**UNIT 3: ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS**

**Outcomes**

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

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|  | * Explain what is involved in preparing for a presentation * Describe the techniques to use for effective delivery |

**Content**

* Preparations before the presentation
* Facing the audience: techniques for effective delivery

**Introduction to public speaking**

Making a good oral presentation is an art that involves attention to the needs of your audience, careful planning, and attention to delivery.

Every speaker aims to convey a message to the listener and must make an effort to speak effectively in order to achieve this aim. However, speaking in public is not as easy as one to one oral communication. Public speaking requires special skill as it is a task that most people find very difficult. Some people are gifted public speakers while others are not. Whatever the case, all public speakers need to know the principles of public speaking in order for them to speak effectively. This unit gives you basic knowledge of the principles of public speaking.

1. **Preparations before the Presentation**

You will feel more at ease when you face your audience knowing exactly what you are going to say to them than when you are not sure. So you need to prepare your talk well. In order to do this you need to consider, among other things, the following:

* Know your purpose. You must define your purpose clearly or else you may fall into the trap of giving irrelevant information. It must be clear whether your talk is meant to inform, persuade, instruct, or evoke certain attitudes or feelings etc.
* Know your topic well. You are normally asked to speak about something you are knowledgeable about. Before you face your audience make sure that you know all you need for the talk and gather as much information about the topic as you can.
* Know your audience. To a very large extent, your talk will be determined by the type of audience you are faced with. Conduct a target audience analysis to help you have an idea of the characteristics of your audience. Consideration of your audience will help you to select the right level of language to use and what kind of examples to give in order to illustrate your points.
* Know the time allocated for your talk. This is important because it determines how much detail you need to include in your talk.
* Write out the presentation in rough, just like a first draft of a written report. Review the draft. You will find things that are irrelevant or superfluous - delete them. Check the story is consistent and flows smoothly. If there are things you cannot easily express, possibly because of doubt about your understanding, it is better to leave them unsaid.
* **Never** read from a script. It is also unwise to have the talk written out in detail as a prompt sheet - the chances are you will not locate the thing you want to say amongst all the other text. You should know most of what you want to say - if you don't then you should not be giving the talk! So prepare ***cue cards*** which have key words and phrases (and possibly sketches) on them. Postcards are ideal for this. **Don't forget to number the cards** in case you drop them.
* Remember to mark on your cards the visual aids that go with them so that the right OHP or slide is shown at the right time
* Rehearse your presentation - to yourself at first and then in front of some colleagues. The initial rehearsal should consider how the words and the sequence of visual aids go together. How will you make effective use of your visual aids?

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| *Content and structure* |

## Content

It is likely that you already have a topic and you know what you want to say about it. This is the content of your presentation. You may already have the content of your presentation in written form: for example in a written report. Whether your content is already written down or you are beginning from scratch, you may need to cut it down for your presentation. Why?

* You will need to fit your content within the time limit. Think carefully about how much information you can reasonably present in the time allowed and select the most important point.
* You will need to hold the interest and attention of your audience. Many people lose interest towards the end of presentations that contain too much information. Think carefully about the key points that you want to get across and build your presentation around them.
* Some kinds of information, such as technical explanations and tables of figures, are difficult for listeners to absorb during a presentation. Think about summarizing this kind of information or referring the listeners to a document they can read after the presentation.
* You will need to leave time for examples and illustrations of your points. Think carefully about how you will support and explain your key points.
* You will need to leave time for an introduction, conclusion and questions or comments. During this time you are likely to be repeating points made in the main body of your talk.

**Structure**

Most presentations will consist of an introduction, the body of the talk and a conclusion. The introduction prepares the audience for what you will say in the body of the talk and the conclusion reminds them of your key points. Good presentations raise questions in the listeners' mind. Good speakers encourage questions both during and after the presentation and are prepared to answer them.

### Introduction

A good introduction does four things:

* Attracts and focuses the attention of the audience
* Puts the speaker and audience at ease
* Explains the purpose of the talk and what the speaker would like to achieve
* Gives an overview of the key points of the talk

It is often a good idea to begin a talk with a question, a short story, an interesting fact about your topic or an unusual visual aid. Many speakers follow this with an overhead transparency that shows the title, aim and outline of the talk.

### Body

The body of a presentation must be presented in a logical order that is easy for the audience to follow and natural to your topic. Divide your content into sections and make sure that the audience knows where they are at any time during your talk. It is often a good idea to pause between main sections of your talk. You can ask for questions, sum up the point or explain what the next point will be. If you have an OHT with an outline of your talk on it, you can put this on the projector briefly and point to the next section.

Examples, details and visual aids add interest to a presentation and help you get your message through. Here are some questions you can ask yourself about the examples you include:

* Are they relevant to the experience of the audience?
* Are they concrete?
* Will the audience find them interesting?
* Are they varied?
* Are they memorable?

### Conclusion

A good conclusion does two things:

* Reminds the audience of your key points
* Reinforces your message

Your conclusion should end the presentation on a positive note and make the audience feel that have used their time well listening to you.

* Questions

Many speakers worry about questions from the audience. However, questions show that the audience is interested in what you have to say ad can make the talk more lively and interactive. You should be more worried if there are no questions at all! One way of handling questions is to point to questions you would like to discuss as you are talking. You can control questions better if you leave pauses during your talk and ask for questions. It is important not to let question and answer sessions during the talk go on too long, however. Answer briefly or say you will deal with the question at the end. Make sure you are ready to go on with your talk when questions have finished.

* Decide whether or not you need visual aids. Pictures, charts, diagrams etc. sometimes explain things better than words. So when you are explaining difficult concepts or dealing with many figures it may be a good idea to use visual aids. It is important to note, however, that visual aids need to be very clear otherwise they will only confuse the audience instead of clarifying things.
* Acquaint yourself with the venue. If possible, visit the venue before the presentation to familiarize yourself with the sitting arrangements and other logistics.
* Practise your presentation!

## 2. Delivering your presentation

Even if a talk is well prepared, if it is badly presented you will not achieve your aim of getting the message across to the audience effectively. So the actual delivery of a talk is of utmost importance. In order to speak effectively in public, you must bear the following in mind:

People vary in their ability to speak confidently in public, but everyone gets nervous and everyone can learn how to improve their presentation skills by applying a few simple techniques.

* Consider your posture. Are you going to sit or stand? This depends mainly on the size of the group you are talking to and the type of talk you are giving. If you are talking to a small group of people, sitting would be acceptable, but if you are giving a lecture to a large group of people, it would be best to stand. Generally it is best to stand while talking in public except in very special circumstances.
* Consider your voice. You must project your voice so that everyone in the audience can hear you without difficulty. Also vary the tone of your voice and avoid a monotone otherwise the audience will get bored and possibly doze. In terms of volume, consider whether you are loud enough or too loud. Adjust your voice to the size of the room and make sure the people at the back can hear.
* Observe how your audience reacts. Maintain audience contact and make sure you divide your attention equally among your audience. Do not spend most of your time looking at one or only a few of the audience at a time. This will help you assess the general audience reaction. You can also involve the audience by asking occasional questions, and asking if anyone has questions for you. If you think questions will disrupt the flow of your talk, then you can announce that questions will be allowed at the end.
* Avoid objectionable mannerisms. Avoid irritating mannerisms as they may distract your audience. These include verbal mannerisms such as overuse of ‘you know’, ‘um’, or ‘I mean’ etc. and physical mannerisms such as poking your nose or scratching your head etc.
* Look confident. It is natural to feel nervous in front of an audience but try to conceal your nervousness. There are various ways of doing this: you can avoid looking nervous by breathing deeply, speaking slowly and avoiding unnecessary gestures or movements; or you could start by focusing attention on members of the audience who show interest and then spread your attention as the talk progresses. Note however, that there is not one, but many different ways of dealing with nerves and these will vary from person to person.

## 2. Delivering your presentation

Rapport with the audience involves attention to eye contact, sensitivity to how the audience is responding to your talk and what you look like from the point of view of the audience. These can be improved by practising in front of one or two friends or video-taping your rehearsal.

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| Avoid jokes - always disastrous unless you are a natural expert  Use your hands to emphasise points but don't indulge in to much hand waving. People can, over time, develop irritating habits. Ask colleagues occasionally what they think of your style.  Look at the audience as much as possible, but don't fix on an individual - it can be intimidating. Pitch your presentation towards the back of the audience, especially in larger rooms.  Don't face the display screen behind you and talk to it. Other annoying habits include:   * Standing in a position where you obscure the screen. In fact, positively check for anyone in the audience who may be disadvantaged and try to accommodate them. * Muttering over a transparency on the OHP projector plate an not realising that you are blocking the projection of the image. It is preferable to point to the screen than the foil on the OHP (apart from the fact that you will probably dazzle yourself with the brightness of the projector)   Avoid moving about too much. Pacing up and down can unnerve the audience, although some animation is desirable.  Keep an eye on the **audience's** body language. Know when to stop and also when to cut out a piece of the presentation.  **Appearance** - first impressions influence the audience's attitudes to you. Dress appropriately for the occasion. |

## Voice quality

Your voice is your main channel of communication to the audience, so make sure you use it to its best effect.

The main points to pay attention to in delivery are the quality of your voice, your rapport with the audience, use of notes and use of visual aids.

Voice quality involves attention to volume, speed and fluency, clarity and pronunciation. The quality of your voice in a presentation will improve dramatically if you are able to practise beforehand in a room similar to the one you will be presenting in.

Speak clearly. Don't shout or whisper - judge the acoustics of the room.

Don't rush, or talk deliberately slowly. Be natural - although not conversational.

Deliberately pause at key points - this has the effect of emphasising the importance of a particular point you are making.

### Volume

Is your voice loud enough or too loud? Adjust your volume to the size of the room and make sure the people at the back can hear. In a big room take deep breaths and try to project your voice rather than shout.

### Speed and fluency

Speak at a rate so your audience can understand your points. Do not speed up because you have too much material to fit into the time available. Try not to leave long pauses while you are looking at your notes or use fillers such as 'um' or 'er'. Use pauses to allow the audience to digest an important point. Repeat or rephrase difficult or important points to make sure the audience understands.

### Clarity

Speak clearly. Face the audience and hold your head up. Your speech will be clearer if you look directly at the members of the audience while you speak. Keep your hands and notes away from your mouth and keep your eyes on the audience when you are talking about overhead transparencies. If you have to look at the whiteboard or the overhead projector, stop talking until you are ready to face the audience again.

### Pronunciation

You may not be able to improve your general pronunciation much before an important presentation. However, you can make sure you know how to pronounce names and difficult words. Do not use exagerrated intonation or pronunciation of individual words. Your natural speaking style will be good enough as long as you speak clearly.

## arrow.gif (178 bytes) **Engaging the audience**

One of the secrets of a good presentation is to involve the audience.

### Maintain eye contact

Look your audience in the eyes. Spread your eye contact around the audience including those at the back and sides of the room. Avoid looking at anyone too long because this can be intimidating!

### Ask for feedback

You can involve the audience by asking occasional questions. Try to ask genuine questions to which you do not already know the answer and show interest in any replies. Leave time for the audience to think and try to avoid answering your questions yourself or telling members of the audience that their answers are wrong. Questions to the audience work well when you manage to make those who answer them feel that they have contributed to your presentation.

You can also pause occasionally to ask if anyone has any questions for you. If a question disrupts the flow of your talk too much, you can say that you will answer it later (but don't forget to do it!). Before you ask for questions, make sure you are ready to pick up your presentation again when the Q & A session has finished.

### Look confident

It is natural to feel nervous in front of an audience. Experienced speakers avoid looking nervous by breathing deeply, speaking slowly and avoiding unnecessary gestures or movements. Smiling and focusing attention on members of the audience who show interest can also help you feel more confident as your talk progresses.

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| Oral presentation - using notes |

One of the decisions you have to make before you give a presentation is how to remember what you are going to say. Experienced presenters use a variety of methods. The advantages and disadvantages of each method has been outlined. It is up to you to decide which is best for you.

Good speakers vary a great deal in their use of notes. Some do not use notes at all and some write out their talk in great detail. If you are not an experienced speaker it is not a good idea to speak without notes because you will soon lose your thread. You should also avoid reading a prepared text aloud or memorizing your speech as this will be boring.

The best solution may be to use notes with headings and points to be covered. You may also want to write down key sentences. Notes can be on paper or cards. Some speakers use overhead transparencies as notes. The trick in using notes is to avoid shifting your attention from the audience for too long. Your notes should always be written large enough for you to see without moving your head too much.

## arrow.gif (178 bytes) Speaking without notes

Some presenters do not use notes at all. They just remember the outline of what they are going to say and talk.

**Advantages**: If you do it well, you will seem natural, knowledgeable and confident of your topic. You will also find it easier to establish rapport with the audience because you can give them your full attention.

**Disadvantages:** It is easy to lose your thread, miss out whole sections of your talk or to go over the time limit. People who speak without notes often fail to convey a clear idea of the structure of their ideas to the audience.

This is a high-risk strategy. A few people can present effectively without notes. If you are one of them, good luck!

## arrow.gif (178 bytes) Reading from a script

Some experienced presenters write down every word they intend to say. They may read the whole script aloud or they may just use it as a back-up.

**Advantages:** You will find it easier to keep within the time limit. You are likely to less nervous and make fewer mistakes.

**Disadvantages:** It is difficult to establish rapport with the audience. You may sound like you are reading aloud rather than speaking to an audience. Listeners often lose interest in a presentation that is read aloud.

This is a low-risk strategy employed by many experienced non-native speaker presenters. If you use it, you will need to develop the skill of reading aloud while still sounding natural. Few people can do this effectively.

## arrow.gif (178 bytes) Note cards

Many presenters write down headings and key points on cards or paper. They use them as reminders of what they are going to say.

**Advantages:** You will find it easier to establish rapport with the audience. Your presentation will be structured but you will sound natural.

**Disadvantages:** You may find it difficult to keep within the time limit. If your notes are too brief, you may forget what you intended to say.

This is a medium-risk strategy used by many experienced presenters and the one most often recommended. The disadvantages of note cards can be overcome if you practice your presentation before you give it.

## arrow.gif (178 bytes) Overhead transparencies

Some presenters use their OHTs as notes. They use them like note cards as reminders of what they are going to say. Handouts and PowerPoint presentations can be used in the same way.

**Advantages:** It is easy to establish rapport with the audience because you are sharing your notes with them. You will sound natural and your presentation will seem well-organised.

**Disadvantages:** You may find it difficult to keep within the time limit. Your presentation may be dominated by your OHTs. Unless you are careful, you may find that you are talking to the overhead projector rather than the audience.

This is a medium-to-high-risk strategy. Used well, it can be very effective, especially by presenters who are used to speaking without notes.

## Visual aids

Visual aids help to make a presentation livelier. They can also help the audience to follow your presentation and help you to present information that would be difficult to follow through speech alone.

The two most common forms of visual aid are overhead transparencies (OHTs) and computer slide shows (e.g. PowerPoint). Objects that can be displayed or passed round the audience can also be very effective and often help to relax the audience. Some speakers give printed handouts to the audience to follow as they speak. Others prefer to give their handouts at the end of the talk, because they can distract the audience from the presentation.

Visual aids significantly improve the interest of a presentation. However, they must be relevant to what you want to say. A careless design or use of a slide can simply get in the way of the presentation. What you use depends on the type of talk you are giving. Here are some possibilities:

* Overhead projection transparencies (OHPs)
* 35mm slides
* Computer projection (Powerpoint, applications such as Excel, etc)
* Video, and film,
* Real objects - either handled from the speaker's bench or passed around
* Flip~chart or blackboard - possibly used as a 'scratch-pad' to expand on a point

Keep it simple though - a complex set of hardware can result in confusion for speaker and audience. Make sure you know in advance how to operate the equipment and also when you want particular displays to appear. Sometimes a technician will operate the equipment. Arrange beforehand, what is to happen and when and what signals you will use. Edit your slides as carefully as your talk - if a slide is superfluous then leave it out. If you need to use a slide twice, duplicate it. And always check your slides - for typographical errors, consistency of fonts and layout.

Slides and OHPs should contain the minimum information necessary. To do otherwise risks making the slide unreadable or will divert your audience's attention so that they spend time reading the slide rather than listening to you.

Try to limit words per slide to a maximum of 10. Use a reasonable size font and a typeface which will enlarge well. Typically use a minimum 18pt Times Roman on OHPs, and preferably larger. A guideline is: if you can read the OHP from a distance of 2 metres (without projection) then it's probably OK

Avoid using a diagram prepared for a technical report in your talk. It will be too detailed and difficult to read.

Use colour on your slides but avoid orange and yellow which do not show up very well when projected. For text only, white or yellow on blue is pleasant to look at and easy to read. Books on presentation techniques often have quite detailed advice on the design of slides. If possible consult an expert such as the Audio Visual Centre

Avoid adding to OHPs with a pen during the talk - it's messy and the audience will be fascinated by your shaking hand! On this point, this is another good reason for pointing to the screen when explaining a slide rather than pointing to the OHP transparency.

Room lighting should be considered. Too much light near the screen will make it difficult to see the detail. On the other hand, a completely darkened room can send the audience to sleep. Try to avoid having to keep switching lights on and off, but if you do have to do this, know where the light switches are and how to use them.

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| Overhead transparencies (OHTs) |

## Purpose

The aim of using transparencies is to support the points you want to make in speech. The audience will be able to follow better if they can see your key points and examples as well as hearing them. OHTs can

* Reinforce a point you have made
* Show what something looks like
* Illustrate relationships
* Show information patterns
* Present figures or graphs
* Summarise key points
* Help the audience follow passages or quotations you read aloud

OHTs are not the only form of visual aid available to you. For example, if you want to show what something looks like, it may be better to show the audience the thing itself rather than a picture of it.

## Design

To be effective, OHTs must be attractive and easy to read. Some basic rules are:

* Use large fonts and images
* Present one key point or example per OHT
* Use headings and bullet points in preference to lines of text
* Use strong colours and don't use too many
* Use simple graphs in preference to tables of figures
* Pay attention to layout. Use the centre of the OHT rather than the edges

**Using overhead projectors**

Overhead projectors are designed to allow the speaker to project an image while facing the audience. The image may be a picture or graphic, notes indicating the points you are making or longer texts that you want to read aloud. Whenever you use an OHT, the attention of the audience will be divided between you and the image, so there are a few basic rules to follow:

* Make sure the image can be seen. If possible go to the room in advance and check that everything on your OHTs can be read easily from the back of the room.
* If possible, make sure the projector is in a convenient position. Decide where you want to stand when speaking and then position the projector where you can get to it easily. This will usually be on the side of your body that you normally use for writing (i.e. your left side if you are left-handed)
* Keep your slides in order in a pile next to the projector and put them back in order in another pile as you take them off the projector.
* If possible, control the lighting in the room yourself so that there is always a light shining on you. If your OHTs are easy to read, you will not need to turn off the lights.
* When you are presenting, avoid looking at the projected image and the transparency on the projector. It is a good idea to print out your slides on paper to keep with your notes so you can refer to them while you are speaking.
* If you want to draw attention to a point on an OHT, put a pen on top of it and leave it pointing at the point you want to draw attention to. Don't point with your finger because you will have to look at the projector while you do so.
* If you want the audience to read longer texts on OHTs (e.g. quotations or tables of figures) give them time to do so. There is no point in putting an OHT on the projector if the audience does not have time to read it.
* Make sure you explain the content and purpose of each OHT.

The main rule is to use OHTs to support your talk. Don't let them dominate it.

## OHTs and handouts

Some speakers give handouts for the audience to read while they are talking. The advantage of OHTs over handouts is that they focus attention on you and your talk. If you want to give a handout, it is often a good idea to wait until the end of the presentation before distributing it. Often members of the audience want to note down points from your OHTs. This can distract them from following the presentation, so it is a good idea to distribute information that the audience will want to note down on handout. As soon as someone starts taking notes, tell the audience that they do not need to do so because they will get the information on the handout.

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1. **Finally ...,**

Enjoy yourself. The audience will be on your side and want to hear what you have to say

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|  | Activity  1. Make a list of the various visual aids that can be used during presentations and briefly describe the features of each.  2. List five advantages and five disadvantages of visual aids. |