



A guide to oral presentations

Many students find that oral presentations are one of the most confronting forms of assessment at university. However, presentations are also one of the most fruitful sources of personal growth in your university education. For both your study and future work purposes, it is important to develop skills and confidence in giving oral presentations.

The following is a guide to improving your presentation.

The message is a simple: PREPARE! PREPARE! PREPARE!

1. Plan

Analyse your audience

- What do they know about the subject? What terminology would they know?
- What do they want or need to know? What is their motivation for listening to you?
- What aspects of your subject would they be interested in?
- How much information can they absorb? If they are new to the topic, their level of absorption may be lower than for an expert audience.

Determine primary purpose

- What is your main point? (Can you put it into one sentence?)
- What do you want your listeners to do or think? (Are you trying to inform / convince / guide / entertain them?)

Select effective supporting information

- What kind of information will best support your presentation?
- What kind of information will appeal to your listeners? Provide interesting examples.
- Listeners may only remember two or three supporting points.

2. Prepare

Prepare an outline

In general, follow a 3 part structure:

- 1) **Introduction** - tell them what you're going to tell them.
- 2) **Body** - tell them!
- 3) **Conclusion** - tell them what you have told them!

Do not try to include too much content in for the time allowed.

Prioritise. It is important to have time to repeat key points in different ways, and to provide an effective introduction and conclusion.

Select appropriate visual aids

(Overhead transparencies, slides, flip charts, chalkboards, handouts, 3D objects, computer projections...)

- Visuals must convey your point clearly and simply.
- Do not over-use visuals (a trap when using Powerpoint). The visuals are not the presentation, their purpose is simply to summarise or illustrate your main points.

ESL CORNER:

"Visuals" can be a **noun**, eg:

"Can you prepare some *visuals* for my presentation?"

Prepare an introduction

- When your introduction is over, your audience should be interested, know what your main point is, and know how you're going to explain it. Therefore, does your introduction ...
 - 1) arouse interest in the topic?
 - 2) provide context, ie. background and definitions?
 - 3) clearly state the main point of the talk?
 - 4) describe the structure of the talk?

Prepare a conclusion

- The audience listens for your summary and concluding remarks. Listeners rate a presentation on the quality of its ending, so prepare clear, succinct closing comments that catch the listener's attention.

3. Practise

Delivery

- Practise your presentation aloud (it will not help if you just say it in your head).
- Don't read it. Use cue cards with simple dot points on which you elaborate orally.
- Let the audience know what's coming: let them know the structure of your talk, use linking words between sections and keep them up-to-date on where you are up to.
- Audience attention span is short, so break up long sections of information with questions, feedback, activities, and repeat important points.
- Do not rush. Speak more slowly and clearly than you normally would. Provide extra emphasis through intonation and body language.
- Be aware of body language: avoid annoying habits such as talking with your hands in your pockets, slouching, scratching, fiddling, "um, er...".
- Practise maintaining eye-contact with a group of people.

Expect the unexpected

- How will you deal with audience questions? What if you can't answer the question?
- How will you respond to criticism?
- What if the audience misunderstands what you say?

Know your equipment

- Familiarise yourself with the equipment you will use.
- Time your presentation using the equipment (it may take longer than just reading aloud).

4. Present

- Nervousness is normal – combat it by knowing your content and practising it! Convert what nervousness remains into enthusiasm and focus.
- Breathe. Pause between points. Emphasise key ideas / information.
- Establish contact with the audience – talk with them before your presentation.
- Walk purposefully and confidently to the front of the lecture room (fake it!).
- **Remember, the purpose of oral presentations is to communicate a topic as interestingly and succinctly as possible, so be expressive and concise.**

Other useful references

Beisler, F, Scheeres, H & Pinner, D 1993, *Communication skills*, 2nd edn, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.
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