

# Oral Presentations

Oral presentations are a common feature of many courses at university. They may take the form of a short or longer presentation at a tutorial or seminar, delivered either individually or as part of a group. You may have to use visual aids such as *PowerPoint* slides. Researching, planning and structuring an oral presentation is similar to the process of writing an essay, except you use spoken language instead of written language and you need to be mindful of a live audience.

## How do I plan an oral presentation?

Like any form of presentation, an oral presentation needs you to pay close attention to research and planning. You should first consider your purpose, audience and setting.

### *Purpose*

- What is the aim of your research?
- What is the key focus of your presentation?
- Why are you presenting it in oral form?
- If you are presenting as a group, what will the other group members say?

### *Audience*

- Who are you presenting your findings to?
- What does your audience expect to gain from listening to you?
- What is the age group and educational background of your audience?
- Are they more or less knowledgeable on the topic than you?

### *Setting*

- What facilities will be available?
- Is there a computer with a projector?
- How big is the room?
- Will you need a microphone?
- Can you visit the room beforehand to check the facilities?
- Will your audience be seated in rows or around tables?

## When should I use *PowerPoint*?

Communication is both verbal and visual. Using visual aids can make your presentation more interesting and informative, besides helping you to engage your audience.

*PowerPoint* is one of the most effective ways to present visual information. It provides you with more features than an overhead transparency, and can be easier to manage and look more professional when used appropriately. For more information, please refer to the Learning Guide on *PowerPoint* Presentations.

## How should I structure my oral presentation?

As with any effective essay, an oral presentation needs an introduction, body and conclusion.

### *The Introduction*

An introduction is essential. It allows you to engage your audience and set the scene for the talk which follows. Without an introduction, your audience will not know where you are taking them and what your main points will be. A good introduction should include:

- Your name (and perhaps your academic background)
- The subject of your talk
- A brief background to the subject
- A statement as to why the subject is important
- An outline of the main points
- Any questions that you will address
- Any questions or points you want the audience to consider while you're talking.

The introduction helps the audience to follow your talk by knowing what points to expect, and the order of these points. Do not spend too long on the introduction, but give your audience time to assimilate what you are saying. You should spend most time on the body of the talk. For example, if you're giving a 10 minute presentation then 2–3 minutes is enough for the introduction. If you need to give a lot of background, you can move that to the body section.

### *The Body*

The body is the major part of the presentation. This is where you elaborate on your points, perhaps with images or sound. As they say, 'A picture is worth a thousand words.' Be careful not to use gimmicks though; include only those things which will help you to make your point more clearly or forcefully. Remember to give examples for each point, and use graphs or tables if appropriate.

### *The Conclusion*

Your conclusion should match the points in your introduction and body, but never be longer than the introduction. It should leave the audience with a final impression of the subject. You should consider the following questions:

- What were your major points?
- Did you answer any questions during the talk?
- Did you ask the audience any questions which you need to recap now?
- Is there anything the audience are not clear about?
- What do you want your audience to remember after your talk?

### **Question Time**

Not all presentations will include time for questions. Check with your tutor whether you need to do this. Prepare your talk thoroughly so that you can answer questions about what you have addressed. If you are asked questions you cannot answer, don't be afraid to say, 'I don't know, but I'll try and find out'. You could also try asking other members of the audience if they know the answer.

### **What is the difference between spoken and written language?**

There are both subtle and significant differences in spoken and written English and it is good to know what they are when preparing your oral presentation. Of course, a speech will sound more natural than a written essay, but you can still use a more formal approach. Consider the following points:

- First Person – Your oral presentation will typically be presented in the first person, using the word 'I'. You can refer to yourself, e.g. *I would like to start by...* or *Let me give you an example...*, whereas in written assessment it is best to avoid saying *I think*, or *in my opinion*.
- Signposting – In an essay paper, you often use the expression *The focus of this paper...* This technique is crucial in oral presentations where the audience does not have the text in front of them, but needs to be able to follow the structure of your presentation.
- Jargon – Your audience needs to be able to follow you without necessarily referring to written text and so you need to express yourself using common language. You do not need to sound overly academic and use terminology that your audience cannot be expected to understand. Make sure you define unusual terms in your introduction.

### **How do I prepare for an oral presentation?**

Preparation will help to give you confidence. However, most people feel nervous before a presentation. Here are some points to consider:

- Anxiety and Nerves – If you are feeling particularly anxious, try taking deep breaths before you start and focus on speaking slowly. The best method for coping with nerves is to act as though you feel confident. It helps to smile. Remember that you will probably look a lot less nervous than you feel. Even if you look nervous, most of the audience will be sympathetic, because they will be feeling nervous too! Try having a glass of water handy, to sip if your throat becomes dry.
- Body Language – Your body can communicate impressions to your audience. Your audience will not only listen to you, but they will also watch you, so make sure you maintain good eye contact

with them. Try to look at everyone, not just a few people in the front row. Slouching may suggest that you are uninterested in the topic or that you do not care. On the other hand, good posture may suggest to your audience that you know exactly what you are doing and it will also help you to speak more clearly. Above all, be enthusiastic. If you are excited by your topic, you will enthuse your audience too.

- Notes/Cue Cards – Reading an essay out loud is not the same as doing a presentation. As mentioned above, spoken and written language often have a different purpose and audience. Reading from a text will make you lose eye contact, intonation and good posture. Reduce your original text to bullet points and practise filling in the gaps during your rehearsals. Use notes, either on cue cards or on a sheet of paper. Number the cards, in case you drop them.
- Time Limit – Make sure you keep to the time limit. If you take too long, you are taking someone else’s time and your audience will become bored and restless. At the same time, do not finish too early, as it may seem that you did not understand the topic or that you did not do enough research.
- Voice Projection – Speak loudly enough for your audience to hear you. Imagine you are speaking to someone at the back of the room; that way, everyone should hear you. If you have a quiet voice, consider using a microphone. Don’t talk too quickly, and be careful to speak clearly. Try not to speak in a monotone, but vary the volume, speed and pitch of your voice.
- Practice – Don’t let the first time you give your presentation be the only time you give it. Practise with a critical friend, preferably in the same environment in which you will deliver the actual talk. Consider recording the practice so you can watch it several times and pick up areas for improvement.

## Other useful resources

### *Counselling Service*

If you are anxious about giving an oral presentation you can seek assistance. If stress becomes overwhelming there are a number of strategies you can explore. The University of Adelaide Counselling Service runs workshops on stress management and relaxation, or you can make a personal consultation time with one of the counsellors by ringing 8303 5663.

### *Printable information*

[http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/2\\_AssessmentTasks/assess\\_pdf/oral\\_presentations.pdf](http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/2_AssessmentTasks/assess_pdf/oral_presentations.pdf)

<http://www.ecu.edu.au/CLT/tips/docs/presentation.pdf>

[http://www.elssa.uts.edu.au/docs/oral\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.elssa.uts.edu.au/docs/oral_presentation.pdf)

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If you require more assistance with Oral Presentations, please contact the Writing Centre on 8313 5771.

Visit the Writing Centre website for additional resources: [www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/)

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