Delivering an Oral Presentation

1. GETTING READY: THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOUR PRESENTATION

Know the material well.

Learn about the audience (see Section 1 for more on preparing your presentation).

Prepare speaking notes.

Practice in advance.
- Rehearse the entire presentation out loud.
- Time the presentation and adjust the content to match the allotted time.
- If someone else is changing your slides or overheads, practice with him or her in advance.

For formal presentations, visit the location beforehand.
- Become familiar with the surroundings.
- Arrive early, walk around the speaking area, stand at the podium, speak into the microphone, become familiar with equipment, and practice using your slides or overheads.

2. ORGANIZING YOUR DELIVERY

Remember to follow this basic structure: Tell the audience what you are going to say, say it, and tell the audience what you said.

The most memorable parts of your presentation are its beginning and ending. If you lose the audience during your presentation, you can get them back at the end by reminding them of what you told them.
General tips:
- Announce your topic clearly;
- State your objective up front;
- Give an outline of your presentation in your introduction; and
- Use transitions at the beginning of each major section.

A good transition looks back at what you just spoke about and links it to what you are going to talk about next.

THE OPENING
Very briefly tell the audience who you are and where you’re from, then gain their attention. Try one of these:
- Use humor (with caution: Know your audience);
- Tell a personal anecdote;
- Create verbal imagery (“Let’s imagine for a second…”);
- Issue a challenge (“How many of our youth will we lose to AIDS in the next decade?”);
- Read a quote; or
- Provide a compelling fact.

Now that you have their attention, “Tell the audience what you are going to say”—tell them your main points.

THE MIDDLE
“Say it”—organize the presentation around your key points. New information and ideas tend to stick best in listeners’ minds when presented in series of three.

THE CLOSING
“Tell the audience what you have said”:
- Summarize your main message by repeating the key points.
- Encourage action, where appropriate.
- Refer back to your opener.
- End on a positive note.
- Ask the audience whether they have questions.

THE QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD
Accept questions and comments graciously.

Let audience members know that their questions are valid by saying things like, “That’s an excellent point,” or, “A very good question.”

When you don’t know the answer, offer to find out and get back to the person asking the question. Try to offer related information that you do know.

3. FOCUSING ON YOUR STYLE, VOICE, APPEARANCE, AND BEHAVIOR

STYLE
Your style is the way you deliver what you have to say.

Three important qualities of oral style:
- Clarity—Use short, simple phrases with no filler words.
section 2: delivering an oral presentation

- Appropriateness—Personalize the presentation to the audience. Use personal pronouns whenever possible.
- Vividness—Evoke mental images.

**To read or not to read?**
- Do not read your entire presentation.
- You can sometimes read key parts for emphasis, impact, or accuracy, as in the following situations:
  - To quote an author accurately;
  - To present figures or provide precise details;
  - To communicate a complex concept clearly or provide a definition;
  - To stick to a previously released text (for example, if you are using a text released to the media); or
  - To hold your speech to strict time limits.
- Write your notes in language as you would speak—language that is immediately understandable to the ear, without the need for reflection that written language allows.
- Do not turn your back to the audience to read from the screen.

**Build rapport:**
- Make eye contact.
- Use humor carefully.
  - *Humor isn’t always about telling jokes. It can mean introducing amusing, whimsical, or otherwise entertaining elements that make it easier for you to make a connection with your audience, put you and them at ease, and reinforce your message.*
- Think about drama.
  - *Drama can be created with your timing, words, gestures, and voice. Try using numbers, ratios, and other hard facts, or a smooth, slower-paced delivery to add drama to your presentation.*
- Be yourself.
  - *Your audience will be most at ease if you speak naturally. If you are not comfortable with humor and drama, then it may be better not to try these techniques.*

**VOICE**
A good voice has a pleasant tone; is natural, reflecting the speaker’s personality; has vitality, giving the impression of force and strength even when it isn’t especially loud; portrays various shades of meaning and is never monotonous or emotionless; and is easily heard because it uses proper volume and articulation.

**Project your voice:**
- Speak to the back of the room to ensure that everyone can hear you, but be careful not to shout!
- Vary the pitch of your voice to convey emotion and conviction.
- Make a conscious effort to be conversational in your speaking.

**Pause for emphasis:**
- Vary your speaking rate to add interest to the presentation and emphasize specific points.
- Try to avoid pauses that last more than four seconds when nothing is happening.

**Speak slowly, and remember to breathe:**
- Relax to reduce tension in your voice, and think friendliness, confidence, and a desire to communicate.
APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR
Dress appropriately for the audience. If you are unsure what to wear, you should dress more formally than you think your audience will be dressed.

Face your audience, not the screen. It’s okay to look at the screen once in a while, but these should be momentary glances only.

Avoid distracting gestures such as waving or tapping your hands.

Use a pointer as necessary to help guide the audience.

4. DEALING WITH NERVES

Harness your nervous energy with confidence-building tasks:
- Prepare: Know the material, room, and audience.
- Practice your presentation out loud in advance.
- Get to know your audience by greeting some of them as they arrive and making them your “friends.”

Try several ways to relax:
- Do deep-breathing exercises.
- Stand or sit comfortably with your back straight.
- Visualize yourself giving a successful presentation.
- During your presentation, find a friendly face in the audience and look at him or her to reassure yourself.
- Realize that audiences want speakers to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They want you to succeed, not fail.

Accept that it’s normal to be a little nervous.
- Don’t apologize for being nervous; you will only draw attention to it.
- Concentrate on the message, not on your nervous feelings.
- Practice often and gain experience; you will build confidence while decreasing anxieties.

5. TIPS ON PRESENTING WITH AN INTERPRETER

Find an interpreter who has experience with the subject being presented.

Prepare a glossary ahead of time, especially for interpreters less familiar with the subject.

Give speaker notes to the interpreter as far in advance as possible.

If you will be using consecutive translation (where a person speaks and then pauses for translation), time your presentation to take into consideration the added time for translation, and take frequent pauses for translation.