

Oral Presentations for Tutorials & Seminars



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What is an Oral Presentation?

An oral presentation is a short talk on a set topic given to a tutorial or seminar group. In an oral presentation one (or more) students give a talk to a tutorial group and present views on a topic based on their readings or research. The rest of the group then joins in a discussion of the topic.

Depending on your course, giving an oral presentation can involve:

- reading background material
- preparing and delivering a talk
- leading a group discussion
- preparing handouts and visual aids
- preparing relevant and thought-provoking questions
- submitting a written assignment based on the presentation topic

Presentation topics are usually scheduled early in the semester. You may be able to choose your topic or one may be allocated to you. If you are able to choose a topic, select the one that you have some questions about and that interests you the most. Your presentation may be given as an individual or as part of a group.

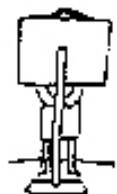
In some courses the oral presentation may be the basis for a written assignment. Check with your tutor for details. There may be specific requirements you may need to meet and these are usually detailed in your course outline or study guide.

Preparing a Presentation

Preparing an oral presentation is much like preparing any other assignment; it needs to be planned researched and written before it is delivered.

Getting started

- Examine the assignment criteria provided in your course outline carefully and make sure you know exactly what to do. Do you have to answer a set question, present an argument, explain or discuss something, be critical? If you are unsure, check with your tutor.
- Analyse your audience. What are their needs, constraints, knowledge level?
- Research your topic. You must demonstrate an understanding of the main points of your tutorial readings, but you will need to read further. Use your course reading list to find additional relevant information.
- Read and consider the tutorial readings carefully. Express your own conclusions about the opinion/argument/ thesis you think the author is trying to express. Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the material presented in the texts.
- Brainstorm your topic and write a rough outline in point form.
- Organise your material and write a draft—think about the length of time you have to speak and the amount of information you can include.
- Summarise your draft into points to write on overheads and/or cards.
- Plan and prepare your visual aids.
- Rehearse your presentation and get its length right. Ask a friend to listen and time you.



Structuring Your Oral Presentation

Have a clear, organised structure for your oral presentation. Structuring a talk is no different from writing an essay or a report; it requires an introduction, body and conclusion. Like an essay, these sections of your talk need to fit together and be linked clearly. A poorly structured talk will confuse and frustrate an audience.

Oral presentations should have the following structure:

Introduction

An introduction is like a road map that tells your audience the direction your presentation will take.

- State your topic and tell the audience what your presentation will cover.
- Outline the main points.

A good introduction will capture an audience's attention.

- Start your talk by greeting the audience and introducing yourself.
- State your topic clearly. For example:
 - 'I'm going to talk about...'
 - 'Today I'd like to discuss...'
- Provide an outline of the main points.
- Provide any necessary background or definition of terms.

Body

The body of your presentation is where you develop the main points and present examples and evidence.

The information in the body needs to be well-structured. Decide on an organising principle. It could be by chronological order, theme or order of importance.

Make sure you provide clear links between main points, explanations and examples.

Use visual aids to engage the interest of your audience and 'show' instead of just 'tell'.

Emphasise important information. Tell your audience when information is particularly important or interesting. Tell them why.

- Use verbal 'signposts' to guide your audience through the presentation, highlight key points and indicate the different sections of your presentation.
 - 'Another point is...'
 - 'A contrary view to consider is'
 - 'In conclusion'
- Move from one point to the next by using phrases (such as 'Firstly ... secondly' ... 'finally').
- Introduce supporting evidence
 - 'For example ...'
 - '[Author name] states that ...'

Conclusion

The conclusion is usually a summary of the main points made in the body of the talk.

- Restate the main points.
- Re-answer the question.

Don't introduce any new information in the conclusion. Take the opportunity to show that you have covered all the points you made in your introduction.

- Work out how you will finish your talk. You can signal your conclusion with the phrase '*In conclusion ...*'
- Thank the audience, and invite questions:
- Restate the purpose of your talk, and say that you have achieved your aim:
 - 'I think it's now clear that ...'

Timing

Oral presentations usually have a time limit and the amount of time you have will determine how much information you are able to cover. To keep within the allotted time, you need to plan carefully and focus on essential points when giving your talk. Find out what the time limit is and ask yourself:

- How much of the topic area can I cover?
- How much detail can I include? What can I leave out? (Remove any padding or irrelevant information).
- What is the most effective way to present information? Would using visuals (OHTs, slides, videos, whiteboard etc.) help me cover more ground in less time?

Write a draft 'script' and allow roughly 400 words for each five minutes. A draft will help you work out the structure, the main points and the supporting information you need to include.

Giving the Presentation

Starting well

- Stand in a balanced position, facing the audience, feet apart - this helps you to appear confident. Don't slouch, shuffle about or lean against the furniture.
- Take a deep breath and wait for the group to focus their attention on you before you start to speak.
- Greet the audience and introduce yourself, even if they already know you.
- Smile! Your audience will react warmly and if you can't feel relaxed you can at least appear that way.

Delivery

- Don't read your presentation word-for-word from a script or from PowerPoint slides - listening to someone read aloud is boring for an audience. Aim to talk instead.
- Written and spoken language are different. Use appropriate language; generally a formal but conversational tone is best (avoid slang or colloquial language).
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Don't rush; nervous speakers tend to speed up, so try to pace yourself.
- Slow down to emphasise key points.
- Don't be afraid to pause. Short pauses can add emphasis to important points and give you a chance to collect your thoughts.
- Make eye contact with your audience. Don't just look at your tutor or stare off into space. A good technique is to divide the room into three sections (left, middle and right) and sweep your eyes across the audience. If you don't want to look anyone in the eye, look at a point in the middle of their foreheads.

Preparation

Prepare 'prompts' to help you remember what to say

Using 'prompt' notes prevents you from reading your talk. If you know your topic well enough, you can give the talk from these headings and point-form cues.

- To make notes, reduce your draft 'script' to point-form. List main headings and supporting details or examples. Use key words and phrases rather than full sentences.
- Try using palm-sized cue cards. Number them so they don't get out of sequence.

Plan your opening remarks

Think about how to get (and keep) the group engaged. Plan an opening that will attract interest and direct attention to your topic. Try starting with a controversial statement, a quotation, an anecdote, a question or a 'show of hands'. Some examples:

- Three out of five people in this room will be affected by heart disease.
- Who can guess roughly how many people drive to work each morning?

A little relevant humour can be an effective ice breaker and gain attention. However, avoid telling jokes; you are giving a presentation not a stand-up comedy routine.

Rehearse

- Rehearse your presentation at home alone, in front a mirror, then to your family or flatmates.
- Practice projecting your voice clearly and varying your pitch and tone. Don't mumble or speak in a monotone.
- Be aware of body language and posture. Stand up straight. Use appropriate gestures to emphasise your points.
- Rehearse with notes. Practise speaking naturally, glancing at your notes occasionally.
- Rehearse with your visual aids to make sure they work.
- Time yourself to make sure you stay within the allotted time limit.

Prepare handouts

Handouts can provide your audience with an outline of you talk, extra material and references, plus serve as a record of the presentation. The handout should be well-laid out and outline the main points.

- right) and sweep your eyes across the audience. If you don't want to look anyone in the eye, look at a point in the middle of their foreheads.
- Keep your body turned toward the audience and your body language open and friendly.

Tutorial discussion

Depending on your course, your presentation may conclude with a group discussion. If this is the case, it is a good idea to prepare a couple of questions that are relevant to your topic. When you start speaking, tell your audience that you will be asking some questions at the end of your presentation. It sometimes keeps people more alert if they know that they may have to participate in a discussion based on what they have just been listening to.

You can hand out copies of your questions, put them on an OHT or slide, or write them on a whiteboard.

Providing the audience with handouts that include a summary of your talk, or a list of the main points can help promote discussions. Distribute these at the end of your talk. If you give them out before your talk people may not listen closely because they already have the information.

Answering questions

After your presentation, members of your tutorial may ask you questions. Don't be afraid of questions; they are a positive sign. They show that the audience is listening and interested.

- Listen carefully to the question. Repeat or paraphrase the question so you are sure you understand it and so everyone in the audience hears it.
- If it is a long question, try breaking it up into sections, and answer them one by one.
- Be brief and to the point and avoid introducing new information.
- If you don't know the answer to the question, it's OK to say so - you can't know absolutely everything about your topic. Get the group involved by opening the question up to the audience and letting someone else answer it! If no one else can, you can always offer to find out the answer for them at a later date.

Performance anxiety

Most people feel nervous about speaking in front of a group and that's not a bad thing—a bit of adrenalin can help a performance. However, an oral presentation is a performance, so you need to act the part of a confident speaker. To make sure that 'stage fright' doesn't become a problem, here are some strategies to try:

- Being well-prepared and organised reduces anxiety and makes presenting easier. Make sure you've prepared and rehearsed, that your notes are arranged in correct order and any visuals work without any problems.
- Take a few deep breaths. Breathing slowly and evenly will calm you down especially if you're prone to 'the shakes' (in your hands or your voice) when you're nervous.
- Stand in a balanced position, facing the audience, feet apart. Smile!
- If you feel nervous, tell the tutorial group—they will understand. Remember that the audience consists of your colleagues and friends. They want you to succeed.

Visual aids

Using visual aids can add support and impact to your presentation. Visual aids can :

- illustrate something that is difficult or time-consuming to describe
- show reality in ways that words alone cannot (photographs, plans, maps)
- summarise information
- add colour and interest to a 'dry' topic

Visuals can include PowerPoint slides, OHTs, whiteboards or videos.

For more information, see The Learning Centre's guide *Using PowerPoint in Oral Presentations*