# Giving an Oral Presentation

At university, an oral presentation is a talk given to fellow students. Although lengths of presentations and formality, can vary considerably depending on the circumstances and discipline, all presentations need to be planned, prepared, organised and practised.

## Planning and preparation

1. Check the assignment criteria carefully to clarify what you are expected to do:
   * How long do you have to present?
   * Are you presenting on your own or as part of a team?
   * Do you need to allow time for questions and answers?
   * Are you expected to use visual aids?
   * Do you have to address a set topic, enquiry, or can you choose your own?
2. If you choose your own topic, think about its relevance to the course.
3. Brainstorm your topic to decide what you need to find out from your research.
4. Think carefully about what you need to achieve, your presentation should blend explanations with analysis, in order to inform and, perhaps, persuade your audience.
5. Decide how much content is appropriate for the time – for oral presentations you divide time allocation between discussion points and accompanying slides. For example, a 10-minute presentation may be broken into:

* An introduction of up to 1 minute (1 or 2 slides)
* The main body of approximately 8 minutes (4 to 8 slides)
* A conclusion of 1 minute (1 or 2 slides)
* For a scripted presentation you may be able to speak 100-130 words per minute (900-1200 words total), whereas unscripted maybe 130-160 words per minute.

1. Organise your materials into a simple, logical order that will make sense to your audience. As with an essay, your presentation should consist of an introduction, main body and conclusion.
2. **Introduction**
   1. Introduces you and your topic and rationale
   2. Explains what your presentation is about and your main points or argument
   3. Explains the order your discussion will take
3. **Main Body**
   1. Main points
   2. Each main point is supported by elaboration; explanation; evidence; examples.
4. **Conclusion**
   1. Restates the enquiry and main points raised with supporting evidence
   2. Provides a summative conclusion (i.e. answers the main question you have addressed)
   3. Invites any questions

Once you have a good idea of what you intend to talk about, start to transpose your materials into a form that will help you remember what you want to say and show. This can range from a full script to prompts or cue cards (key words/ bullet points/headings), or you may use the notes function of PowerPoint. However, each one has its advantages and disadvantages:

1. **Script**

**Advantages**

* Helps avoid not knowing what to say.
* Easy to get timing right.
* Ensures you won’t forget anything.

**Disadvantages**

* Focused on script rather than audience.
* Easy to get lost in a large script.

1. **Cue Cards**

**Advantages**

* Encourages spontaneous, more engaging delivery.
* Allows greater flexibility.

**Disadvantages**

* Easy to lose track of time.
* Can forget the details of what to say.

1. **PowerPoint notes**

**Advantages**

* Ensures that your talk and your slides are always synchronised.
* Helps to separate what you say from you show on the screen.

**Disadvantages**

* Only works in conjunction with PowerPoint.

## Practise

Practise is essential for an effective oral presentation. Practise helps you to:

* Become more familiar and confident with the material.
* Get the timing of your presentation correct.
* Identify difficult or complicated information that is difficult to put into words.
* Identify parts that you don’t fully understand.
* Get used to speaking and hearing your own voice.
* Get used to coordinating your visual aids with your monologue.

Rehearse your presentation in front of a friend or colleague, and ask them for feedback on your clarity and use of visual aids, audibility, speed of delivery, presentation style etc.

## Delivery

**Speak clearly:** Introduce yourself to get your audience’s attention, even if they already know you. Check that you can be heard at the back of the room, you will probably need to speak more loudly and pronounce your words much more clearly than you’re used to.

**Speak at the right pace:** Nervousness, and the desire to get your performance over with, can make you speed up. Try to regulate the pace so that you are clear, emphasise key points using short pauses to allow the audience to absorb important information, and allow you time to think. Remember that some of your audience might have English as their second language.

**Speak to the audience:** Do not address your feet, or your notes, or the projector screen, maintain eye contact.

**Monitor your time:** Make sure you finish within your allocated slot. It’s easy to digress and get behind schedule. If you do, adjust your remaining content to make sure you reach your conclusion in time – don’t just fade out inconclusively, or be cut off by a tutor.

## Dealing with nerves

* Recognise that it’s natural to be nervous.
* Take a few deep breaths and try to put everything in context; after all, it is just a presentation.
* Remember that the audience wants you to succeed.
* Visualise success – recognise the value of what you’ve prepared.
* Above all, maximise your confidence as well as your performance by being well-prepared, well-rehearsed and well-organised.

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