

PRESENTATION SKILLS

You may be asked to lead a seminar either on your own or with other students. This enables you to develop and demonstrate a wider range of skills. Some people express themselves better orally than in writing. This is also good practice for giving talks either at work or for life more generally.

Many people are nervous at making oral presentations but there are steps you can take to make the presentation more successful.

Remember the audience

The most important aspect of making a presentation is to consider the needs of the audience. If you simply read or repeat information 'off by heart' your presentation will probably sound very flat and dull to the audience. There is also a greater risk that you will lose your place in your talk.

If you are a natural entertainer, then use these skills in your presentation. However, bear in mind the purpose of the presentation and how it will be assessed. Make sure you cover the essential information and that this comes across very clearly to the audience.

Prepare for the presentation

1. Write out your main argument or conclusion, just as you would for a writing activity.
2. Write out the main points as headings and bullet points on a series of index cards or on a sheet of paper. These will prompt your memory if you lose your place.
3. Visit the room and try out the technology. This will increase your confidence on the day.

4. Time yourself making the presentation. Cut it back if it is too long.
5. Have a clear and opening and closing line that refers directly to the main issue.

Use visual aids

1. Use acetates on an overhead projector. Use only a few lines of text in large print or a simple diagram for each acetate.
2. If you are very confident the technology will work, you may prefer to use PowerPoint. However, ensure you have acetate back-ups.
3. If you use PowerPoint or similar software, avoid gimmicks such as jingles, animation, or sound effects that either distract attention or slow down the presentation. If you 'fly in' text, make sure you use the same method throughout the presentation.
4. Keep it simple. Use technology as a tool where it helps, rather than for the sake of it.

On the day

1. Arrive first.
2. Arrive early enough to check the equipment and seating are as you want them.
3. Have water to hand.
4. Act confident no matter how you are feeling.
5. Do not make apologies for things you haven't done. Act as if it all as if everything is as it should be.
6. Make eye contact with the audience.
7. Smile.

Speed pacing

Many presentations, even those by professionals, may go wrong because people try to cover too much information in the time available. They then try and gabble their way through a set of bullet points at top speed even though people cannot take in what is being said.

Cut out unnecessary information - and even information you think is valuable if it does not fit into the time allowed. You must be able to deliver

the whole presentation at a speed slower than your normal talking speech. This is necessary so that people can take in what you are saying and jot down some notes.

Talk more slowly than you feel is necessary. Take a moment or two to breathe between each point.

Leave time for questions

Even if the time available to you is brief, leave a few minutes for people to ask questions. This will indicate that you are confident about your material.

Prepare an 'additional point' to use up the time in case there are no questions.

For further information please see Chapter 10 of *The Study Skills Handbook* by Stella Cottrell.

Please also see *Presentation Skills for Students* by Joan van Emden and Lucinda Becker.

Six important things to remember when you are giving a presentation

1. Introduce yourself by name.
2. Bring back up visual aids in case your PowerPoint presentation fails.
3. Slow down when you are speaking.
4. Make eye contact with the audience.
5. Smile.
6. Ask for questions from the audience at the conclusion of the presentation.

Group presentations

Do:

1. Appoint a group co-ordinator and plan a timetable together.
2. Choose your subject together, and then support one another throughout the work.
3. Narrow your subject down to a manageable size.
4. Decide who is to speak, and allocate topic and time to each speaker.
5. Rehearse together and get the timing right.
6. Organise how you are going to answer questions between you.

Don't:

1. Allow a strong personality to make all the decisions.
2. Allow any individual to opt out of responsibility to the group.
3. Choose a topic which is too complex for the time available.
4. Forget to introduce everyone at the start of the presentation.
5. Make recommendations which are unrealistic, technically or financially.
6. Over-run the time you've been allocated.
7. Guess at an answer you don't know.

For more advice, see [working with others](#).

Using PowerPoint

Do:

1. Check that you have booked all the equipment you need well before your talk.
2. Plan what you want the audience to see and don't crowd the screen.
3. Use an appropriate font such as Arial, at least 22 point in size.
4. Use a good colour contrast for background and image, and project it to check.
5. Give handouts with details, which wouldn't be clear on the screen.
6. Rehearse with all your visual material and the equipment you will be using.
7. Always have backup in case of disaster.

Don't:

1. Show paragraphs or long sentences on the screen.
2. Use fussy and distracting backgrounds.
3. Overdo punctuation: very little is needed in a visual aid.
4. Use over-complicated diagrams, which the audience won't be able to see clearly.
5. Use unnecessary and distracting movement on the screen.
6. Watch the computer screen instead of the audience.
7. Assume that you can use the equipment without trying it out.