Tips for effective oral communication: preparation, practice and performance

Preparation – Getting Started
- Read your assignment requirements very carefully.
- See 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.
- Research your topic.
- Read critically and take notes.
- Organise your material/notes into a draft.
- As you build your presentation, anticipate questions your audience might ask and prepare answers.

Preparation — Visual Aids
- Most students will use presentation software such as PowerPoint or Prezi.
- Your message should be the main focus, regardless of which software you use or if you choose alternative visual aids.
- Use key words & phrases only.
- Limit the main ideas to 4 or 5 per slide.
- Use standard font, such as Calibri.
- The ideal font size is 32.
- Use images to get your message across.
- Ensure charts, tables, graphs or images are simple and clear.
- Stick to the basic functions when creating your slides. Avoid using/abusing the animations function in PowerPoint.
- Back up your PowerPoint with a handout in case the technology goes wrong.
Preparation — Developing a Structure

**Introduction**: Capture the audience’s attention with a question, a comment or interesting background information about your topic. State your topic and your position in relation to the topic. Outline the content of your presentation using sign-posting language such as “First of all … Next … After this … Finally …”

**Main Points**: Present your main points which support your position in relation to the topic. Make clear transitions as you move from one main point to the next, e.g. “Moving on … The next key issue is …”. Use clear examples and visual aids to illustrate your main points.

**Conclusion**: Restate the purpose of your presentation. Summarise what you have covered. Thank the audience for their attention. Invite questions from the audience.

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**Practice**

- Give yourself many opportunities to practise your presentation.
- Practise out loud to get use to the terminology.
- Time your practices. Then modify your presentation if necessary.
- Practise with an audience (or in front of a mirror). Focus on your body language & audience.
- Record your voice. If your voice is too soft, practise in an open space & try to project your voice.
- Practise in the venue before your presentation. Ensure you become familiar with the technology.
Performance — Voice & Body Language

- Speak loud enough that everyone in the audience can hear you.
- Speak at a natural pace & speak clearly. Don't rush.
- Don't mumble.
- Emphasise key words or ideas, so that the audience tune into these.
- Vary your voice (intonation, speed & volume), otherwise your audience will tune out.
- Use pauses when changing topic or for emphasis.
- Stand up straight and comfortably. Don’t slouch or shuffle around.
- Face the audience. Don’t turn your back on them.
- Look around as you speak and make eye contact with different members of the audience.
- Use natural hand gestures & facial expressions. Don’t over exaggerate these.
- If presenting as a team, step to the side when you team mate is speaking & don’t move or look around. Focus on your team mate.

Performance — Audience

- Greet the audience & look confident & relaxed.
- Wait for the audience to focus their attention on you before you start.
- Capture the audience’s attention in your introduction.
- Keep the audience’s attention through your use of voice & body language & a well-designed PowerPoint.
- Be aware of how the audience responds. If they look confused, ask them if something needs clarification, e.g. “Does that make sense?”. If they look bored, change your voice or make eye contact with them.
- Be open and prepared for questions. 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.”
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t get flustered. Simply acknowledge the question and suggest that you can investigate this further and follow up with an answer later.
- Be prepared to start the discussion at the end of your presentation, in case there are no questions.
Additional resources:
Visit the links below for more information about:
- [Suggestions from students and staff for preparing a good presentation (ACU)](#)
- [Advice on avoiding common mistakes (UNSW)](#)
- [Some tips to becoming a better presenter (YouTube)](#)
- [Tips for creating good PowerPoint presentations (UNSW)](#)