



THE SALVATION ARMY
BOOTH
COLLEGE

Guidelines for Making Oral Presentations

Oral presentations are a major form of assessment throughout all levels of study, and are usually viewed with some apprehension by most students. Do oral presentations need natural talent? Or do they involve a skill that can be learnt? Take a closer look at oral presentations and find out how you can make them less formidable and more productive experiences.

A good oral presentation is one which is able to capture the attention of the audience at the very beginning, hold it through to the last minute and make the audience feel at the end that their time was well-spent, and have them leave wishing they could listen to you more on the topic.

Look back at your own past experiences of speaking in public at some length - at a school assembly, at a debate, in a class presentation, a presentation at a meeting in your workplace, in a tutorial presentation at university. How did you fare? What helped you get close to the ideal? What kept you away from it? List your strengths and weaknesses separately. Where do they seem to belong? With the way you prepared yourself for the event, or with the actual presentation itself?

To make a good oral presentation, you need to think of the task in four main stages: preparation, presentation, discussion and evaluation. You also need to remember that the audience plays an important role because an oral presentation is a two-way and interactive communication.

Preparation

1. Analyse the Audience

As for any assignment, an oral presentation needs a considerable input of work. The onus on the speaker is greater here, because in addition to getting the information ready for the presentation, it is necessary to get ready for the audience as well. So, an important first step

during preparation is to analyse your audience. You do this by thinking of your audience in terms of the following: number, mood (with relevance to time of day), knowledge of topic, response to previous speakers, if any, and attitude to yourself.

2. Researching your topic

This is another task you need to do early on so your information is thorough and your ideas are well thought through. Just like a written assignment you also need to consider the assessment criteria, how the objectives of the course and key concepts presented in the lectures relate to your topic or question, and any suggestions and advice the lecturer has given.

While you should have a basic outline to guide you through your research, just like when reading for a written assignment, you should also have the audience in mind throughout your research. When you read, look out for information that is both suitable and relevant for your audience (which includes your fellow students and the lecturer) in terms of knowledge and interests and expectations.

Remember that in an oral presentation the amount of information you can present is much less than in a written presentation. This is because listening to a speaker is different from reading a paper. When you present information orally, you need to repeat things more and clarify things more, because your audience does not have the choice of going over the material whenever they need to do so. So keep your messages simple and limited. Sift your information carefully and restrict yourself to a few key ideas, all the time being aware of audience knowledge and understanding of the topic. Ask yourself questions about the information you are selecting. For example; How will they react? Will they get bored? Will they be overwhelmed by too much new knowledge, hard to grasp concepts and unfamiliar terms? How can I use visual aids to better present difficult concepts?

3. Organising the Information

Just like in a written presentation, your oral presentation needs to have an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

Introduction

- Start by introducing the topic, but in a more striking manner than in a written presentation

- this will make a good first impression on your audience. This is very important, because first impressions are usually lasting. Also, a good opening will make your audience sit up and listen to you better.

- State your purpose and announce the outline of your presentation in very simple, precise language.
- Make your major premise very clear, so that your listeners will know your stand from the beginning and will be better prepared to understand your arguments.
- If your introduction is effective, by the end of it you will have your audience eagerly waiting to hear what you are going to tell them.

Body

- State main ideas clearly in proper sequence, and provide supporting details for each main idea.
- Remember that there are no paragraphs or headings to signal main points and no underlining or bold face type to highlight key ideas and terms. You will therefore have to use linking phrases generously to move the audience through your main points and to draw their attention to whatever is important. These include words like: however, similarly, alternatively, and phrases such as: the first point, the second point, an example of this, if you look at the top of the table (said while pointing to the overhead transparency).
- Summarise each major section as you go, to make sure you have not lost your audience half way through your presentation. Make allowances for sleepyheads and wandering minds and for any omissions you may have committed on your part.

Conclusion

- Summarise the main points briefly and restate your major premise clearly.
- This part needs to be more memorable than what you would usually compose for a written assignment, because you need to make your audience leave with a sense of satisfaction, that listening to you was a productive experience for them.

4. Consider Materials, Equipment and Visual aids

Now that the framework for your presentation is ready, try to make it attractive for your audience. Remember that the attention span of your listeners is fairly short. Usually attention begins to flag after the first 10 minutes or so, even though you may have made a stunning introduction. So think of various ways to stimulate the interest of your audience from time to time.

- Add variety to your presentation by alternating media. For example, use overheads, power-point, posters, video segments.
- Incorporate your knowledge of the audience and refer directly or indirectly to their familiarity with the subject and their sources of information, and also their experiences with the topic.
- Get your group to participate actively by introducing brainstorming, encouraging questioning and asking questions yourself and planning for activities that involve movement etc.

Make certain you are clear about how you are going to alternate your verbal information with your visual and other media, as well as with the activities you may have planned for the group. Be clear on how and where exactly you are going to introduce any personal elements and bring in some surprise and suspense.

Visuals and handouts should be as large and clear and eye-catching as possible. When making handouts, copies of readings etc., make sure you have enough to go round. Familiarise yourself with all the equipment you plan to use. For example, note that overhead transparencies are used differently from charts. Do not point to the projection, but make all necessary indications on the transparency, using a pen/pencil to guide the audience. Consider using a folder with everything (notes, overheads, handouts) organised in the sequence it will be used.

Note: Please ensure that you organise all the equipment you require prior to your presentation, as what you need may not necessarily be in every classroom.

5. Write a Script

It is helpful to write out a script for your entire presentation. Start by choosing an appropriate tone. Do not use the very formal academic language you use in your written assignments, nor the casual language you use in your daily interactions. Use spoken academic English that is generally used in lectures and tutorial discussions. Write out every detail including signposting, when to use visuals and other media, sources of information, anecdotes, examples, experiences of self and friends. In terms of grammar, use active voice and simple structures and words, while still retaining the necessary technical language of your discipline.

6. Practice, Practice, Practice!

Now you are ready to rehearse for your presentation. Do not memorise the script, nor plan to read it word for word. The purpose of writing the script is to familiarise yourself with your material.

- From the script pull out the detailed plan of your presentation and set it out on cards or paper as main points and key supporting ideas. This information should be arranged in such a way that you can see things at a glance. Number your cards/paper to avoid too much shuffling. Make sure that you use only this information at the time of your presentation.
- Run through your presentation looking only at your prompt cards/notes. Make necessary adjustments if your presentation is too long/short. Leave plenty of time for visuals, brainstorming/questioning, activities etc. Make sure that you do not delete your conclusion to make way for other things. A presentation that runs beyond time or stops abruptly or finishes too early will not be effective. So give adequate attention to correct timing.
- Listen to yourself on a cassette and review the recording critically to improve your presentation. Especially monitor clarity, speed, volume and pitch of your voice.
- Practice your presentation to friends/family and ask for feedback, regarding clarity, interest, posture, gestures and voice quality.
- If possible practise in the room in which you will give the presentation, with the equipment you intend to use.
- Anticipate possible questions. The best way to do this is to make a set of likely questions. Also familiarise yourself with all technical terms used and with details of your sources so that you can answer questions from students and the lecturer about these things.

Presentation

Before the Presentation

Go a few minutes early to check on audio-visual equipment and to set up the room in a way that would facilitate movement and activities you have planned.

- Check your material to make sure that you have arranged your cards, notes, handouts, overheads etc. in the order you need them.

- It is normal to feel nervous before and during the first few minutes of your presentation. Accept this, but have confidence that your presentation will go well, because you have gone through a comprehensive preparation stage. Many speakers have a glass of water handy to counteract the 'dry mouth' feeling.

During the Presentation

Stand or sit in a relaxed position and use deep breathing to keep calm. Have a positive friendly attitude to your audience.

- Watch your hands. Remember not to fiddle with your hair, clothing, paper or pens. Use gestures naturally.
- Establish eye contact with as many as possible in the audience. Make sure that you look at and address the whole audience when you use your audio-visual aids.
- Speak more slowly than usual, because you tend to speak fast when you are nervous/excited. Watch your volume so that you do not speak too loud/soft. Use proper intonation for emphasis, anecdotes, questions and statements. Keep your head up to help your voice project into the room.
- Leave enough time for handouts to go round and for people to take a quick look at them before you start talking. This way you will be able to hold the attention of your audience.

Discussion

Sometimes this is optional and other times it is part of the assessment criteria. You should always plan to be asked at least a couple of questions.

- Have a couple of statements or topical questions ready to lead the discussion.
- Listen carefully to questions and understand what you are asked to do.
- Repeat or rephrase each question so that it will be clear to other people in the audience.
- When you answer the question establish eye contact with the person who asked the question and also with a few others.
- Summarise your information again at the end of the discussion, making necessary qualifications based on the discussion.
- Ask for audience feedback on your presentation -maybe you can ask everybody to write down the best thing and the worst thing about your presentation.
- Finish off by thanking the audience.

Evaluation

Reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of your oral presentation will enable you to improve your next performance and possibly your marks. Some students video their presentation to evaluate themselves.

Revise the advice in this brochure and decide what aspects you did well and what aspects you need to consciously work on next time. When watching other speakers notice what they do that seems to make their presentation effective and plan to incorporate it in your next presentation. Ask for feedback from other students and your lecturer.

* If you are still apprehensive about giving oral presentations we recommend you discuss your concerns with your lecturer or fellow students for support and advice.