APEC Architects shares their wisdom during a student presentation skills workshop

Full transcript

Summary: This discussion focused on effective presentation techniques for architectural projects. Key points included setting the context early, using visuals over extensive writing, and structuring presentations in layers. Emphasis was placed on clarity, brevity, and adapting to the audience. Practical tips included outlining the presentation structure, using simple diagrams, and practicing without visuals. The importance of understanding the building's user experience and the rationale behind design decisions was highlighted. The conversation also touched on the value of collaboration, continuous practice, and the need for architects to be effective communicators.

Discussion transcript

Mary: Having a good summary when you start. Setting points of there your project is, the context, and what the building is/does. Set them out at the beginning without showing everything. Set out the grounding so that everything the audience digests after that is in the context of what it is/what the building is going to become. I found that with some of them, I couldn't find out what it is or was until the end.

Alex O'Connor: Curation, its telling a story and how you narrate that story. You need to be able to narrate the story through visuals basically. Because, the more you write, people aren't going to engage with writing the same way you do with a drawing or a sketch. Think about your process. If you have a lot to say, make sure it's done in a methodical fashion

Dave: Presentations are a bit different to portfolios. Shrek, presentation has layers!

The first layer is the overall big picture. 'How can I grab someone's attention?' 'How can I keep someone interested' How can you get someone on board with the concept. Very brief and simple

Next layer: Delves into light details, do not worry too much about going into extreme details because if someone's really interested, it might come up in the Q&A. That's when you talk about specific things and go into the real detail.

Be mindful of the time you have, and think 'how can I curate my presentation to be clear in the time I have and to be accessble for the people who might not get it'. Killer image then move onto details for the people who are interested.

Naomi: Take a step back before you even plan the presentation. Before you even know what drawings go in, take a step back and think 'what is the narrative I want to say'. Especially important when you have 10 minutes/time constraints.

You need to be mindful when presenting to groups who aren't architects and not used to looking at drawings etc community groups. Naomi always gives them a quick overview of what the contents of the presentation will be 'I'll talk you through the key points of the brief then I'll take you through the analysis...' They know what to expect in the presentation and can visualise a structure. Helpful to yourself in the planning of it and the delivery. Methodical thinking helps with engagement

Mary: Explain plans and buildings through the people who are going to use it, how the visitors experience it. E.g. the people approach the building through here and then xyz.

Naomi: Following on- In a lot of our projects, orientation is very important for us, as a design philosophy especially in community buildings where there's this [sort of] thing about thresholds, and quite often we'll say the perception of the building before you arrive [exampling Maarias work] they'll see this transparent section, they'll see the canopy. They'll know that's the entrance because that's how its articulated.

~05:55

Mary: I know you probably do a lot of process work in university , but I think at job interviews they'll want you to go quicker through the building and when they ask you questions you can draw back out and go 'this decision led me to this decision'. The process is very exciting, it should all be accumulated in the building as well.

Sharmin: When it comes to dealing with portfolio, don't be scared to have space around because in Uni you're so used to compressing everything onto one A1 sheet, or however you do it. It is good to let the drawings or visuals speak for themselves.

Naomi: Yeah we always say, when we interview candidates, I'll often say beforehand. From the past when I've interviewed a candidate and they'll spend 50 minutes going through literally everything in their portfolio. And I'll say before you'll have half an hour. I want you to just, you don't have to include everything you've done. You think about some key points you want to get across which might cover, you know, a bit like, say, it was a postgraduate, say, you know, a bit of your undergraduate, you know, bit of your year out, you know, that one project from your out, and then maybe a thesis project. But just say, think about much more, how and the things that you choose, that you can demonstrate different skills to me rather. And then it because before, before I started to advise candidates to do that, you know, then I did this, and then I did this, and then I did this. And if it's I don't need to say everything. I want to know what. Again, it comes back to the narrative. What are you trying to What are you trying to get across to me?

Mary: following on - I think some graphically, some very simple diagrams, really help. [Yeah,] diagrams tell a big story for you

Alex O'Connor: But equally, if you've, if you've got a particular point at which you want to punctuate. If you've got a diagram of your process that can be identified in one particular part of your project, use that as a way of showing you've done the process, and that's how it's manifested, because that way you can immediately see where you've used that process. Because if you've got an element of process, but there's you, you struggle to see where that process then manifests in your project. It's almost a why do we need to know about the process if we can't see where it is, so it's a difficult one to try and navigate. But like you're saying, it's almost like that less is more kind of aspect, really. Yeah.

~09:00

Lauren: Oh my gosh, super helpful guys. I'm writing everything down. My part of the magazine is, so I do the networking and collaboration stuff but I am very keen on helping the lower years with stuff like this. So if I can make a 'Key points to follow from the APEC team' then I think that'll be super helpful [...]

Dave: As you, as you're going through Project, talk about your projects as much as you can, because it does, you know, if someone like, I know, in my own experience, it's helped me to understand my own projects. As you say, even talking to people who aren't necessarily that this is what I'm talking about, the different layers of people who might understand it or might be interested in the projects, you know. So it's like you might talk to someone down the pub, you might or the coffee shop. You might talk to someone in the street. You might talk to someone who you're actually you're gathering some research about it, and you're telling them about the project. Or you might talk to someone who's an academic

Naomi: and actually, that's a good point as well, because as architects and profession, we present the scheme, say to the client, we present it to community stakeholders, we present to planners, and we present quite different, you know, it's the same scheme, and it's not that no integrity, but, yeah, it's a slightly different narrative or different angle, depending on who your audience is. So it's, it's good to be able to do that. And where it was very difficult during lockdown, because we had a lot of community clients, and in lockdown, when you we were presenting virtually, you can't see any feedback, so you can't tell whether people are getting it or not. Whereas, now that we're back to in person presenting to our clients, we can adapt like we were presenting what we thought was just our original concepts in Winston green the other week. So quite a challenged area of Birmingham. Let's say we thought there might be, what, half a dozen pinkies, about 50 in the end.

~12:30

yes. So it was a bit taken aback. But we standing there and talking to people and just seeing people's face, you know, just with it, because they give away, you know, it was good that we could repeat a point or reaffirm or say it in a different way, if people look confused.

Mary: Yeah, yeah, just try and read body language. But I think also its holding that intention with actually writing the script was probably really good for you so you knew you're clear. Like, do you think so?

Lauren: Because, like, even if you prepare so much, when you get actually up there, everything can leave your mind

Dave: it depends on the person. Yeah, you know, different things work for different people, and the only way you're gonna really find out is through practicing your presentation

Alex O'Connor: I'd practiced a whole different element of whatever I was talking about this morning, and then when I got in, there is a completely different setup, which kind of threw me a bit. But from I know from now, I do a lot more presentations for review panels or for clients and things like that, where actually, if you've just got a visual, which you can if you had four key points, for example, where you can take that through, and then you know you can move on to that next One. You don't feel like you've got to over explain and in that if you present it to people who don't know anything about it as well. And that way, it's just my wife when I present anything, if I put it in front of her, and she's actually still not closed over. And I think. That's it. That's fine because she's and it's and it is just interesting to see how other people will interact with it. So just practice.

Sharmin: finitely be precise. And sometimes I think it's not just about the work, it's about how you present yourself, which, especially when you're interviewing.

Alex: it's great that you're trying to communicate that to other students. It's a really handy thing to do because.

Naomi: I'm having no training at School of Architecture about present sometimes they'd tell you when it was [bad], but no one ever sort of said, here's some tips.

Alex O'Connor: And it is, it's really, it's really key between yourselves that you actually share that. Because I remember doing a load of things with part two, where I was doing a lot of part time stuff, where we were completely separate for all the part one, we were just like, there was six of us, and everybody else is in. Like, Oh, yeah. Well, you've got 25 people telling you what they think, whereas we had, right, you've got six, the same six people, and they all know your project already. So it's there's nothing different. And when it came to part two, they obviously mix things in a lot more. And actually it meant that there was cross year stuff. Yeah, cross whether part time or full time, but just, I don't feel like you've got to gatekeep any of the information either it's actually, it's all about actually sharing it, because you're all in it together. That's a really key part. Because more than anything, you will find that you will actually get each other through it. In the end, it's collaboration. You're going to do that for the rest of your career.

Naomi: good practice, and I think for the profession, because architects sometimes get a bad press for being, like, aloof or not good at communicating. So I think it's in all of our interests that architects do become better communicators with non-architects, in particular and in the profession, and that we are seen as being good communicators amongst the construction industry. So a lot of what we do, even in our drawings to site, is all about communication. It's the drawing that we send to site isn't a isn't an end in itself. It's whether it explains something to the person who's going to build it.

Dave: trying to think of like what my number one tip would be for communicate, like improving communication skills and presentation. I probably said practice presenting without your work.

Naomi: like the elevator pitch. And an elevator pitches that they're really succinct, but similar, that if you the elevator pitch is more for, like, if you running a business, but it could be the same say project where say you go five stories up in an elevator. What are the key things that you have? Like, yeah, and just to and to be succinct, that somebody gets what you but a similar thing that, yeah, without any drawings in front of you, yeah, what would you say? And then choose the drawings that help.

Alex O'Connor: That's a really interesting point actually

Dave: That true, It's actually quite interesting. My best interviews were when I didn't have my drawings with me.

Naomi: says, I think it's a really key point, though, because if you let the because there are some candidates who will talk you through a drawing rather than a design.