

STUDENT NOTES FOR SUCCESS

No 10

Oral presentation

Giving a presentation can be a very rewarding experience for both the presenter and the audience. There are some very simple techniques for guaranteeing a successful presentation, despite nerves!

Purpose and audience

With all communication, but particularly with oral presentations, you need to seriously consider your purpose and your audience. Why are you giving this presentation? Do you want to inform, persuade, motivate, or convince? You will take different approaches depending on your audience. The way you speak to your classmates and the information you give may be different to presenting to business people. The examples you will give to each group will need to relate to their experience and expertise. Always use phrases which acknowledge your audience.

Phrases such as:

- “I’m sure you are aware that...”
 - “As you may know...”
 - “It is likely that you are familiar with...”
- will avoid you sounding like you know everything when in fact your audience may already know more than you think.

Using a ‘hook’ to gain audience attention

It can also be useful to ask for ideas from the audience right at the beginning of a session to involve them and help them to draw on their own experience. A good technique to involve your audience is to use a simple ‘hook’, which is something that you know relates to their experience. For example, if you were presenting something about food products, you might start by asking your audience “Who has eaten cereal this morning?” Because this is something that relates to people’s everyday experience, you are likely to have their attention immediately.

Become a confident presenter

What do good presenters give the audience which a written document can’t? First of all, if

good presenters are lively and enthusiastic, they can inspire and energise us.

Presenters can also present difficult information in a simplified way and provide examples that are meaningful to help us understand difficult concepts. In contrast, if a presenter talks in a monotone about facts and figures and uses bland language, we are likely to start thinking about more interesting things such as what we are planning to do at the weekend.

Traits of a confident presenter

What presenters have you found inspiring? Very likely they are people who know their topic well and can explain it simply and in an interesting way.

Good presenters are also likely to:

- have confident body language
- gain eye contact with everyone in the audience, by scanning the room as they speak, and smiling when appropriate
- avoid ‘nervous tics’ which may distract the audience, such as covering their mouths or fiddling with jewellery
- walk around conveying the feeling they are having a conversation with *you*, and
- catch the attention of their audience immediately.



Good presenters use different techniques to involve and engage their audience. Their preparation will include gaining information about their audience so they can tailor their examples and messages to suit. They will then use this knowledge to make their presentation more convincing. Good presenters are also very adaptable. They know their subject matter so well, and are usually so well-prepared, that they can be flexible within their allocated time. If necessary, they can extend or shorten their presentation without being thrown off-balance.

Practise, practise, practise

Whether it is an individual or group presentation practising helps in several ways. By practising you will learn how to talk 'round the topic', that is, not read out the slides. Instead, you can provide the listener with much more information than is on the slide, as if you were in a conversation. Practising will help you to express complex ideas clearly and simply. It will also make you feel more confident.

Questions

Ensure that you allow time at the end of the session for questions. What do you do if you don't know the answer to a question? It is always better to admit you don't know and say you will find out than to pretend you do, and then get caught out. Alternatively, you can ask the audience what they think.

PowerPoint Pointers

PowerPoint is a wonderful tool – but don't forget it is just that – a tool. It should not dominate your presentation.

Remember, if using PowerPoint:

- do not use full sentences on the slide
- do not use a style that is too fancy and distracting
- remember that upper case is more difficult to read than lower case
- be careful with the colour combinations you use; there is no point using nice colours if your slide cannot be read, and do not be dominated by PowerPoint. You are the presenter!

Tips for presenting:

- Give the audience an overview of information before giving detail.
- Do not talk to the slide: instead provide further information relating to each point which appears on the slide.
- Do not turn your back on the audience: you can stand to the side of the projected image and point at certain items.
- Stick to the point: be clear and fairly concise in your explanations.
- Control the environment: familiarise yourself with the room and any technology which you need to use.
- Be flexible: if somebody interrupts, consider whether you can use their question to explain a section of your presentation. If not, say that you will allow time for questions at the end.
- Be aware of your body language: stand straight, avoid hands in pockets and cast your eyes around the audience as you speak. Moving away from the computer will help you to relax and make you seem more lively and enthusiastic.
- Do not be afraid of silence when you invite questions: 10 seconds will feel longer to you than to the audience. People need time to consider what to say.
- Read your audience: if many people are looking tired and restless, change the pace, move around, let them know if you only have a few more points to cover, or invite questions.

Find out more at the CBS Academic Communication Development website:

<https://businesslaw.curtin.edu.au/study/student-experience/academic-communication-development/>

You might also be interested in *Handy Handout 1. Developing your own ideas.*

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