

GIVING AN ORAL PRESENTATION

Some units at University will require you to prepare and deliver an oral presentation. While this may seem daunting, it is a good opportunity for you to build confidence in speaking in front of an audience, and in leading a discussion about a specific topic. The process can be divided into three distinct stages:

1. preparation
2. practice, and
3. presentation.

The majority of your work is done during the first two stages, so that by the time you deliver your topic, you can feel well prepared and confident.

PREPARE EFFECTIVELY, TO DEVELOP CONFIDENCE

Unless your audience cannot read for themselves, you don't need to do it for them. If you have to use the occasional quote or phrase, let the audience read the text for themselves. Aim for key words and phrases, rather than text-heavy sentences.

Prepare your presentation in broadly the same way you would prepare an essay, that is, research your given question or topic by locating, evaluating and reading through various sources of information, and then consider the position that you will take (sometimes termed your thesis). During preparation you should consider your audience's knowledge on the topic. You need to pitch your information so that it is challenging but not overly technical. New terms need to be explained on first use.

The introduction and conclusion are especially important. One approach to starting a presentation is to find an interesting and engaging way to introduce your topic and grab the attention of your audience: perhaps a surprising fact or figure, or a contentious statement. Make sure that you also end strongly, with a clear concluding statement.

USE APPROPRIATE VISUAL AIDS TO COMPLEMENT YOUR PRESENTATION

The main difference between an essay and a spoken presentation is that a spoken presentation involves an additional visual element—including yourself, the speaker, and any additional visual aids that you choose to use. Visual aids can help to maintain audience interest and they can act as a prompt for the main elements of your delivery.

Presentation software, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, is favoured by many students to create, edit and use slide shows based on images and text. In addition to PowerPoint, consider using the whiteboard, or taking along real objects. Remember that visual aids should enhance your presentation, not take it over.

Tips for preparing and using PowerPoint slides include: aim for 1–2 minutes per slide; keep the design simple—less is more; use images in preference to words; text, when used, should be in dot point form, with no more than 3 dot points of up to 6 words per dot point on each slide (do not write a script or you

will end up reading aloud to your audience); use a font size of no less than 36 point for title and 28 point for text; limit animations and clip art; label all figures and graphs; use references to cite sources, and include a reference list at the end.

PRACTISE YOUR PRESENTATION

Before your presentation, have several practices and maybe consider recording yourself. After practising a few times, consider possible improvements. It is a good idea to present to friends or fellow students and seek their honest feedback. Pay particular attention to the organisation of your talk, and memorising your main elements.

The following weblink will take you to exemplary short talks on various topics:
<http://www.ted.com/talks>

Think about the approach used by effective speakers that you have heard, and whether any of their methods might work for you. Think about where you will stand in the room and where you will look—try to engage the whole audience across all parts of the room. Trial your equipment in advance. When practising your talk, focus on your pace and volume, timing, and room preparation.

TACKLING THE BIG DAY

Aim to be positive—your practising should have given you the confidence that you are ready to present. Choose appropriate clothing. Make good use of non-verbal communication—look around the room, use gestures when speaking, make eye contact and involve your audience. Remember that it is a presentation, not just a reading. Direct your audience and indicate when questions may be asked. Do not be afraid of difficult questions as it means you have inspired your audience. Open the topic up for discussion among the group. This can engage your audience and can often be a sign of a good presentation.

WHAT NEXT?

After the presentation, you should seek valuable feedback from fellow students and your teacher or lecturer. This will help you to improve for your next presentation. You should also evaluate yourself—how do you think it went? Do not be too critical as speaking in front of an audience is a challenging task. The skills you gain in presenting will also help you in lecture question time, class discussions and tutorials.