Effective Oral Presentations

Oral presentations are a common requirement in many courses. They may be short or long, include PowerPoint slides or other visual aids, and be done individually or in a group. Planning and structuring an oral presentation is similar to the process of writing an essay, except you need to think about having a live audience, and use spoken language instead of written. The major steps in oral presentations are planning, structuring, preparing and presenting.

Plan

- **Purpose**
  - Identify the purpose of your research. Research your subject to ensure that you are knowledgeable. This will help you to decide what the key focus of your presentation should be and what the main points that you want to convey are. Anticipate questions you may be asked and prepare answers to these.

- **Audience**
  - Who is the audience? Are they more or less knowledgeable on the topic than you? Pitch your presentation at the right level. What does your audience expect to gain from listening to you?

Structure

Like an essay, an oral presentation needs an introduction, body and conclusion.

- Introduce the topic, giving the scope and plan of the presentation. Set the mood of the talk (in accordance with the purpose).
- Present four or five main points in the body of the talk. Make sure they are ordered (choose a logical, chronological, special or topical sequence).
- Link your main points to create a smooth flow of ideas and use signposts when moving from one point to another (i.e. ‘firstly’, ‘secondly’ etc.).
- Use visual aids and audience activities to illustrate your main points and maintain interest and pace in your presentation.
- Conclude your presentation by summarising your main points. Include recommendations if you have been asked to do so.

Prepare

The more prepared you feel, the less nervous you're likely to be. You will need to think about:

**The time limit**

Practise the presentation a number of times to make sure you fit the information into the time allowed.
Ways of presenting your information
Create **visual aids** that the audience can see clearly, and remember these support what you say, and are not replacements for what you say. These could include:

- A PowerPoint presentation (See PowerPoint tip sheet).
- Whiteboard drawings
- Photographs
- Overhead transparencies
- Posters
- Video clip
- Role play

You may also want to consider using some worksheets to encourage audience participation and interaction.

Presenting your material:

- Try to establish rapport with your audience. Get audience attention with a stimulating opening statement. Be positive. Make it clear that you are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about your subject.
- Don’t read your entire presentation as you will tend to lose eye contact, intonation and good posture. Talk to your audience. Use cue cards as prompts when needed. Your audience can only listen for so long without their attention wandering, so use your visual aids and audience activities to illustrate your main points and maintain interest and pace in your presentation

Voice

- Speak clearly and loudly enough to reach the back row
- Check the pronunciation of new or foreign words, technical terms and people’s names
- Use pauses and stress to emphasise main points
- Vary the pitch of your voice
- Speak confidently
- Avoid speaking in a monotone
- Be careful not to speak too quickly

Physical presentation

- Establish eye contact with the audience and move your eye contact around the room so that everyone feels that you are talking to them.
- Maintain good posture and use appropriate gestures with your hands
- Avoid distracting mannerisms
- Ask for questions/ invite discussion
- End confidently and leave your audience feeling upbeat about what they have just heard.

Nerves

Everybody feels nervous at some point when asked to give an oral presentation. If you're feeling particularly nervous, take a few deep breaths and focus on speaking slowly. Also try to focus clearly on your message.