interview before you arrive on campus. Generally, search committees try to schedule the presentation around mid-morning. Sometimes, though, the only time to schedule it is right after lunch or even toward the end of the day. Make sure you plan your own energy level to be at a personal best at presentation time.

You will typically be given some time right before your presentation to set up and get yourself ready. Make sure you have water handy. Use the bathroom! Even if you don't think you need to, go. At least use the time to make sure your appearance is in order and there are no remnants of lunch in your teeth. (Audiences generally don't worry as much about a candidate's appearance as the candidate does, but a check to reassure yourself doesn't hurt.) Now, take a couple of deep breaths. You can do this!

You've developed an excellent presentation and you've practiced on your friends, so there's nothing to worry about, right? Stage fright, or performance anxiety, happens to everyone—even to the most experienced speakers—from time to time. A survey reported by Peter Watson in the *Sunday Times* on October 7, 1973, listed fear of “speaking before a group” as the *number one* fear among those surveyed (41 percent), higher even than fear of flying or of death itself! “Speaking in public” tops another list of phobias published in *Health* magazine.¹ There's a lot riding on this presentation, so it's natural to be anxious. It's probably little consolation to the novice speaker to say that it generally gets easier with practice, but it does. Usually.

There is a large amount of literature published on stage fright and many theories about its causes. Regardless of the theory, there is general agreement that it includes psychological, physiological, and behavioral components and all are present to varying degrees. There is disagreement as to how much learning and innate biology respectively contribute to stage fright. There are things you can do to reduce your stage fright, but you're probably not going to eliminate it completely.

On The Day, you'll be given a little time before the audience arrives to familiarize yourself with the equipment you'll be using. Use it to your advantage. Stage fright comes from a feeling of being out of control, so control those things that you can. Bring up your presentation and run through a couple of slides to be sure all of the features work. If you have animations or embedded material in the slides, make sure they work on the new system. Make sure the Internet is working, both at the local institution and at the websites you plan to visit. Make sure you know how to move through the slides, either with the keyboard or the remote clicker.

One of the best ways to avoid stage fright is to know your material. This means *practice!* Run through your presentation *at least* once in its entirety before you leave for the interview. This will give you a sense of the time your presentation will take, so that you can be more or less within the allotted time frame. It also reassures you that you can make it all the way through. If you can, practice with a small group of friends who can give you experience speaking in front of a friendly audience and provide constructive feedback on your presentation. If they're very familiar with the topic, ask them to try to listen with "fresh" ears for jargon or faulty logic on your part. Ask them to be brutally honest. "It was great" doesn't really help you. Ask someone to count the number of times you say "um" and note any other nervous habits you might unconsciously display.

Don't tweak the presentation the night before. You've done all you can, so relax. It's easier said than done, but a good night's rest goes a lot further toward warding off stage fright than staying up late obsessing over it. Take a warm bath, watch a movie in the hotel room, or read something totally off topic to take your mind off of tomorrow.

Just before the presentation is also an excellent time to give yourself some positive self-reinforcement. If you go in with a confident attitude—I can *do* this!—you stand a much better chance of having a successful presentation. Your confidence will also make a good impression on your host as you get your presentation set up, which may help in the search committee's deliberations.

Your opening is the most important part of your presentation. It is your only chance to make a first impression on your audience. Stage fright usually peaks, however, in the moments just before and just after you start speaking. Anticipate this and be prepared. Use this initial period of stage fright to energize yourself for your presentation. A tasteful joke or a relevant personal anecdote is a good way to get the audience on your side.

There are a number of traditional tricks to reduce stage fright. The article by Auerbach gives excellent, concrete advice for handling stage fright both before and after the presentation.² Some tricks work and some don't. Do *not*

imagine the audience in their underwear—librarians are generally not former underwear models! Instead, imagine that you're speaking to those friends on whom you practiced earlier. If you find your hands shaking, stand behind the podium and hold onto it. If you shake so much that the podium rattles, take a few more deep breaths! Taking a sip of water is another way to buy yourself a little time and help yourself relax.

During the presentation, movement is often a good thing, but make your movements natural. Once you've gotten over any initial panic, relax your vise-like grip on the podium and move around the area. Point to something on the screen if it seems appropriate. This has the added benefit of directing attention toward what you are trying to say and away from you.

Eye contact is important in any presentation. It helps put the audience on your side. Try not to stare at the wall behind the audience or blankly into space. Attempt to make eye contact with everyone in the audience at least once during your presentation. You should hold eye contact with a person for about 3–5 seconds, then move on. If you are feeling anxious, once you've found a "friendly" face, return to it occasionally throughout the presentation but don't look at them to the exclusion of everyone else in your audience. You will feel more like you're talking to one person than to a group, and a friend, at that.

Vary your voice's pitch, speed, and tone. Use pauses to punctuate your thoughts. A soft voice highlights your points. The most important parts of your presentation are the beginning and the end. Be energetic in the introduction. Use a strong voice. At the conclusion, a soft voice will make the audience "hang on your every word." Try to end softly, but without trailing off. Practice speaking slowly. Most people talk more quickly when they are nervous as they frantically try to get through their presentation and sit down. Taking a few breaths along the way not only calms you but may help slow you down as well.

It's hard to say how many people will be attending your presentation, even based on the size of the institution. They are taking valuable time away from their duties, so thank them for coming. Busy schedules make it difficult for folks to stay at your presentation the entire time. They may have to leave during the presentation to attend another meeting or sit on the desk, so don't be offended—or thrown off—if they come and go during the presentation.

You are being graded by each of the audience members, which can only add to your level of anxiety. This is your one chance to make a good impression on the entire organization. They will all have been provided with a copy of your resume or vita. They will know enough about you to be dangerous! They will likely have evaluation sheets that they will turn in to the search committee after your presentation, so you need to impress them all, not just the search committee.

Remember, though, that the audience *wants* you to succeed, or you wouldn't have been asked to the on-site interview. They know you're nervous, so most will give you the benefit of the doubt. They are looking to see how you stay on topic and if you can make it through the presentation without making a fatal faux pas. If instruction is part of the job description, they may be looking to see how you would perform in front of a class. *How* you present is at least as important as *what* you present.

You probably don't know these people or the local culture, so avoid topics, illustrations, or humor that might be offensive to someone in the audience. Taking your clothes off during a presentation (hey, it happens—we've seen it!) is not generally considered good form.

After the presentation, there will be time for questions. *Lots and lots* of questions. Some examples of questions that have come up in real interview presentations are given in figure 8.1.

There are things that can't be asked for legal reasons. You can't legally be asked any question that would indicate any of those equal opportunity protections, such as age, religion, marital status, or sexual orientation (among other things). Nor should you volunteer such information, besides what's in your resume or vita. The questions should relate to the activities of the job.

Lots of questions are a good sign; a lack of questions could be a bad sign. You will probably be asked to expand on some of the things you said in your presentation, which is why you don't want to bring anything up during the presentation that you cannot fully explain later. If the moderator doesn't ask the questioners to introduce themselves and their function in the organization, ask them yourself. Unless you're a real people person you won't remember everyone, but it will give you a context for your answer. If you can remember a few names and use them, it leaves an extremely positive impression on everyone present.

Don't ramble, and don't blurt answers. If you're having trouble with a question, don't be afraid to take a moment to think. A legitimate comment like "That's an excellent question. Let me think about it for a moment" will not be frowned upon (unless you tell the audience you need to think about every single question posed to you). You will be seen as someone who takes the time to work through a difficult question. If you're having real trouble with a question, try saying "I'm going to have to think about that and get back to you" to buy yourself some time, with the added benefit that there probably *won't* be time to get back to it! Think about an answer, anyway, in case you run into the speaker in another context later on.

Try to avoid a simple "yes or no" answer, even to questions that seem to require one. These are often "trap" questions. Always try to give a balanced

Sample questions from the audience

Candidates should be prepared to answer a large variety of questions from the audience during the presentation portion of their interview. We've included a list of some of the most common questions we've heard during our own experiences here.

- What part of this job appeals to you most? Least?
- Can you describe your training or experience in bibliographic instruction/ collection development/reference/electronic resources?
- How do you keep current in your field?
- How do you handle competing priorities?
- Please describe a situation where you demonstrated leadership/initiative/creativity.
- What can you bring to this position that other candidates may not?
- Please describe your experience working with patrons from diverse backgrounds.
- What would be your top priority if you were hired for this position?
(For tenure-track positions) What areas of research would you like to pursue?
- How do you deal with frustrated patrons?
- When working on a team for a project, what role do you generally play?
- What are your professional goals for one year? Five years? Ten years?
- Describe yourself in three adjectives.
- What would you feel is your weakest area with respect to this job? [Caution: trap!!! Also worded as: In what part of the job do you think you would need the most training?]
- In twenty-five words or less, please describe how you would effectively address the issues of race, class, and gender in issues of library accessibility.
- What experience do you have with government documents? How do you see them fitting into your work environment? [Even if you aren't applying for a gov docs job, the gov docs librarian will ask this one!]
- Please tell us about your professional affiliations or involvement with professional organizations.

answer, especially to a question that seems like a “trap” or one that might portray you in a negative light. If possible, give a brief example from personal experience.

Be sure to ask if your response answered the question and satisfied the questioner. Keep track of multipart questions. If you can do this mentally, fine. If not, don't be afraid to take notes. Saying truthfully, “I'm writing this down to make sure that I answer all parts of your question,” gives a positive impression.

You will probably be asked if you have questions for the audience. Again, it's a bad sign if you don't. Have a few questions prepared in advance that you can ask the audience members. You should already have reviewed the library's website and that of the greater institution. These should provide you with enough fodder for plenty of questions. Be sure you don't ask questions on topics that are readily apparent on the institutional website—it *will* be noted! Some additional question suggestions are also provided in figure 8.2.

After the presentation, thank the audience for their time. You'll probably be mentally exhausted and won't want to talk to anyone for a week, but people will come up to greet you or introduce themselves. Be polite, even if you've temporarily turned your mind off. If you are offered the position, and they mention it later, you can always say (truthfully) that “I'm sorry, there were so many people that day, it's hard to remember everyone.” You're probably ready for a nap, but there's more interview left. Part of the interview process is proving that you can be delightful, intelligent, witty, and lively even when you're totally exhausted.

It all sounds a little daunting, right? It doesn't have to be. If you know your material and know your audience, your presentation should be a successful one. It may not go perfectly (and you shouldn't expect it to), but if you've done your homework, you should survive relatively happy and unscathed. And don't forget that the reason you were invited to interview in the first place is because the search committee saw potential in you—they are interested in what you have to say. If you have any doubts at all after preparing for this part of the interview experience, keep it in mind that the search committee wants you to succeed, too.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rob Abernathy and Mark Reardon, *Hot Tips for Speakers: 25 Surefire Ways to Engage and Captivate Any Group or Audience* (Tucson, AZ: Zephyr, 2002).

Jeremiah J. Sullivan, “Six Hundred Interviews Later,” *ABCA Bulletin* 43, no. 1 (1980): 2–5.

FIGURE 8.2

Sample questions for the audience

Candidates should be prepared with a list of questions for the audience after the presentation portion of their interview. We've included some sample questions here.

What's the biggest challenge currently being faced by this library system?

Why do you like working here?

What do you think are this library system's best qualities?

Where do you see this organization in five years?

Does the library provide a formal or informal mentoring program for new librarians? (This is valuable for both tenure-track and non-tenure-track positions.)

What kind of support does the library provide for professional development, such as conference travel?

Could you describe the relationship between the library and the departmental faculty in the university?

For those of you who have been here at least ten years, what keeps you here?

I noticed a really interesting [some prominent object in the library or on the website] . . . Could someone tell me the story behind it?

Notes

1. Cassandra Wrightson, "America's Greatest Fears," *Health* 12, no. 1 (1998): 45.
2. Alan Auerbach, "Self-Administered Treatments of Public Speaking Anxiety," *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 60, no. 2 (1981): 106–9.

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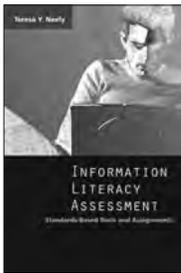
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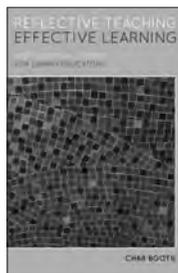
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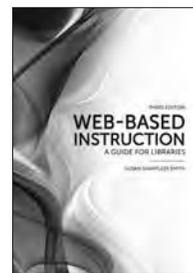
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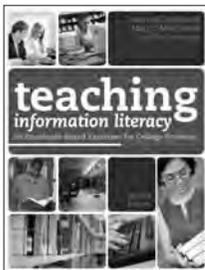
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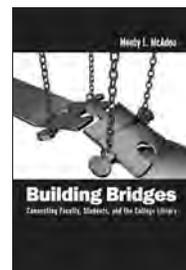
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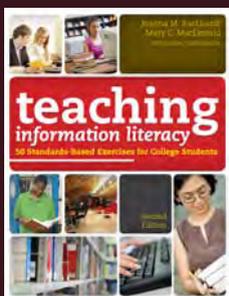
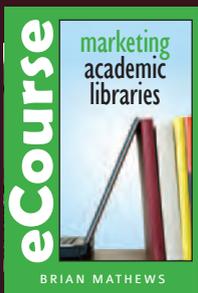
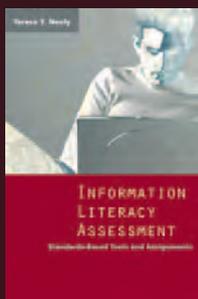
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