

# Oral Presentations At University

During your time at university, you may be required to deliver an oral presentation, either in a classroom setting or online. You can reduce your nerves by knowing your topic well and preparing in advance. Good oral presentations have the following characteristics:

- **Clear** objectives;
- **Logical** structure;
- **Confident** delivery;
- High **engagement** and clear enunciation; and
- **Positive** body language (e.g., eye-contact and gestures).

## Stages of Oral Presentations

### Planning

You must first make sure you research and plan. The more informed you are the more confident you will feel. Follow these steps to begin planning your presentation:

- **Understand the assessment task** or question;
- Consider **who your audience is and how much they know** about the subject, as this will affect how you deliver your message;
- Decide on **how you will divide up your topic** if you are presenting in a group;
- **Plan your presentation** by drawing on a number of resources and evaluating them for which are the most relevant, credible, and current; and
- **Make notes** on important concepts, facts, and examples.

### Preparing

In this stage, you should look at the research you have collated and decide on a logical order to present this information. You may like to write notes or flash cards in dot-point form to guide your talk or prepare visual aids or handouts.

Your notes should:

- **Make sense** to you
- **Be large** enough to follow while you are presenting
- Contain the **key words** and ideas of your presentation, rather than a word-for-word speech.

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It is also a good idea to think about some questions your audience could potentially ask at the end of your presentation so you are able to answer them as well as you can.

## Practice

Practicing your delivery is essential, it will boost your confidence, make you more familiar with your material and help you polish your presentation skills. You may consider beginning by rehearsing at home alone in front of a mirror and once you feel more confident, rehearsing to your family or friends.

Before you give your presentation:

- Practice your **tone, speed, and volume**;
- Check you run within the **timeframe** given for the presentation;
- Check if you need to **modify your notes or visual aids**; and
- Check your slideshow is **appropriately sequenced**.

If possible, also try and practice your presentation in the location you will be conducting your final presentation in, so you are familiar with how loud you need to be and the equipment available.

## Present

On the day of the presentation, you should arrive early to set up anything you require. Take some time to calm your nerves. It is a good idea to bring some water with you and save your presentation in multiple places in the case of technical difficulties.

When you are ready to begin presenting:

- **Greet your audience** – even if they already know you;
- **Project your voice** clearly, varying your pitch and tone;
- Use **appropriate gestures** and **slow down when emphasizing** key points;
- **Maintain eye contact** with your audience – avoid reading your slides or notes by looking up occasionally; and
- **Smile!** This will help you convey the impression that you are confident, even if you do not feel that way.

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## Managing Presentation Nerves

Feeling anxious is a natural response when public speaking and can both help and hinder a presentation. The more you practice public speaking, the easier it will become over time. Making sure you are adequately prepared can also reduce anxiety.

Some useful tips for staying calm and on topic include:

- Ensuring you **have water with you** when presenting.
- Taking **deep breaths** before your presentation and visualizing your success.
- Try and **talk 'low' and 'slow,'** as we often speed up our speech when presenting.
- **Arrive early** to your presentation and have something to eat beforehand.
- Accept that **your anxiety is normal** and very common!

## How to Structure Your Oral Presentation

As with a written assignment, your oral presentation should also contain an introduction, body, and conclusion.

### Introduction

At the beginning of your presentation, you should introduce yourself, your topic, any important definitions, and outline what you plan to say on the topic. Think about how you will engage your audience from the outset – will you begin with a quote, an anecdote, or a rhetorical question?

### Body

You should present your ideas on the topic in a logical manner, similarly to writing paragraphs in an essay. Be sure to relate each point you make to the topic, pause after each main point, and use transitional words and phrases so your presentation flows nicely.

Your body section should:

- Address each of your **main points in order of importance;**

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- Draw on a **case study or example** to help illustrate your points; and.
- **Provide evidence** to support your claims.

## Conclusion

This is where you summarise the main points of your presentation and thesis statement, including stating any recommendations or future actions. You may also ask if the audience has any questions and thank them for their time to signal you have finished.

## **A Note on Slideshows**

You may like to include a visual aid, such as a PowerPoint, to maximise engagement during your presentation. These materials are primarily for the audience's benefit – not for your reference. They should add to what you are saying and not detract from your speech.

When using visual aids, ensure they:

- Are **clear and use legible** fonts.
- Include **visuals** such as images and diagrams.
- Use a **simple** design.
- **Sequence** your slide show in line with your presentation structure.
- Communicate only **one specific idea, point, or topic area in each slide**.

A handy hint to remember is the 6:6 rule, which means using no more than 6 dot points per slide, and no more than 6 words per dot point. Handouts can also provide your audience with an outline of your talk, extra material, and further references to allow your presentation to remain concise.

## **After Your Presentation**

You may like to ask your tutor or classmates for feedback. Review the feedback you receive to see if there are any improvements you can make in terms of your content and delivery.

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