

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

This handout will:

- Detail strategies for preparing for Oral Presentations
- Describe the basic organization of Oral Presentations
- Provide suggestions for how to deliver Oral Presentations

Preparation:

The questions and suggestions below are intended to help you begin brainstorming the ways you will address some key elements of your oral presentation. You can answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper as you prepare your oral presentation to help you feel more prepared and confident.

- **Know the topic:**
 - What are you going to talk about?
 - What do you already know about the topic?
 - Do you need to research your topic? What kinds of research will you need?
 - You should do enough research to understand the main points of your topic, several specific examples of it, its causes, its effects, and its relevance to your project.
 - Be able to express the core of your subject within two sentences.
 - Think of this as a thesis. If you cannot describe what you are talking about and why it is important in two sentences, your subject is not specific enough.
- **Analyze your audience:**
 - What does your audience already know about the topic? What do they need to know?
 - Why is your topic important to your audience?
 - What should the audience do/feel/know after listening to your presentation?
- **Determine the purpose of the presentation:**
 - There are six common purposes for conducting an oral presentation. These purposes include:
 - To persuade the audience to adopt your position on the topic, or to take action towards accomplishing a goal.
 - To inform the audience about the topic.
 - To compare and contrast aspects of the topic.
 - To identify an issue.
 - This typically requires the speaker to define an issue, describe the individual components of the issue, and who is affected by the issue.
 - To analyze an issue.
 - This typically requires the speaker to construct an argument about any number of the following: the causes of the issue, who is affected by the issue, the effects or anticipated effects of the issue.
 - To confront an issue.
 - This typically requires the speaker to briefly define the issue, the causes of the issue, who is effected by the issue, and, most notably, to argue for possible approaches for addressing and possibly even fixing the issue.
 - *Note:* The previous purposes are not mutually exclusive, but can all be combined in a single presentation, or used individually. They are defined

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

above simply as frames of reference to help you begin to understand how you might define the purpose of a presentation.

- **Determine the argument or point that you want to convey.**
 - This is articulated in the “thesis” of your presentation and should be supported with adequate evidence gained throughout the research and/or brainstorming process.
- **Identify effective supporting information:**
 - Choose supporting information that best supports your thesis/purpose of the presentation.
 - Does the supporting information effectively define and explain the purpose/thesis/main ideas of your presentation?
 - Does the supporting information strengthen your argument?
 - Remember that an argument does not have to be a debate between two people, but, in this context, can be thought of as the point you are trying to make during your presentation.
 - With this in mind, how does the supporting information convince your audience to accept your ideas and/or take action?
 - Understand key ideas.
 - While researching and collecting data, you may notice that certain categories or trends appear multiple times. This means that they are key ideas and you should examine their causes and effects thoroughly because they will likely feature in your presentation.
 - How can you define and explain these ideas to your audience?
 - Provide specific, relevant examples.
 - Make sure the examples you choose directly and explicitly relate to your purpose/thesis/main ideas.
 - Too general examples are not helpful for you or your audience because they do not give you enough information to adequately explain how the examples and supporting information directly relates to your purpose.
 - Examples are too general when they can be applied to many topics or ideas not directly related to the topic/idea you are discussing.
 - Examples are too general when they do not directly and explicitly support a specific idea in your essay.
 - Review the following example:
 - A student is giving a presentation on the harmful social effects of sexism.
 - This student provides the following example: “Sexism is bad because it promotes inequality. When people experience inequality, they aren’t treated fairly.”
 - There are many issues in the world that promote inequality, and many instances when people aren’t treated fairly. These issues are not limited to the topic, nor do they specifically support the thesis. Furthermore, without an adequate explanation about why sexism promotes inequality this example would be far too general.
 - Use the most persuasive data from your observations.
 - Ask yourself: Which data is most likely to convince the audience to accept my ideas?

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

- **Incorporating visual aids to support your presentation:**
 - Do you need any visual aids to support your presentation? Would your audience benefit from visual aids?
 - If yes, what kind of visual aids can you use for your presentation?

Organization:

- **Introduction:**
 - Introduce yourself (yourselves).
 - At the very least you must provide the audience with your first and last name(s).
 - Greet and engage the audience.
 - Simple openings and salutations, such as “good morning” or “hello” or “thank you for coming,” build good will with your audience and makes them more likely to listen to you.
 - Focus on motivating your audience to listen by relating topic(s) to their interests or studies.
 - Introduce the topic.
 - Establish the purpose of your presentation.
 - Why are you presenting about this topic?
 - What is the goal of your presentation?
 - Try to be as concise as possible; like with the subject of your presentation, you should be able to express your purpose in two sentences or less.
 - Forecast the structure/outline of your presentation.
 - In a few sentences, briefly explain the main points you intend to present in the order in which you are going to discuss them.
- **Body:**
 - Select 2-4 main points that support the thesis/purpose of the presentation.
 - Introduce each point.
 - Introduce each idea independently of the others. This allows you adequate time to express and analyze each point. If you present multiple ideas at once, they distract from each other.
 - Provide relevant evidence that explains, supports, and defends your thesis/purpose.
 - Information is relevant if it is directly related to the subject; you should not need to exert yourself by trying to make the evidence fit the purpose.
 - Explain/analyze how the evidence supports your thesis/purpose.
 - How does this subject support your purpose? Does it validate your claim? What impact will improvements have on this issue?
 - Use transitions to move from one point to the next.
 - Just like essays, transitions help create structure in oral presentations and let your audience know what you are going to cover next. If you start with “firstly,” your audience will expect two to three points following it. If you start with “the cause of this issue is...” the audience will expect you to talk about the effect of the issue next. And if you start with “A problem/issue with this is...” then you should follow through with a solution.
 - Be sure to use consistent and appropriate transitions throughout your presentation.
- **Conclusion:**

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

- Summarize your main points.
 - Repeating your main points at the end of your presentation ensures that your audience will remember them.
 - Even if some people did not pay attention during the rest of the presentation, you should summarize your points efficiently, such that those people would still be able to understand your evidence.
- Restate the purpose of your presentation.
 - End your presentation on your central argument so that your audience leaves with your purpose in mind.
- **Activities 1, 2, and 3:** Use your prompt or assignment to fill in the information for this outline. This is not a concrete organization, but it should serve as a basic model for you to follow and use to help you begin composing oral presentations.
- **Introduction:**
 - *Name:*

 - *Qualifications to Speak:*

- **Greet and Engage the Audience:**
 - *Hook the audience with comedy, an anecdote, or an interesting fact:*

- **Introduce Topic:**
 - *The topic of the presentation:*

 - *Context or necessary background information for the audience:*

- **Explain Purpose or Goal of the Presentation:**
 - *What is the thesis or goal of the presentation (or paper/project):*

 - *General Purpose:*

 - *Specific Purpose:*

- **Preview outline/structure for the rest of the presentation:**
 - *Main Point 1:*

 - *Main Point 2:*

 - *Main Point 3:*

- **Body:**

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

○ *Main Point 1:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

○ *Transition to Next Point:*

○ *Main Point 2:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

○ *Transition to Next Point:*

○ *Main Point 3:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

▪ *Supporting Information:*

○ *Transition to Conclusion:*

● **Conclusion:**

○ *Restate the purpose of the presentation:*

○ *Summarize the main points:*

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

- *Signal the end of the presentation:*
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- ***Thank the audience and open up for questions, comments, and discussion.***

Delivery:

- **Tone and language:**
 - Project your voice and enunciate your words.
 - A loud, clear voice establishes your authority and gets your audience's attention.
 - Vary the emphasis of your voice.
 - Shifts in tone and volume are more interesting for audience than flat, consistent monotone.
 - Use language appropriate to the audience.
 - Find a balance in your diction that matches the vocabulary of the setting.
 - Do not use overly flowery or metaphoric speech to impress your audience.
 - Focus instead on meeting your audience's interests and relating to them.
- **Body language:**
 - Make eye contact as much as possible.
 - Making eye contact shows that you are invested in your audience as individuals; however making eye contact with individuals for long periods of time may make those people uncomfortable.
 - Not making eye contact may give the impression that you are not being completely honest or that you are not confident in your work.
 - Stand up straight.
 - Standing straight presents power and confidence.
 - Slouching makes you appear to lack interest.
 - Avoid locking your knees.
 - You will pass out.
- **Engage the audience:**
 - Your delivery will influence your audience's attention and level of interest.
 - Check in with your audience from time to time.
 - Break up long sections with questions, addressing comments /concerns, and other feedback.
- **Use notecards/outlines to help you remember your material:**
 - You can use quick notes to help you remember parts of your presentation.
 - Cue Cards can be made using 3inch X 5inch notecards with brief notes from your presentation.
 - You can also use a brief outline to help you remember the material and organization of your outline.
 - Use key words or phrases to help you remember the main ideas of your presentation.
 - These material are NOT a substitute for practice and rehearsal. You should also try not to read these materials like a script during your presentation, no matter how nervous you may be.
- **Incorporating visuals:**
 - Use visuals to:
 - Stay on track.
 - Reinforce/illustrate your main points.

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

- Provide details.
 - Assist your audience in following your thoughts.
- Visuals must have a clear connection to your presentation.
- Do not overuse your visual. This could overwhelm your audience and draw their attention away from your ideas.
- **Thanking the audience:**
 - After you can concluded your presentation, it is important to thank your audience at the end of your presentation.
 - This brief gesture shows respect for your audience's time and attention.
 - This is particularly important if your presentation requires audience participation.
 - Something as simple as "Thank You" or "Thank you all for your time and attention" would be sufficient.
- **Opening up for questions:**
 - After you thank the audience, you can open up for questions to allow the audience to engage with you and clarify any confusion or inquire about parts of your presentation that interested them.
 - In case someone asks you a tough question:
 - Make sure you understand the question. Do not think about other things while you are answering the question so you can think through the issue proposed. Try not to be defensive before you understand what is being asked because the question is not directed at you, it is directed at the ideas of your presentation.
 - If the person who posed the tough question disagrees with your answer, pause to gather your thoughts to make sure your response actually answers the question.
 - Use specific examples to address issues in order to make your position clear and to provide support to your stance in the disagreement.
- **The Goal:**
 - Show preparation, but avoid appearing rehearsed.
 - You do not want to sound like you have robotically memorized a script. Instead your speech should flow naturally, pausing occasionally and giving yourself time to think.
 - If you try to completely memorize a speech and present without some memory aid then, almost without fail, you will forget your place at some point and make yourself even more nervous and seem unprofessional.
 - Present effective organization.
 - Use transitions and visuals, such as PowerPoint or pictures, to help yourself and your audience follow your argument and remember your main points.
 - Know more about your topic than you put in your outlines.
 - Your visuals, PowerPoint, and notes should be an outline, not your entire presentation.
 - Do not limit your research to your main points.
 - This way you will be able to answer questions and speak more broadly about your main points and purpose.

Campus Academic Resource Program

The Basics of Oral Presentations

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