

Oral Presentations



Oral presentations are one of the most common assignments in college courses. Scholars, professionals, and students in all fields desire to disseminate the new knowledge they produce, and this is often accomplished by delivering oral presentations in class, at conferences, in public lectures, or in company meetings. Therefore, learning to deliver effective presentations is a necessary skill to master both for college and further endeavors.

Oral presentations typically involve three important steps: 1) planning, 2) practicing, and 3) presenting.

1. Planning

Oral presentations require a good deal of planning. Scholars estimate that approximately 50% of all mistakes in an oral presentation actually occur in the planning stage (or rather, lack of a planning stage).

Make sure to address the following issues:

Audience:

- Focus your presentation on the audience. Your presentation is not about how much you can say, but about how much your audience can understand.
- Organize your information into three to five points/categories. Audiences can only easily remember a maximum of three to five points.
- Build repetition. Listening is much different than reading. Your audience cannot go back and read over something they missed or did not understand. Build repetition through internal summaries, transitions, analogies, and stories.



Introduction:

- Introduce yourself if needed, providing your affiliation and/or credibility.
- Create an effective opening that will interest your audience: pose a question, give an amazing fact, or tell a short, interesting story.
- Reveal your topic to the audience and explain why it is important for them to learn about.
- Give a brief outline of the major points you will cover in your presentation.



Main Body:

- Explain your points. Give clear explanations. Provide sufficient evidence to be convincing.
- Use transitions between sections of your presentation (introduction, body, and conclusion) as well as between points in your main body section. The Writing Studio's [handout on Roadmaps](#) provides a great explanation of how to create clear signals and “signposts” that will guide the audience through your presentation.
- Use analogies and stories to explain complicated ideas and to build repetition.

Conclusion:

- Signal your conclusion with a transition.
- Summarize your points.
- Refer to future action if needed.
- End with, “Thank You.”
- If answering questions, tell your audience, “I’ll now be happy to answer any questions.”

2. Practicing

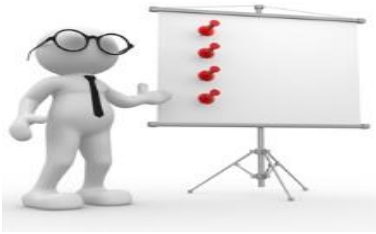
Practicing your presentation is essential. It is at this stage of the process that you figure out word and phrase emphasis and the timing of your sections and overall presentation.

- Record your presentation and review it in order to know how you sound and appear to your audience. You may notice that you are pausing awkwardly, talking too fast, or using distracting gestures.
- Consider using different colored highlighters to remind yourself when to pause, when to emphasize a particular point, when you have a slide change on your PowerPoint, etc.
- Practice in front of peers and elicit feedback. Ask your peers to comment on your delivery and content. What aspects of your delivery work well to convey the information and argument of the presentation, and what aspects of your delivery are not working as well as they could? Also, are there moments in your presentation in which your peers become confused, bored, or distracted?
- Remember that the more you practice, the more comfortable you will become with the material. As a result of repeated practice, you will appear far more polished and professional while delivering your presentation.

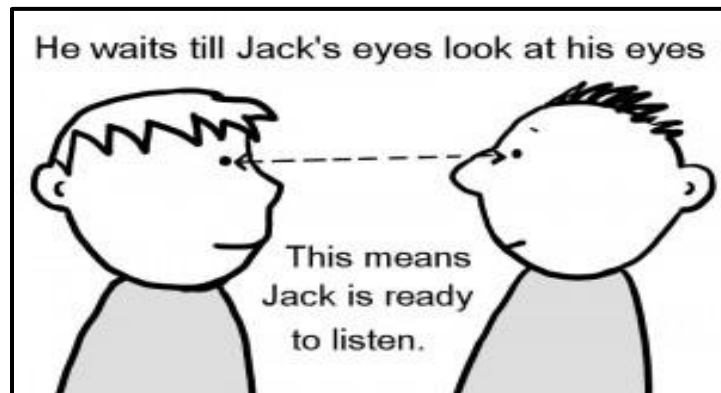


3. Presenting

As the person in charge of the situation when presenting, it is your job to make your audience feel comfortable and engaged with both you and the material of the presentation.



- Maintain eye contact. Only look at notes or slides very briefly. Sweep the room with your gaze, pausing briefly on various people.
- Be aware of your body posture.
- Be enthusiastic about your topic.
- Smile.



- Slow down your speech. We naturally talk faster when we are nervous. Include pauses to allow your listeners to keep up and time for you to think ahead.
- Use gestures to emphasize points and move about the space if possible.



- Calibrate the volume of your voice so that people in the back of the room can hear you.
- Avoid fillers, such as “Ah, uh, I mean, like, okay, um....”

- Act as natural and relaxed as possible.
- Dress appropriately.



Not like this...



Or like this...



Visual Aids - help explain your points, act as supporting evidence, and add visual interest.

- Do not turn your back on the audience to look at the visual or block the visual with your body.
- Provide an orientation to the visual (explain the X and Y axis, etc.).
- Highlight what you would like the audience to focus on, and then make sure you fully explain the information you are highlighting.
- Make your visuals readable and visually pleasing.
- Above all, make sure your visual aids augment what you are saying rather than compete with what you are saying. Try not to include too much text or too many images in your visual aid. Your spoken words and your visual aid should work together so the audience's attention is never divided between the two.



Questions and Answers – Do not underestimate the challenge of running a successful question and answer session. They are unpredictable by nature. In your planning, try to anticipate possible questions your audience might have. Follow this four-step process to successfully answer audience questions:



- Acknowledge the question. (“Good Question!”) This polite gesture shows your interest.
- Rephrase the question. This important step allows you to: make sure you understand the question, ensure all audience members hear the question, phrase the question into one you want to or are willing to answer, and gain time to think about your answer.
- Answer the question as clearly and concisely as possible.
- Check for comprehension with the questioner and your audience. (“Does that make sense? Is that clear?”)



Oral Presentation Resources:

- [NC Central Oral Speaking PDF](#): Very detailed advice on planning, presenting, concluding, etc. - definitely the most comprehensive and detailed resource on this list.
- [Princeton](#): Brief bullet-pointed lists on tips to prepare, presenting, visual aids, etc. - good if you want fast pointers.
- [Purdue OWL](#): Specific advice for presentations in different settings (for example scientific presentations, persuasive presentations, interviews, etc.) - perhaps a good link for people who are looking for more specific advice.
- [University of Wisconsin](#) : FAQs about presenting - a good overview to address the common concerns of presenters.
- [University of Guelph](#): Information on how to avoid nerves and deal with making mistakes during a presentation.
- [University of Wisconsin](#): Gives good timelines and outlines for how different presentations should be carried out - good for specific organization of a topic.
- [Carleton College](#): If you want more resources about oral presentations, here is a very comprehensive list of links to the resources of other universities.
- [UNC](#): This is another comprehensive list of links to other schools' oral presentation resources.
- [Emory University](#) (visual aids): Very detailed PowerPoint on how to design visual aids and PowerPoints for presentations.

COMING SOON/UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Please send suggestions of possible clips to wstudio@aes.duke.edu.

Help Wanted: Oral Presentations Video/Photo Examples

Short examples (30 to 120 seconds) from online oral presentations that successfully portray the following situations:

Introduction – Examples should include the topic of the presentation, why it is important for the audience to learn about it, a brief outline of the presentation’s major points, and possibly a greeting and/or introduction.

Specific introduction examples showing a presentation starting with:

- An interesting/amazing fact
- An engaging story
- A question
- Other hooks?

Main Body – Examples should have clear explanations, sufficient evidence to be convincing, transitions between sections, and built-in repetition of ideas.

Specific Examples of a main body of a presentation showing:

- Effective use of transitions (into the main body and between sections)
- Clear explanations using an analogy and/or story
- An example of an internal summary (recapping info before moving onto the next point)

Conclusion – Examples of conclusions should include a signal that it is the conclusion, summary of points, and an appropriate ending (such as “Thank You”).

Specific examples of conclusions showing:

- Variety in conclusion approach
- A transition into a Q&A session