

Oral Presentation General Guidelines

Prepare your presentation to be no longer than 20 minutes allowing time for 5 minutes for discussion and questions from the audience. Presentations should be shown with PowerPoint.

General Guidelines to Prepare an Oral Presentation

Presentations are brief discussions of a focused topic delivered to a group of listeners in order to impart knowledge or to stimulate discussion. They are similar to short papers with an introduction, main body and conclusion. The ability to give brief presentations is a learned skill and one that is called on frequently in the workplace.

Preparation

Preparation is the key to giving an effective presentation and to controlling your nervousness. Know your topic well. You will be the expert on the topic in the classroom. Good preparation and the realization that you are the expert will boost your self-confidence. After your research, you will find that you know much more about your topic than you will have time to present. That is a good thing. It will allow you to compose a good introduction, to distill out the main, most important points that need to be made, and to finish with a strong conclusion.

- Know your topic - become an expert
- Learn as much about the topic as you can to boost your self-confidence
- Have an idea what the background is of your audience is so you will know how much detail to go into and what kinds of things you may have to define.
- Prepare an outline of topic.
- Bullet or number the main points. An 8-minute talk is roughly equivalent to 4 double spaced pages in 12-pt font and 1" margins - however, never read a presentation. Write out your presentation if you need to organize your thoughts, but then outline this text for the actual presentation.

Visual aids

Visual aids (maps, photos, film clips, graphs, diagrams, and charts) can enhance a presentation.

- Keep visual aids simple and uncluttered.
- Use color and contrast for emphasis but use them in moderation
- Use a font large enough to be seen from the back of the room
- A rule of thumb: slides are readable from the back of a room if they are readable at a distance of 9 feet from a 15" monitor
- A rule of thumb: for a 15 minute presentation use 15 slides.
- Resist the temptation to use sound effects and dramatic slide transition

Practice

Practice giving your presentation to yourself.

- Speak out loud and time yourself.
- Practice using your visual aids.
- It is absolutely important that you adhere to your time limit. Your professor knows that you know more about your topic than you will have time to share.
- Your goal is to inform, not overwhelm. In this case, less can be more.

Delivery

To deliver your presentation you will have to overcome your nervousness and deal with room conditions. Good preparation should allay most of your nervousness; realizing that everyone feels nervous before a presentation should also help. Your presentation will never go exactly as

you think it will – fortunately, they usually go better than you expect. However, be prepared for something to go wrong and have a backup plan.

Equipment tips:

- Workout details with equipment before the day of your presentation
- Know how to operate the equipment you choose to use
- Have a backup copy of your PowerPoint on a disk or flash drive.
- Do not expect a network connection to work when you need it. Have any web sites you hope to show available as offline copies on a disk or flash drive. Work offline whenever possible to avoid slow network response

Delivery tips:

- Begin your presentation by telling your audience what your topic is and what you will be covering. Audiences like to have a guidepost.
- Avoid reading your remarks
- Dress neatly and appropriately. The rule of thumb is to dress one level nicer than the audience will be dressed
- Do not wear a hat of any kind
- Speak in a clear, audible voice -loud enough to be clearly heard in the back row. Never, ever mumble
- Stand up straight, don't slouch or drape yourself around the podium
- Don't be afraid to move around the room – moving around is good, it causes the audience to pay attention
- Don't rock back and forth on your heels
- Don't tap a pencil or play with pencil or pointer
- Don't do things that will distract from your content.
- Never apologize to your audience for the state of your knowledge or your degree of preparation. The audience wants to have confidence in you –you are the authority, do nothing to undermine your authority
- Never mention anything that could have been in your talk but wasn't
- Make frequent eye contact with the audience. Really look at the audience as you talk to them. Engaging them directly with your eyes transfers a bit of your energy to them and keeps them focused on your content. Making eye contact says that you are in charge of the room and for a presentation
- Avoid the tendency to speak to the screen instead of to the audience. Be so familiar with your visual aids that the only reason you look at them is to point something out.
- Never turn your back on the audience
- Try to avoid walking in front of the projector
- Adhere strictly to your time limit. Organize your main points and rate of speech so that you speak for the allotted time. You will be surprised how quickly the time goes.
- At the conclusion of your presentation ask for questions. Encourage questions with your eyes and your body language. Respond to questions politely, good-humoredly, and briefly. Take a quick moment to compose your thoughts before responding if you need to – but do not fill the moment with “uh”
- At the end of your presentation, summarize your main points and give a strong concluding remark that reinforces why your information is of value
- Show some enthusiasm

A note on fear and nervousness

Accept nervousness for what it is – part of the preparation for speaking and it is a good thing. It heightens your senses and gets your blood pumping. You will think clearly and move faster. Everyone will feel nervous. A good preparation will increase your self-confidence. Once you get going, your good preparation will kick in and before you know it, your presentation will be over.

The role of the audience

Presentations involve both a speaker and the audience. People in the audience play a role in how well a presentation goes. People in the audience have an obligation to:

- Listen politely
- Make occasional eye contact with speaker
- Take notes or jot down interesting facts
- Control negative facial expressions
- Control bored body language
- Do not put your head down on the desk or tilt your head back to sleep
- Control the impulse to constantly check watch
- Expect a Question & Answer period to be part of the presentation
- Participate in Question & Answer period – either by listening or by posing a question
- Prepare to remain attentive throughout the Q&A – speakers will dismiss their audience
- Remain seated until the speaker is finished

Source:

Ohio Wesleyan University Libraries Website. December 20, 2018.

<http://go.owu.edu/~dapeople/ggpresnt.html#Preparation>

Other resources you may consult

Purdue Online Writing Lab. Retrieved December 20, 2018.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/visual_rhetoric/designing_effective_powerpoint_presentations/index.html

USNews: 15 Strategies for Giving Oral Presentations. December 20, 2018.

<http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/professors-guide/2010/02/24/15-strategies-for-giving-oral-presentations>

Williams, R. (1994). *The Non-designer's Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice*. Peachpit Press, Berkeley, CA