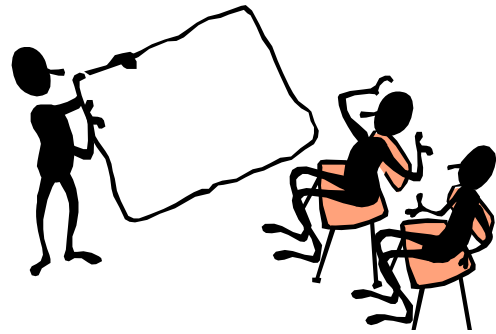


# Presentations

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## What is a presentation?

A presentation is another way of communicating your work. A presentation differs from a written report in that it illustrates, demonstrates and involves

## Advantages of a presentation

Reports are a great way of transmitting information, but you can't ask a report a question, and the report can't ask you if you've understood the content.

A presentation has the advantage in that it is:

- interactive
- can be modified "in flight"
- addresses more than one sense - auditory, visual and kinaesthetic
- personal
- good for concepts and persuasive arguments
- entertaining



## Activity

Before you begin planning your presentation ask yourself the following questions.

- Why am I giving this presentation? (the purpose)
- Who will hear the presentation? (the audience)
- What will it cover? (the scope)
- How will this be conveyed? (the structure - clear language, logical progression of topics, use of audio visual aids, etc)
- How long have I got? (time management)
- Where is it required? (physical location)

# Planning your presentation

In the planning stage you need to establish the context or setting in which your presentation will be given.

## The Purpose – Why are you giving this presentation?

Whenever you give a presentation, the *purpose* must be clear in your mind. If it is not, you will have great trouble getting started.

Some common objectives of a presentation include:

- to inform
- to teach
- to motivate
- to explore
- to entertain

## The Audience – Who will hear your presentation?

It is important to know the profile of your audience. This will determine a great deal about your presentation - the extent, relevant detail of your introduction, the extent to which you can use jargon, the extent to which you have to elaborate on details, and the level of explanation you will need to provide.

Establishing rapport with an audience is easier if you have considered the following :

- What are the different attitudes, knowledge and expertise of the audience members?
- What are their needs and expectations?
- What do they prefer in presentation style and format?



### Activity

Visualise yourself as a member of an audience hearing **your** presentation.

How do you feel during the presentation:

- interested?
- bored?
- entertained?

## The Scope – What will it contain?

Having considered the purpose of the presentation and the audience profile, the next step is to decide on the content. In the process of preparing your presentation you may have found a mountain of seemingly relevant information. You must decide how much to include in your presentation, and how much to leave out.

Nothing turns the potentially interested listener off faster than a mind-numbing catalogue of meticulous details. If any of your audience really need to know details, they will ask you during Question Time, or, even better, in some more relaxed context after your presentation is over.

Present only those details which are strictly relevant to your purpose.

## The Structure – How to present it?

Having identified why, for whom, and about what your presentation will be about, your task is now to **structure** it and **present** it in a manner which will address the interests of the audience.

The structure of your presentation provides a framework. Structuring a presentation and delivery issues will be dealt with in below.

## The Time Frame –How long have I got?

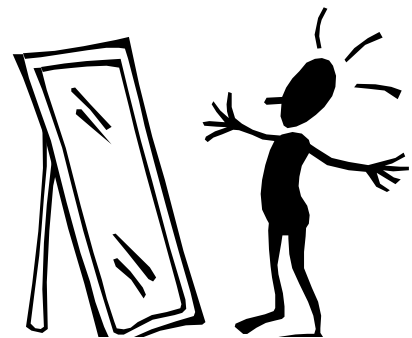
*"I do not object to people looking at their watches when I am speaking, but I strongly object when they start shaking them to make sure they are still going."*

- Lord Birkett

Always know the duration of speaking time available. The timing of papers is an essential component of a good presentation.

Once you begin to go over time, the audience will begin to shuffle, no matter how arresting your presentation may be. It is much better to end earlier with an appropriate and dignified ending, than to run over time and be asked to sit down in a disorganised scramble.

Good timing comes with good preparation. The **only** way to ensure that your presentation will be within the time limit is to have a trial run. Ideally, this should be in front of your fellow students or family members. The next best is to closet yourself in the bathroom, the bedroom or the car, and rehearse it to yourself. In either case you should allow for the time it takes to change your illustrative material (overheads, etc.).



**Rehearse, rehearse,  
rehearse.**

## The Place – Where is it required?

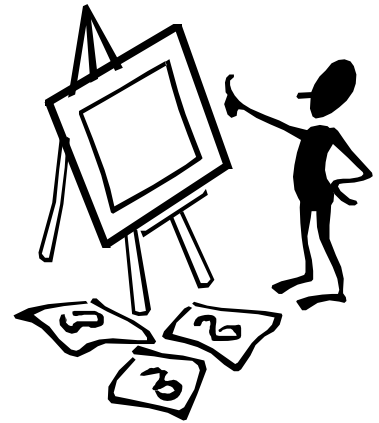
It is important to take the venue where you are to deliver your presentation into account, as it will impact on the preparation and delivery of your material.

Some questions to consider include:

- What facilities are available?
- What audio-visual aids are available?
- What is the seating arrangement for audience members?

# Preparing your presentation

After you have considered your purpose, audience and the context, identified your main ideas and organised your material, you need to write your presentation.



## Structure of the presentation

An oral presentation has three main sections:

- introduction
- body
- conclusion

### Introduction

An introduction is usually brief and prepares the audience for what you are going to present. It should include a broad overview of your subject and should be presented in a manner that stimulates interest.

When writing your opening sentence, consider your audience. Your presentation should begin with a sentence which makes an impact, and which seizes the attention of your audience and unifies its thoughts. Some strategies to use in your introduction include:

- ask a rhetorical question
- ask a series of questions
- begin with an unusual, startling or controversial statement
- begin with an illustration or story
- begin with humour
- present a hypothetical situation
- use a play on words
- use a proverb

### Body

The body of the presentation develops your topic by:

- expanding the plan in a point-by-point sequence that is logical
- using evidence, including references to other studies, to support the claims being made
- using visual aids to communicate information more effectively.

In structuring your paper, try to make your presentation as interesting as possible. Organise your ideas under main headings and subheadings and progressively unfolding or developing your theme. Emphasise the main points and expand on them with supporting material. Examples of supportive material include:

- personal experiences
- examples
- methods used
- data collected (type, amount, when, where)
- illustrations
- facts statistics
- analyses performed

Also try and bear in mind that even experienced audiences can generally assimilate only one major idea every 3 minutes, and that in an oral presentation repetition is highly desirable.

Humour, but only if you are sure that it will work, is also desirable. If you do include a joke ensure that it is relevant, non-sexist and strictly secular.

## Conclusion

The conclusion is a clear resume of the main points of your work and let's your audience know you are about to end your presentation. It should return to the points made in the introduction, clearly summing up what the presentation was about rather than trailing to an end . . .

The audience should be left with a strong impression of the main theme of your presentation

As a rule the conclusion contains no new material. To make a memorable impact use:

- a relevant anecdote
- a quotation
- an example
- a recommendation

Remember the adage:

*"Tell them what you are going to say,  
then say it,  
and then tell them what you have said".*

## Signalling phrases

The structure of your presentation and the organisation of the main ideas must be clear to the audience. Each stage in your presentation must be evident in the language.

Throughout your presentation, you must keep signalling explicitly where you are in your presentation and what is happening in relation to the overall topic. While such obvious signals would be inappropriate in written texts, in spoken texts they provide vital structure and improve the quality of your presentation dramatically. Signalling phrases are like a table of contents or a chapter heading in a written report.

Here is a short list of signalling phrases which can be used in your presentation:

### Introducing and structuring the topic

- "I want to start by . . . "
- "The topic I intend to discuss is . . . "
- "Firstly, I will provide a definition of . . . then, I'll outline . . . and finally, I'll examine . . . "

### Introducing a main point

- "So the main point is (pause) . . . "
- "The central problem is that . . . "
- "Fundamentally . . . "
- "I should emphasise that . . . "

### Rephrasing the main point

- "The point I am making is . . . "
- "In other words . . . "
- "As I have been saying . . . "

### Introducing an example

- "Let me illustrate this by . . . "
- "A case in point is . . . "

- " A good example of . . . is . . . "

## Making a digression

- "I might just mention . . . "
- "Incidentally . . . "
- "That reminds me of . . . "
- "Just to digress for a moment . . . "

## Moving on to another point

- "Let's consider another crucial factor . . . "
- "I'd like to move now on to the next significant question . . . "

## Introducing a conclusion or summary

- "In conclusion . . . "
- "In summary . . . "
- "To sum up . . . "
- "Thus we can see that . . . "

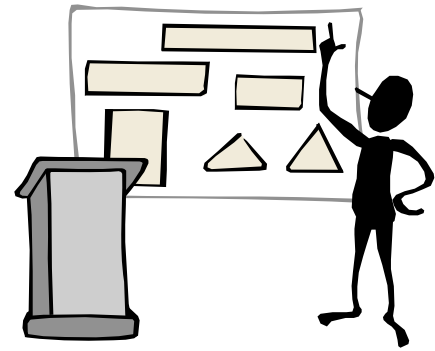
## Adding emphasis

In order to add emphasis to your main points or important statements, remember to pause before then, slow down the speed of delivery, change your intonation and make eye contact.

# Delivering your presentation

Having written your presentation, how do you present it?

To be effective an oral presentation must combine the content, supporting information, visual aids, choice of words, vocal qualities, body movement and nonverbal communication in a way that catches an audience's attention.



## Presentation notes

Assuming you have written out your presentation you may read it, although very few people do themselves justice this way. Also your subject will not be projected well unless the material has been written for speaking. Alternately, you may be tempted to memorise your entire presentation. However, unless you have a photographic memory or are a trained actor, this can have its drawbacks, especially if the next sentence just won't come to mind, or some interaction with the audience breaks the flow of your talk.

It is much more effective to convert your written text to notes and key words. Go through your text and **highlight key words** and **ideas**. These are what you will have on your cards/in your notes rather than the whole text.

There are various techniques for preparing your presentation notes.

### The 'one piece of paper' method

When using this method, make your first outline on a single A4 sheet of paper that has been divided into a four sections. Allow the first section for the introduction, the last section for the conclusion, and the remaining two for the body. Then stick to that same piece of paper through the full preparation and rehearsal cycles, making any other required notes on it. Finally, take that same piece of paper with you to the presentation.

The key ingredient of this technique is that you really know that piece of paper, and even though it may become smudged, curled or tattered - it will be there like an old friend in your hour of need. You'll know instinctively where everything is located on the page so that if you need to check your notes while speaking, your eyes will automatically glide to the right part of the page.

### The 'notes from the manuscript' method

This technique starts with the generation of a manuscript that says approximately what you want to say. Once the manuscript is finished, **immediately** start to rehearse the presentation - without looking at the text. When you come to a point at which your memory fails, look at the manuscript to refresh your memory but **mark with a red pen** the point at which you stumbled. Then, go on to the next stumbling point, and so on until you come to the end of your talk.

After the first time through, write the first word after each stumbling point on a separate piece of paper. Then try to go back through the presentation using this list of stumbled words as notes. If you stumble at additional places, add them to the list until you can get all the way through the presentation. using only this list of words as notes.

## The 'stack of cards' method

A common technique involves the use of 7 x 12 cm cards. In this technique, outline your talk by placing each major point on a single card. Use additional cards to note specific facts or examples you intend to include.

Although this is a fine technique, particularly for a novice speaker, it has two drawbacks. Firstly, your audience will notice that you are flipping the cards, and secondly, the order of those cards is rather critical.



## The 'one card' method

As your confidence increases, try reducing your piece of paper or stack of cards to a single 7 x 12 cm card. The key to this approach is simple, direct speech organisation. Once your outline is ready, pick key words that express the main thought in each major section of the outline and write those words in large, dark letters on the card. Be careful not to let the card get too cluttered.

## The 'visual aids as notes' method

A properly designed set of audio-visual aids can lead you (and the audience) through the presentation without the need for any sort of notes.

## On speaking

### Stage fright

Studies have shown that a large percentage of humanity fears public speaking more than anything else, including death itself. So it is not surprising that many people find giving an oral presentation a traumatic, even terrifying experience.

Consider for moment what you do when you are nervous.

Do your hands shake, do you feel weak in the knees, does your face turn red, do your palms sweat, does your voice tremble? Some of these things cannot be changed, so it is unrealistic to expect that they will. However, the way you manage physiological reactions can be controlled. You may never totally lose your fear of speaking but you can learn to make that extra energy work for you rather than against you.

Here are a few useful principles for managing nervousness:

- **Know you material.** Your confidence will increase if you are completely familiar with your material.
- **Practice, practice, practice**
- **Be idea-conscious not self-conscious.** Focus on what you have to say, rather than on how you are saying it.
- **Relax.** Learn some relaxation techniques to help yourself calm down and control nervousness. Take a deep breath before you begin.
- **Establish direct eye contact.** Speak to you audience individually they have had the desire or courtesy to come and hear you.
- **Maintain a conversational style.** Think of your presentation as a conversation with each member of the audience - talk with them, not at them.
- **Slow down.** Don't feel that you have to fill the time with words in rapid succession. Allow for short periods of silence.
- **Smile.**



## Voice projection

A vital part of your personation is how you project your voice, because nothing is more frustrating to the audience than an excellent paper that no-one can hear. Mumbling into your socks, or carrying on an intimate conversation with the whiteboard or overhead projector, is unforgivable and unprofessional.

Lifting your chin tends to increase the pitch of your voice so that it projects better. It will also help in this regard to speak to the row about two-thirds of the way up the auditorium. If there is a microphone, ensure that it is positioned at an appropriate height, so that you do not have to present your talk looking like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Remember that modern microphones are highly directional and sensitive - use your normal voice.

## Delivery

It is not so much what you say but how you say it that will get your message across. Indeed, more than 90% of the impact of a message is based on non-verbal communication, so to ensure that your presentation is effective you must employ appropriate delivery skills. Here are a few useful pointers.

- **Approach and departure.** The impression you make begins when the audience first lays eyes on you and does not end until you have left the podium. Dress with this in mind, and remember that the audience will not take you seriously if you do not appear to.
- **Posture.** Good posture contributes to an overall impression of competence and confidence. It also conveys physical energy and promotes proper voice projection.
- **Voice qualities.** Remember that pitch, pace, pause, emphasis, rhythm and intonation all have an enormous impact.
- **Movement and gestures.** Any movements should be free-flowing and varied, and you should avoid constant or repetitive movements. Even something as apparently innocuous as brushing your hair from your eyes can be very distracting to an audience if you do it frequently. To reinforce your message use a variety of gestures, but take care that they are appropriate to your audience and topic.

## Audiovisual aids

Since 80% of what an audience retains from a seminar is visual, there is no doubt that audiovisual aids (more appropriately, visual aids) are a highly desirable adjunct to your presentation. There are a number of aids which you could use. These include handouts, blackboard, whiteboard, flipcharts, overhead transparencies, models, slides and films or videos.

An effective audiovisual aid will:

- focus audience attention
- increase audience interest
- help to emphasise key points
- reinforce and clarify your verbal message
- aid the listener's memory
- help the presenter to arrange the content in an orderly manner
- remove the focus from the presenter

## Production

There are several general points to consider when producing your aids:

- **Purpose.** Aids should be used to drive home and reinforce your main points, to make them stand out and easier to understand and remember.
- **Simple.** Illustrations, text and tables should be as simple as possible. Avoid too much detail - include only the essential points. Any details should be filled in verbally, or with a handout.
- **Accurate.** Ensure that information shown is correct. Never show a slide with an error in it for which you have to apologise.
- **Legible.** All aids should be easily seen and read by every member of the audience. Upper and lower case is easier to read than upper case alone. Where appropriate, use bold lines, contrasting colours, and leave adequate space between the different elements on the one aid.

## Delivery

Similarly, there are some general points to remember in using your aids during your presentation.

- **Check venue and test equipment.** Familiarise yourself with the layout of the room, the lighting, projection and sound reinforcement facilities. Familiarise yourself with all the equipment. If you are using overhead transparencies, ensure that neither you nor the projector occlude the view of anyone in the audience. Also ensure that all members of the audience can see the screen.
- **Verify your aids.** Always allow time to ensure that all your visual aids are present, in the correct order and in the correct orientation.
- **Don't rush aids.** Make sure that the aid is exposed to the audience long enough to be seen and comprehended by each member. Bear in mind that while your audience is reading your aid, it is unlikely to be listening to what you are saying.
- **Talk to the audience.** Don't talk to the screen or the machine.

## Specific aids

### PowerPoint

PowerPoint slides are easy to prepare and will add a professional dimension to your presentation.

When preparing your slides remember the following points:

- use big and bold text - letters should be at least 24 pt in size (**NEVER** use unmagnified typescript or slabs of text copied out of your report – it will be unreadable)
- both upper and lower case is easier to read than BLOCK LETTERS
- avoid paragraphs, use bullet points – and as few words as possible
- keep the design simple
- keep graphics simple
- if photocopying from a book or journal, always **enlarge** the text and eliminate surplus text
- leave a substantial margin (3 cm on both sides and at the bottom to accommodate different-size projection areas)
- number all your overheads outside the image area
- use colours but no more than three, and be careful with colour combinations. Sometimes they are readable on your computer screen but not on the projector
- tables should never exceed 4 rows by 3 columns, although the ideal is 2 rows by 2 or 3 columns



## Activity

Visit the following Web site and learn how to use PowerPoint:

<http://www.infodiv.unimelb.edu.au/tss/cpd/guides.html>

Once you have mastered PowerPoint, you can use it to create your slides.

## Handouts

If you use handouts, they should supplement your talk rather than duplicate it. They are particularly useful for presenting detailed data, references, glossaries of terms, etc. It often happens that the promise of follow up materials can relieve the audience of the need to take notes during your talk.

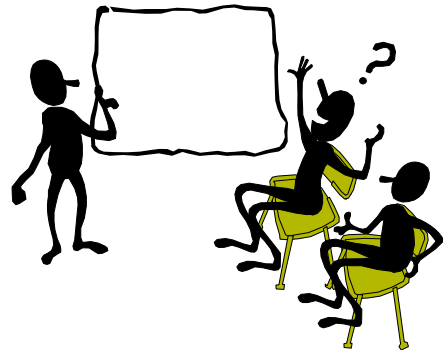
Handouts should be modest in size to increase the likelihood that the audience will read them later on. Ensure you have enough copies.

## Blackboards, whiteboards and flip charts

These should be avoided for the bulk of your presentation and especially for large audiences, but they are ideal when explaining points in response to questions. Remember that it is difficult, if not impossible, to use these aids without turning your back on your audience. If you must use them, and you want your audience to benefit, remember to print, and that big and bold is beautiful.

## Question time

Question time is a very important part of your presentation. How you handle questions may well determine how successful your entire presentation is. However, question time should not be feared, but should be seen as an opportunity to clarify issues, get audience feedback and make additional positive impact.



Most people are even more terrified of asking a stupid question in public than they are of speaking. If someone has summoned up enough courage, and has enough interest in your work to ask a question, however irrelevant it may seem to you, respect their intent. Give a brief answer but not another mini- presentation.

Other useful tips for making Question Time a fruitful experience for everyone include:

- **Anticipate questions.** Prior to your presentation, try to have colleagues brainstorm potential questions which your audience might be expected to raise.
- **Tough questions** are a source of fear to most speakers, but need not be the problem they seem. Two simple but effective responses are to be totally honest and say "I don't know (and no more)", or to refer the question to someone else in the audience (like your tutor).
- **Unclear questions.** If you don't understand or could not hear a question, don't be afraid to ask for it to be repeated.
- Always answer questions sincerely.
- Never degrade a question or questioner.

When you get to answering a question, the following is a useful technique:

- Establish, then break, eye contact with the questioner.
- Compliment the question and/or the questioner, or thank the questioner, as appropriate.
- Repeat and/or paraphrase the question to the rest of the audience.
- Be prepared to spend some time in silence while you frame the answer.
- Answer to the whole audience, not just the individual questioner.

## A final word . . .

In conclusion, the communication of scientific information is an art, an essential part of your professional armoury, and something which always improves with practice (although it has been said that an experienced speaker is one who goes on making the same mistakes with increasing confidence!). However, a great expert speaking with humility and passion makes one of the most impressive of all communicators, and I hope you attain that standard.