

Giving Oral Presentations

Public speaking can be terrifying. In fact, it is some people's greatest fear. However, with preparation and practice, a student 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, 9th ed.*

Prepare

Preparation is essential for a good oral presentation. Leave yourself plenty of time for preparation, or you may experience writer's block before and during the presentation. Consider several steps in this process:

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

Rehearse

It is very important to rehearse the presentation. Practice in front of a group of people who will volunteer to listen and give feedback, but, if that is not possible, at least practice by yourself. You should rehearse until you feel very comfortable with the presentation; most people need to rehearse at least five to six times. Keep in mind that this will take some time, but you will be much more comfortable if you have rehearsed thoroughly.

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:

- Find a critical audience that will point out weak areas.
- Do not script the presentation; note cards work best.
- Use visuals during the rehearsal.
- Time it.
- Rehearse it until feeling more confident (five to six times).

Giving the Oral Presentation

Most people get very nervous right before they have to speak. There are several ways to avoid this.

Before the Presentation

- Get plenty of sleep (by preparing and rehearsing early).
- Eat regular meals to avoid hunger or lightheadedness.
- Drink plenty of water to avoid a “froggy” voice.
- Look the part; students will feel more confident if they are happy with their appearance.
- Review note cards one last time.
- Remember that all students in the class/group have to experience the same thing; they are probably nervous, too, and most people are not usually as critical as the student thinks they are.
- Take a few deep breaths if nervous; this will calm the student.
- Remember that, since the student has prepared and practiced, he or she has nothing to worry about.

During the presentation

Here are some suggestions for effective strategies during the presentation:

Good Strategies	Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eye contact: effective speakers look at the people they are speaking to.• Speech: speak slowly and loudly and make sure to pronounce words clearly.• Facial expressions: smile, laugh, and look interested and confident.• Gestures: use hands to refer to visuals and use the body to communicate (stance, arms, etc.).• Pause if needing a moment to regain thoughts.• Observe the time limit and adjust the speech 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, you know, 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 do not 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 or her alone after the presentation.

How can I make my presentation more interesting?

When looking for some ways to make the 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.