

“Preparation is Key!”

- Ensure that you have fully understood the facts of your client’s case:
 - Get the full picture from your client well in advance of the hearing.
 - Wherever possible, endeavour to verify facts independently.
 - Think through their case logically and address any gaps with them well in advance.
 - It is helpful to have a chronological note of events to hand. This will give you confidence in knowing the facts.
- Pre-empt any questions you suspect your audience is going to ask – especially the difficult ones! Address the difficult points with your client ahead of the hearing, so you can both decide how to deal with them.
- Make it as easy for your audience as possible. Where possible, submit your case and any supporting documentation in advance. If you have prepared a chronological note of events for yourself, you might wish to include that too - as long as it is complete and does not draw attention to any unexplained gaps in the history of events!

Start strong and strive to hold your audience’s attention.

It is crucial to get into the important facts and relevant law as soon as possible. Otherwise, you run the risk of losing your audience!

- Don’t ever be tempted to overstate your case through exaggeration or embellishment. Stick to the facts.
- Be aware of body language! Make good but not excessive eye contact! Sit upright and look engaged!
- Watch your audience as they take notes and slow down if you think necessary.

Speak clearly and at a steady pace.

- The old speech-writing rule holds true: say what you’re going to say, say it and then say you’ve said it. This will ensure clear communication. It helps the audience to take notes and remember what you are saying. Where feasible, make your case in a few points, which you can then elaborate on.
- Use straightforward language and short sentences. Avoid jargon.
- Be aware of your audience in telling the story for your service-user. Emotive and exaggerated language is unlikely to persuade.

- Include only those facts and law which are relevant to your service-user's situation. Shocking and sad facts may, but will not necessarily, be relevant.

- Listen very carefully to any questions. Try and work out what concern is really driving the question. Is there something about the case which is not persuading the audience - if so, is there something you can say to remedy that? Has the audience misinterpreted a point you were making - if so, is there something you can say to clarify it?

- If you are asked a question which you had not anticipated, don't hesitate to pause before answering. Ask your service-user to give the answer if you don't have the information and they do. If neither of you has the fact to hand, you can always offer to forward the information after the hearing where possible.

“End on a strong note by offering to assist with any outstanding queries and summarising the case briefly and clearly.”