Oral presentations: face-to-face & online

What is an oral presentation?

An oral presentation is a talk given to a group where views on an assigned issue or topic are presented. It may have specific requirements which are usually detailed in your course outline and may be presented individually or as part of a group. You will need to:

- persuade your audience that your view is well supported by the ideas and information presented
- provide clear links between main points, explanations and examples

Oral presentations, like written assignments, have three main parts. The introduction is the initial point of view developed in response to the topic (also called the thesis statement) and the body is the main argument with evidence presented to support this point of view. The conclusion is a summary of the arguments and the restatement of the overall point of view that has been developed. You may suggest future questions or research directions that could be taken in relation to the topic.

Preparing

Start your preparation process early so that you can have the content and materials ready for plenty of practise opportunities.

The speech

- Read your assignment requirements very carefully and check with your lecturer/tutor if you are unsure of anything
- Analyse the topic:
  - Who is the intended audience?
  - What do they want to know?
  - What is the purpose of the presentation? Is it to inform, inspire or persuade?
  - What is the scope of the topic you are presenting on?
  - What are the limitations of your discussion of the topic?
- Think about time limits and due date
- Develop a point of view in relation to the topic through research and thought
- Organise your material/notes into a draft
- Decide on what content and how much of it to include, keeping your time limit in mind
- Decide on the main points, and include explanations and examples relevant to the topic
- Consider how you can present your ideas in a logical order
- Use language which is discipline-specific and appropriate for your intended audience
- Use linking words to show connections between main points or ideas, and use key words several times to emphasise their importance
- As you build your presentation, anticipate questions your audience might ask and prepare answers

The visual aids

You may be required to use visuals with your presentation. Remember that these are support only and should not be the main focus of the presentation. YOU are the main focus. Visuals such as PowerPoint can support your presentation by:

- providing an outline of the presentation (key terms, ideas)
- illustrating main points with key words/phrases, images, diagrams, tables, charts or graphs
- allowing the audience to follow your presentation
- keeping you on task (and time)

Practising

Practise, practise and practise again. This helps you overcome any nervousness and makes you more confident with the content and the delivery. You need to practice what you will say (content) as well as how you will say it (delivery).

The content

- Develop your first set of notes and be ready to adapt them
- Use cue cards with bullet points and write key words, ideas and phrases rather than sentences
- Practise out loud from your cue cards so you are able to talk about the information in various ways
- Be sure to state clearly what the purpose of the presentation is in the introduction
- Deliver the presentation and then summarise your main points
- Do not try to get across too many main ideas (keep it focussed, but simple)

Your delivery

Face-to-face oral presentations

- Time the presentation and modify it if needed - this will help you to avoid being rushed
- Focus on standing up straight, using appropriate gestures and looking at your audience
- Practise with an audience or in front of a mirror so you are aware of how you present yourself
- Be sure to face your audience and engage them with eye contact
- Practise using your visual aids (e.g. If using PowerPoint slides, make sure you are not just reading from the slides, but instead using the slides to support what you are saying)
- Practise projecting your voice so your audience can hear you easily
- Use your voice by changing volume, and pitch to add emphasis to important points
- Use pauses to show that you are moving on to a new point
- Record yourself to hear how you sound and monitor your facial expressions, eye contact, body language and hand gestures

Live online presentations

- Test the required equipment (e.g. your webcam, microphone and screenshare software, etc.)
- Practise using the equipment so that you feel confident on the day of the presentation – this will also minimise the potential for any technical issues on the day
- Identify where you will do your presentation - Consider what you have in the background (a cluttered or busy backdrop may be distracting for your audience)
- Practise with an audience – ask your peers to watch you practise online and provide you with feedback about the quality of the sound and visuals from their screen
- Time the presentation and modify it if needed - This will help you to avoid being rushed
- Use your voice by changing volume, and pitch to add emphasis to important points
- Use pauses to show that you are moving on to a new point
- Use natural hand gestures and facial expressions
- Record your presentation to hear how you sound and check your facial expressions, body language and hand gestures

Online recorded presentations
- Practise using the equipment and software required to record your presentation – check your course outline and with your tutor about what you need to use
- Make sure you understand the procedures required for uploading and submitting your recorded presentation – check your course outline and if you are unsure, clarify with your tutor well in advance of the due date
- Time the presentation and modify it if needed - This will help you to avoid being rushed
- Use your voice by changing volume, and pitch to add emphasis to important points
- Use pauses to show that you are moving on to a new point
- Record your presentation more than once – this will help you refine what you say and how you say it (e.g., check that you sound and look knowledgeable about your presentation topic)
- If your presentation requires webcam, check your practise recording for appropriate facial expressions, hand gestures and body language
- Ask peers to watch your recordings and give feedback on your voice and non-verbal communication

Delivering your oral presentation on the day

Face-to-face oral presentations
- Arrive early to make sure that the room, equipment and lay-out suit your needs
- Greet the audience and try to look confident and relaxed
- Wait for the audience to focus their attention on you before you start
- Capture the audience's attention in your introduction
- Establish in your introduction how you will handle questions, e.g. "At the end of the presentation there will question & answer time." or "Feel free to ask questions during or at the end of the presentation."
- Keep the audience's attention through your use of voice and body language, and a well-designed PowerPoint
- Hand out materials either before or after the presentation (to keep the audience's attention during your presentation)
- During question time, be clear about your knowledge and what is outside the scope of your presentation
- If an audience member asks a question and you don't know the answer, be willing to say so

Live online oral presentations
- Set up your equipment early and make sure it is working (e.g. if you need to use webcam, a microphone or software like Skype for Business or Adobe Connect)
- If possible, ask a peer to log in early and check that they can see and hear you

Recorded online oral presentations
- Try to upload and submit your presentation at least a few hours before the deadline to avoid any technical issues at the last minute
- If you do experience any technical problems and have identified this in advance, you are more likely to have time to solve the issue – if this happens, contact your tutor as soon as you can, as they may be able to assist

Preparing for face-to-face or online group oral presentations

Working with a group will involve a high level of co-operation between group members in order to effectively prepare and deliver a presentation so it is important to reach early agreement on goals, timelines, and approaches to collaboration.

- Confirm that there is a shared understanding of the task
- Assign everyone a role in planning and preparing for the presentation
- Meet regularly (face-to-face or online) to consult on progress and confirm a common point of view
    - If meeting online, there are a number of chat tools you can use such as Skype for Business, Messenger or Facetime
- Practise as a group to ensure your presentation flows well via transitions between each speaker
- Step to the side when you team mate is speaking - you want the audience focus to be on your team mate, so avoid distractive behaviour
- Ask peers to watch you practise and provide you with feedback
- For live online group presentations:
    - practise using the equipment and software
    - ask your peers to watch you practise online – they can check that your sound and visuals are working from an audience perspective, and that your transitions between speakers flows