

Giving an Oral Presentation

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1. An oral presentation is a talk given to fellow students on a set topic likely to be of joint interest. The degree of formality expected and the length of presentation can vary considerably depending on the circumstances in which the talk is being given, but what is common for all presentation is the need to prepare carefully in advance. If it is to be successful, an oral presentation requires the same degree of preparation as other any other academic assignment.
2. **Prepare**
 1. Check the assignment criteria carefully; be clear on what you are expected to do:
 - How long a timeslot do you have?
 - Are you presenting on your own or as part of a team?
 - Do you need to allow time for questions and answers?
 - Are you expected to use visual aids?
 - Do you have to address a set topic or can you choose your own?
 2. If you choose your own topic, think about how is it relevant to the course, to the audience's interests, to what others will be speaking about.
 3. Brainstorm your topic: what do you know? What do you need to find out? But don't get carried away – remember you will only be able to cover a limited amount of material in the time you have.
 4. Think carefully about what you want to achieve: your aim should be to educate, to inform, to explain and perhaps to persuade your audience – not to bombard them with information.
 5. Decide how much content is appropriate for the time you have – how much

ground you will cover, bearing in mind what your audience may or may not already know about the topic. Don't be overambitious; aim to cover one or two points well. Remember, there's a limit to how much people can take in (especially if yours is one of a series of presentations).

6. Organise your materials into a simple, logical order that will make sense to your audience. As with an essay, your presentation should consist of an introduction, main body and conclusion.

<p>Introduction</p> <p>① Introduces you and your topic</p> <p>② Explains what your presentation is about</p> <p>③ Explains what your main points will be</p> <p>④ Explains what you will conclude</p>
<p>Main Body</p> <p>Structured in a manner appropriate for the material, generally moving from the simple to the complex</p> <p>↕↕ Emphasises/reiterates important information</p> <p>↕↕ Uses visual aids to illustrate/inform the talk</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>① Restates the main points</p> <p>② Provides a summative conclusion (i.e., answers the main question you have addressed)</p> <p>③ Thanks audience</p> <p>④ Invites any questions</p>

Once you have a good idea of what you intend to talk about, start to transpose your materials into a form that will assist you in remembering what you want to say.

Depending on how confident you feel and the nature of your presentation, this can range from a full script to prompts or 'cues' cards (key words/ bullet points/headings), or you may use the notes function of PowerPoint:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps avoid freezing/ not knowing what to say • Easy to get timing right • Ensures you won't forget anything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can sound unnatural/ monotonous/stilted • Attention focused on script rather than audience • Needs to be written in spoken rather than written English
Cue Cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages spontaneous, more engaging delivery • Allows greater flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to lose track of time • Can forget the details of what to say

PowerPoint Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that your talk and your slides are always in synch • Helps prevent 'Death by PowerPoint' by separating words from images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only works in conjunction with PowerPoint
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3. **Practice**

Practice is essential if you're going to give an effective oral presentation. Practice helps you to:

- Become more familiar and confident with the material
- Get the timing of your presentation correct
- Identify difficult or complicated parts that are difficult to put into words
- Identify parts that you don't fully understand
- Get used to speaking and hearing your own voice
- Get used to coordinating your visual aids with your monologue

If possible, make the presentation in advance (a dress rehearsal) to a friend or colleague, and ask them for feedback on your clarity, audibility, speed of delivery, presentation style, body language, eye contact, engagement, enthusiasm, use of gestures, use of visual aids, etc.

4. **Perform**

At the start of your talk, introduce yourself to get your audience's attention, even if they already know you. Make sure you can be heard by asking (those at the back of the room especially). Unless the room and audience are very small, you'll probably need to speak more loudly than you're used to. There's nothing more frustrating for an audience than trying to listen to a speaker who's barely audible; mumble or speak too softly and you will quickly lose their interest and attention.

Speak at an appropriate pace; nervousness (and the desire to get it over with) can make you speed up. Make an effort to slow down – to be clear and measured, especially bearing in mind that some of your audience might be English second language speakers.

Speak to the audience, not your feet or your notes or the projector screen. Maintain eye contact; gauge the audience's reaction to what you're saying; if their faces look blank, you might need to slow down, speak-up, go back, explain more carefully, or give an example; if you lose your audience and don't get them back, you're wasting their time and yours.

Slow down to emphasise key points; use short pauses to allow the audience to absorb important information, and for you to collect your thoughts.

Monitor your time carefully; make sure you finish within your allocated slot. It's easy to digress and get behind schedule; if you do, adjust your remaining content to make sure you reach your conclusion in time – don't just fade out inconclusively, or be cut off mid-flow.

5. **Rules of Thumb**

For a 10 minute presentation timeslot (other times, use multiples of 10 minutes)

Actual presentation rehearsed at 9 to 9½ minutes

Intro = 1 minute max (1 slide)

Main body = 7 to 7½ minutes (4-7 slides)

Conclusion = 1 to 1 ½ minutes (1-2 slides)

Scripted – 100-130 words per minute (900-1200 words total).

Unscripted – 130-160 words per minute.

6. **Dealing with Nerves**

- Recognise that it's natural to be nervous
- Be well-prepared, well-rehearsed and well-organised
- Take a few deep breaths and try to put everything in context; after all, it is just a presentation
- Remember that the audience wants you to succeed.
- Visualise success – recognise the value of what you've prepared
- Don't put yourself in a position where you feel the need to apologise – by not preparing enough, by not practising enough, by not bothering to make the effort.