

Oral presentations

Four-step guide to preparing oral presentations

Oral presentations are common at university. This can be an intimidating experience, so preparation and practice are essential.

Follow this four-step guide for some helpful tips:

Step 1: Plan

Read your assessment outline carefully and understand what you need to do. Start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Am I answering a set question or providing information on a topic?
- Is my purpose to explain, discuss, persuade or critique?
- Am I presenting my own viewpoint? If so, what can I base this on?
- Do I need to try and promote discussion? If so, consider preparing focus questions to get the discussion started in case nobody in the audience asks a question.

Keep your audience in mind. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What can I assume they know already?
- What terminology will I need to explain to them?
- What can I teach them?
- What do they expect?
- What will be interesting to them?
- What will keep them focused?

Think about any visual aids you might use during your presentation.

- Will you use a power point presentation?
- Will you use handouts? These can be a framework for the audience but they could also be distracting. If possible, let your audience know that you will give them notes at the end of the talk so they can concentrate on listening and participating.
- You might also provide your audience with a list of references so they can follow up on the information in your talk.
- Are there any interesting (and relevant) things you can show the audience?

Consider the venue.

- What facilities and equipment does it have?
- How big is the room?
- What is the set-up and can you change it if you need to?

Step 2: Prepare

Think about your main points and/or arguments. Brainstorm your topic and write a rough outline in point form.

Do your research. Use your own rough outline, assessment outline, recommended readings and instructions from your lecturer/tutor as a guide.

Organise your material to write a draft in a basic essay format. Think about how much time you have and how much information you can include.

IT: Consider IT requirements & be prepared – you may need to save your work on a USB stick. If you need to sign into an account make sure you know the username & password. If you are showing audio visual (e.g. YouTube video) make sure that you test all the links before your presentation.

Note: SCU computers are PC not Apple based. Don't assume compatibility – ask & test (if possible) before presentation.

Introduction

- Start with something that will catch the audience's attention: a question, a funny story, an amazing fact or something to look at. Keep it short and relevant to get them thinking and interested in what you are about to tell them.
- Explain what your presentation is about and your aim, i.e. to inform, persuade, discuss.
- Give a brief outline of your main points and tell the audience what (if anything), they need to do.
- Sometimes it may be appropriate to identify your main argument in the introduction.

Body

- Organise your main points in a logical order. Imagine you are writing a paragraph on each point. Try the PEEL system to make sure you include:
 - Point – make it clear what your main points are. When giving the presentation, use expressions that tell the audience that you are about to move on to a new point. Think about saying things like:
 - 'I would like to start with...'; 'The next point is.....'; 'Now I'd like to explain...'
 - Explain – you might need to give a definition, specific details or a real life scenario to clearly explain why your point is relevant/important/significant.
 - Evidence – you might provide a specific example as evidence, include quotes, cite statistics and/or refer to research that has been done in this area.
 - Link – explain how this point relates to the next or sum up by reminding the audience how this point relates to the topic.

Conclusion

- This is a summary of your main points. Restate your aim and make it clear you have achieved it. When giving the presentation, think about saying things like:
'I think you can now see that...'; 'My intention was ..., it should now be clear that ...' Don't forget to thank the audience, and invite questions and/or discussion.
Now that you have written your draft, you need to summarise it back into main points and information prompts. If you are using a power point presentation, your slides will act as your prompts. Otherwise, write your main points on to palm cards along with single word or short sentence prompts that will remind you of the details. If you are citing statistics or using unfamiliar or difficult terms, always include these as well. It may be appropriate to include references on your last Power Point slide – check with your lecturer/tutor.

Step 3: Practice

Start with your draft. Read it aloud several times until you are able to say some parts without reading it word for word. Time yourself to see whether you need to add more information or cut parts out.

Next, practice your presentation using only your power point slides or palm cards as prompts. This time, you are speaking to an audience, not reading. If you are unable to remember what you need to say, go back to your draft to fill in the gaps.

If you still find it impossible to remember what to say, consider writing yourself notes to use in addition to your power point slides, or adding extra information to your palm cards. **However**, you need to remember you will lose points if you read rather than speak to the audience (i.e. make sure you look at your audience, and not only at your cards).

If you are using power point, make sure you can easily get it started and move between slides without interrupting your talk.

If possible, practice presenting in front of an actual audience (even if it is only one person). Think about the following:

- Are you looking at your audience?
- What does your voice sound like? Is it too loud? Are you speaking in a monotone?
- Are you speaking too quickly?
- Are you saying annoying things like 'ummm' and 'you know...' etc.
- Are you swaying or fidgeting or moving around too much?
- Are you pausing to add emphasis or to allow the audience to think after you have asked them a question?

Double check the pronunciation of difficult or foreign words or words that you are not familiar with.

Step 4: Present

On the day of your presentation, make sure you arrive early to set up. Make sure your equipment is working and if necessary, arrange the class room set-up so that your audience can see and hear you clearly, ask questions and if required, contribute to the discussion.

Remember it is normal to feel nervous. Try to relax and be confident in your presentation. Project confidence & engagement with your audience through your good posture and body language. Face the audience, never turn your back to the audience and talk to the screen. Frequently make eye contact with the audience. Control the tone and speed of your voice. If you feel like you are racing, slow down!

Be aware of how your audience is reacting. If they look confused, ask them if you need to explain something again. If they look bored or distracted, consider stopping to ask the audience a question, or ask if they have a question or comment to make. Remember that it is OK to admit you don't know the answer to a question, if appropriate, you could ask someone else if they would like to answer.

Reflecting on your presentation

Taking the time to reflect on how your presentation went will help you to prepare for your next oral presentation.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What part of my presentation went really well and why?
- What didn't work and why?
- What feedback did the lecturer/tutor give me?
- How did the audience respond during my presentation?
- How can I improve my presentation skills for next time?

Oral presentation checklist

Oral presentation checklist				
Step 1: Plan	Step 2: Prepare	Step 3: Practice	Step 4: Present	Reflect
<p>Read your assessment outline carefully.</p> <p>Be clear as to what you are expected to do.</p> <p>Consider your audience.</p> <p>Think about using visual aids.</p> <p>Consider the venue.</p>	<p>Brainstorm your topic. Write down your key points.</p> <p>Do your research.</p> <p>Write a rough draft in the same format as an essay.</p> <p>Prepare your prompts, e.g. power point presentation or palm cards.</p>	<p>Read over your draft until you have memorised as much as you can.</p> <p>Practice using only your prompts.</p> <p>If using power point, practice using it while you are talking.</p> <p>Be aware of voice, body language and eye contact.</p>	<p>Arrive early to set up.</p> <p>Calm your nerves.</p> <p>Be aware of your voice, body language and eye contact.</p> <p>Be aware of how the audience is responding.</p> <p>Invite questions and/or discussion after your presentation.</p>	<p>Think about what went well and what could have been better.</p> <p>Think about the lecturer/tutor's comments.</p> <p>Think about how the audience responded.</p> <p>Think about how you can improve next time.</p>