

Giving Oral Presentations

Public speaking can be terrifying. In fact, it is some people's greatest fear. But with preparation and practice, you can give an effective and interesting presentation. Just remember to leave plenty of time for all the necessary steps. For more information, see chapter 21 in Mike Markel's *Technical Communication*, 8th edition.

Prepare

Preparation is essential for a good oral presentation. Leave yourself plenty of time for preparation, or you may find yourself having something similar to writer's block before and during the presentation. There are several steps in this process:

- Make sure you understand the assignment/topic and the guidelines/rules for the presentation.
- Do research (if necessary).
- Outline and plan your presentation/speech.
- Prepare note cards.
- Prepare visual aids (posters, props, PowerPoint slides, overhead sheets, etc.).
 - Slides should not be a verbatim copy of your notes.
 - Graphics help retention and are interesting, so use them, if possible.
 - All visuals and graphics should be simple, professional, accurate, and clear.
- Revise your outline/notes and visuals as needed.

Rehearse

It is very important to rehearse your presentation. Practice for a group of people who will volunteer to listen and give feedback, but if that isn't possible, at least practice by yourself. You should rehearse until you feel very comfortable with your presentation; most people need to do it 5-6 times at least. Keep in mind that this will take some time, but you will be much more comfortable if you have rehearsed a lot.

Rehearsing will allow you to

- Practice staying within the time limit.
- Eliminate the "jitters" before the actual presentation.
- Become more familiar with the material.
- See areas that need revision (content, organization, and delivery).

Tips for rehearsing

- Try to find a critical audience that will point out weak areas.
- Don't script your presentation; note cards work best.
- Use your visuals during the rehearsal.
- Time it.
- Rehearse it until you feel confident (5-6 times).

Giving the Oral Presentation

Most people get very nervous right before they have to speak. There are several things you can do to avoid this.

Before the Presentation

- Get plenty of sleep (preparing and rehearsing early will allow you to do this).
- Eat regular meals so you aren't hungry or lightheaded.
- Drink plenty of water to avoid a "froggy" voice.
- Look the part; you will feel more confident if you are happy with your appearance.
- Review your note cards one last time.
- Remember that all students in the class/group have to go through the same thing; they are probably nervous, too. Also, people are not usually as critical as we think they are.
- Take a few deep breaths if you are nervous; this will calm you.
- Remember that since you have prepared and practiced, you have nothing to worry about!

During the presentation

Here are some suggestions for effective strategies during your presentation.

Good Strategies	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eye contact: look at the people you are speaking to.• Speech: speak slowly and loudly and make sure to pronounce words clearly.• Facial expressions: smile, laugh, and look like you are interested and confident.• Gestures: use your hands to refer to visuals and use your body to communicate (stance, arms, etc.).• Pause if you need a moment to regain your thoughts.• Observe the time limit and adjust if needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looking at the floor, ceiling, etc.• Rushed, mumbled, whispered or monotone speech.• A blank face or lack of confidence.• Fidgeting: hair twirl, foot stamp, weaving, etc.• Filler language: um, uh, like, etc.• Stopping before or after the time limit.• Omitting large sections of the presentation to save time.

After the presentation

- Thank the audience for their time and attention.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Answer questions completely and honestly; if you don't know the answer, say so.
- Maintain a polite and positive tone.
- If someone is asking a question that would be better discussed one-on-one, offer to speak with him/her alone after the presentation.

How can I make my presentation more interesting?

If you are looking for some ways to make your presentation more appealing, try these tips:

- Involve the audience: ask questions, give objects or handouts, etc.
- Have an effective introduction and conclusion (ask a question, tell a story, give a statistic, etc.)
- Have stimulating visual aids that help the audience understand the presentation.