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Presenting at university

- Aims**
- ✓ understand reasons for giving presentations
 - ✓ understand common fears about presentations
 - ✓ learn about types of presentation
 - ✓ learn about features of a good presentation



Quiz Self-evaluation

Read the statements, then circle the word which is true for you.

1 I understand why universities often ask students to give presentations.	agree disagree not sure
2 I know the different types of presentation I might be asked to give.	agree disagree not sure
3 I know some common worries students have about giving presentations.	agree disagree not sure
4 I understand what makes a good presentation.	agree disagree not sure

- Tip** ✓ The tertiary education institution you go to after high school can be called different names. In the USA, people talk about university, school and college. In the UK, people tend to call it university ('uni') and college. In South Africa, people refer to university ('varsity'), technikon, technical training college, or generally to institutes of further education and training. In Australia it is university or 'uni' and TAFE which is technical and further education.

Why students are required to give presentations

Glossary

English-medium
If a school or university is English-medium, then English is the language used for teaching there.

At English-medium universities, it is very common for students to be asked to give a presentation. The kind of presentation, and how many you have to give, depends on the university and the subject you are studying.

Many students do not like giving presentations. The idea of giving a presentation in front of a group of people may sound more difficult than writing an essay or an exam. If your first language is not English, then giving a presentation in it will probably seem even more difficult. On top

Glossary

plagiarize

If somebody plagiarizes another person's idea or work, they use it or copy it and pretend that they thought of it or created it.

topic

A topic is a particular subject that you can discuss or write about.

assess

When you assess a person, thing, or situation, you consider them in order to make a judgment about them.

of all this, you probably will not be taught how to give a presentation in your course – you may be expected to work everything out yourself. Even so, once you have completed your first presentation, you will probably feel proud of yourself. Presentations normally get easier, the more of them you do. They also give you the chance to develop useful skills.

There are plenty of reasons why your university might ask you to give a presentation as part of your studies. Presentations help students in these ways.

- Doing presentations helps students develop new skills that may be useful in a future career.
- They prepare students to give presentations at conferences (e.g. if they work as researchers or in sales and marketing).
- They give students useful skills for later job searches; presentations are often part of job interviews.
- They encourage independent research.
- They help students to develop group work skills (e.g. when doing group presentations).
- While some students plagiarize in their written assignments, it is very difficult to cheat while giving a presentation.
- They help students to develop their knowledge of a specific topic.
- They help students to develop self-confidence.
- If students are assessed for their presentations, this gives those students who do not perform as well in exams or other written work a better chance to get a good mark overall.
- By going through a process of researching, preparing and then giving a presentation, students will learn more than by just reading information or attending a lecture.

Types of presentation

You could be asked to give a presentation at different stages of your studies and for different reasons. You might have to give a presentation that is not assessed, meaning you will not receive a mark. Your presentation might, however, contribute significantly to the final score for your course.

Presenting

Some of the most common types of presentation are:

- seminar and tutorial discussions
- seminar presentations
- seminar papers
- poster presentations



Exercise 1

Match the different presentation types, 1–4, to the descriptions, a–d.

1 seminar and tutorial discussions	a presenting a topic individually or in a group to your seminar group
2 seminar papers	b producing a visual summary of research you have done and talking about it
3 seminar presentations	c discussing a topic with a teacher and a small number of other students
4 poster presentations	d introducing a topic to your seminar group, often including preparing a written text to give to your teacher

You will look at all these types of presentation in the rest of this book. In Chapter 12, you will learn about poster presentations, which are quite different from other types of presentation.

Tip ✓ The word 'tutorial' is used in different ways at different universities and in their different departments. For more information on how the word is used, see Chapter 2.

Problems and worries

As you read in the previous section, there are a number of positive aspects of being asked to give a presentation. However, many students see presentations as something to worry about rather than something to benefit from. The following fears are very common:

- feeling nervous or uncomfortable speaking in public,
- worrying that your language skills are not good enough,
- feeling you do not know enough about the topic,
- being concerned that people will ask questions you will not be able to answer,
- not knowing what content to include and how to organize it,
- worrying about working with other students for a group presentation.



Exercise 2

Read the information about the typical worries students have about presentations and complete the gaps with the following phrases.

- a do not know enough about the topic
 - b give presentations in groups
 - c language skills
 - d speaking in public
 - e worry about what to include
- 1 Most people feel nervous about _____ – even very experienced speakers do. Nerves can actually be helpful, though, as adrenalin (the substance your body produces when you are angry, excited or frightened which makes your heart beat faster), can give you more energy and focus.
 - 2 International students often worry about their _____. This is understandable. If this is true for you, remember that you probably have an advantage over many native speakers – if you had to do several English language exams to get into university, you may be more used to having your speaking skills assessed.
 - 3 When you first think about the idea of giving a presentation, it is normal to feel you _____. But once you start preparing your presentation, this worry should disappear, because during your preparation, you will become more knowledgeable about your topic.
 - 4 At the beginning of the process, it is normal to _____ in the presentation and how to organize it. However, with good research and preparation, this will not be a problem.
 - 5 Sometimes students worry if they are asked to _____. Working with other students can create different challenges, especially if you do not know the other people in the group very well or they are a different nationality to you. By working in a group you will develop useful skills, such as sharing your ideas, listening and acknowledging other people's ideas. You might find that you get support from the other people in your group, unlike when you do an individual presentation.

For more information on preparing and dealing with nerves, see Chapter 10.

The features of a good presentation

You may be asked to give different types of presentation during your studies. The specific course you are studying and the requirements from your university will influence your final presentation. However, there are some important things you should always think about, whatever kind of presentation you need to give.



Exercise 3

Look at the list below. Tick the things you think are important and appropriate for a university presentation. Add three more features you think are important at the end of the list.

- anticipating problems
- using effective body language and eye contact
- using visual aids effectively
- engaging with your audience
- giving as much detail as possible
- being well organized
- making the audience laugh
- planning and rehearsing
- including relevant content
- speaking effectively
- writing a script and reading it carefully

- _____
- _____
- _____



Exercise 4

Think about the three features from Exercise 3 that you should not have selected. Why are these things unimportant and inappropriate for a university presentation?



Exercise 5

Read the explanations and examples below. Complete the gaps by writing one of the features you selected in Exercise 3.

- 1 having a clear introduction, main part and conclusion, and keeping to the time limit: _____
- 2 talking about things the audience will be interested in and will not already know: _____
- 3 speaking from notes instead of from a script and using your voice effectively, with clear pronunciation: _____
- 4 using your body to make your message clear, and making eye contact with your audience: _____
- 5 capturing the interest of your audience and getting them involved: _____
- 6 using tools like PowerPoint, handouts and overhead projectors to support your presentation: _____
- 7 organizing the time you have to prepare and practise your presentation in advance: _____
- 8 thinking about and planning ahead for things that might go wrong: _____

By working through this book, you will learn how to improve your skills in all these areas.

Remember

- ✓ Although presentations are often very difficult, they can teach you many skills and can be useful in your future career.
- ✓ Be prepared to give different types of presentations during your studies.
- ✓ Although you may have concerns about presentations, your nerves can actually help your performance on the day. If you prepare for your presentation properly, you should not have serious problems.
- ✓ Think about the specific features that good presentations have in common.