

Oral Presentation Skills

Some people have an innate talent for public speaking. Most of us, however, have to work hard to get up in public and give a good talk. Next time you have to make a presentation to a group or in class, check out these tips to help you prepare, organize, and deliver your speech as well as create visual aids to accompany it and answer questions when it's over.

Preparing an Effective Oral Presentation

- Determine the purpose of your presentation & identify your own objectives.
- Know your audience and what it knows.
- Define your topic.
- Arrange your material in a way that makes sense for your objectives.

- Compose your presentation with your objectives in mind.
- Create visual aids, particularly if they will help you to be more persuasive, informative, or convincing.
- Practice your presentation with your visual aids and make necessary adjustments if your practice run exceeds the time limit for your talk.
- Make necessary adjustments.

- Practice again.
- Check out in advance the room where you'll be giving your presentation (set-up, sight lines, equipment, ethernet connection, etc.).
- Choose the organizational pattern that best suits your objectives. Some common organizational patterns include:

- Topical (moves from idea to idea, theme to theme, etc.)
- Chronological (uses time sequences for a framework)
- Classification (presents information according to discrete categories)
- Problem/Solution (presents a problem with one or more solutions to it)

- Don't forget to frame your presentation with a discernible introduction and conclusion.

The introduction should

- a. get the audience's attention;
- b. present your topic in a clear and compelling fashion;
- c. show the topic's importance, relevance, or interest;
- d. forecast the main points or major ideas of your presentation.

- The conclusion should
 - a) inform the audience that you are about to close;
 - b) summarize the main points of your presentation;
 - c) leave the audience with an idea or concept to remember or ponder.

Delivering Your Presentation

- Dress comfortably, but appropriately.
- Be yourself.
- Use humor, personal anecdotes, and audience participation when appropriate.
- Be conscious of your posture, your voice, your gestures, and your “body language.”

- Move around some, but not too much (avoid moving from side to side or rocking back and forth).
- Face your audience and make eye contact with everyone (if it's a small group).
- Pause or take a drink of water if you need to compose yourself.
- Invite questions at the end, giving audience members sufficient time to formulate them.

Using Visual Aids

- a) Use visual aids (text, graphs, charts, tables, illustrations, etc.) to clarify your presentation, not as a basis for it.
- b) Keep visual aids uncluttered:
- c) use bulleted text;
- d) use simple layout/design;

- e) keep graphs, charts, and tables easy to “read” and interpret.
- f) Use titles on each visual aid to guide the audience.
- g) Make sure that the font size of your slides or transparencies is legible from all seats.
- h) Have paper copies of slides or transparencies to distribute in the event of a technical difficulty.

Answering Questions

- Anticipate questions the audience might pose and prepare brief responses.
- Listen carefully to each question, waiting to respond until you are sure that you understand what's being asked.
- Repeat questions before responding to them to ensure that the entire audience has heard them.

- Keep your responses brief; don't deviate.
- Be honest—if you don't know the answer, say so.
- Control the interchange (i.e. don't let one person dominate the question-and-answer period or give a mini-speech).