

Oral presentations

Academic Tip Sheet



This academic tip sheet:

- explains why you may be asked to give an oral presentation;
- looks at the basic components of an oral presentation;
- outlines the process you could follow when developing an oral presentation; and
- describes what to do when making the presentation.

Why do I have to give an oral presentation?

Speaking in public is an important part of university life. While studying at ECU it is likely that you will give an oral presentation either by yourself or as part of a group. Some of these may be for assessment. The presentation will generally have a time limit, and usually lecturers will give you a clear idea of its purpose and content. You must take care to deliver what your tutor has asked for.

What are the components of an oral presentation?

Most oral presentations will have most of the following components:

- A handout, which should include any references you used.
- An introduction to your topic and your approach to it.
- A brief outline of the major sections of your talk.
- The sections of your talk, with clear segues (links) between them and obvious

links to the main idea of the talk.

- A concluding section where you sum up and reiterate your main idea.
- A period for questions from the audience or discussion of some of the material presented.

If you are not sure whether to include any of these components then consult your tutor.

Develop an oral presentation

Whether you are doing a solo or group presentation there are a number of things you should do:

- Analyse the purpose of the presentation and decide on your approach.
- Develop your central argument/concept or if there is no argument then the content you need to outline.
- Divide the presentation into sections. Make sure that the sections have a logical development and follow the guidelines provided by your tutor. If you are doing a group presentation these might be divided amongst the group/team.
- Read widely, think deeply and talk about your subject ... make yourself an expert in this area; you will then be ready for questions.
- Work out how you are going to engage your audience.
- Decide whether or not you want audience participation during the presentation and how you are going to achieve this.
- Write the presentation. Some people prefer to write in full sentences and paragraphs that they reduce to dot points for palm cards, overheads or PowerPoint slides. Others begin with the dot points under which they list points for expansion.

Note: If using palm cards or overheads make sure you number them in case they are dropped.

Using dot points in PowerPoint

It is best to:

- Use a stem sentence or a heading for each group of dot points.
- Have one group of dot points per slide.
- Use 3-7 dot points per slide.
- Print out a complete set of dot points for yourself, with extra wide spaces between dots. This will be your 'script'.
- Under each dot point on your script, put in anything you want to say. This may include clarifications, examples, jokes, relevant stories, short questions, segues to the next group of points etc. This is for you alone; others will just see the intensely summarised dot points.

Note: Using this method means your

audience will read and note down the important summary points. The extra oral material you include will make your presentation relevant, interesting and lively, giving time for each summary point to be understood and made memorable.

- Prepare a clear, attractive handout. Ask your lecturer for specific information about their requirements. A one-page handout might include:
 - your subject/thesis/content;
 - the heading of each group of dot points;
 - one or two focus questions for discussion; and
 - references.
- Practise your presentation. Do this standing, projecting the voice, with awareness of what the audience should find interesting and important. You are their guide to the topic, not someone merely reciting content. You might like to record your practice sessions to check your tone of voice and the way you use language e.g. pauses, 'ums' and 'ers', slang, repeated phrases.
- Check the time it took you to give the presentation so that you do not go under or over time. If your presentation is to include questions/discussion make sure that you make allowance for this.
- Get someone to listen to your presentation and give you feedback on your voice, your body language, your appearance, the presentation itself and any handouts.

Making the presentation

Before:

- Make a backup set of overheads in case your PowerPoint doesn't work. Most of your lecturers do this!
- Organise your technical requirements well before the presentation. This will allow you time to find the missing cords etc.
- Check you have everything you need, e.g. a board marker, enough handouts.
- If possible set the room up as you wish. Ask people to move if the room is unbalanced (e.g. everyone is huddled down the back). Make sure everyone can see you and your presentation.

During:

- If you are nervous, set up a prop, e.g., a large picture, map, or other item. Most eyes will be on this, not on you. If your hands are shaking, place them on an object like the podium to steady them.
- Try not to move around too much but equally don't stand stock-still like a statue.
- Introduce yourself and outline your topic,

your thesis and the major sections of your presentation. Do not begin by apologising.

- Tell your audience whether you will take questions during or after the presentation.
- Remember to give out and refer to your handout.
- Speak clearly, pitching your voice to the people furthest away from you, making allowance for the room acoustics. Don't rush. Use pauses for emphasis. If necessary, repeat key points to make sure your audience is following you.
- Communicate your interest in the topic. If you're not interested, why should your audience bother? Make eye contact. Do not stand stock-still and read!
- Try moving between formal delivery of important points and a more anecdotal style for examples/illustrations of a point. Ask questions to get them thinking.
- Respect your audience; expect their respect in return. If people are chatting or not concentrating, stop and wait until you have their attention.
- If you are using visual resources such as PowerPoint slides make sure you are not obstructing the audience's view of them.

Concluding:

- Have a clear, practised conclusion or summary so that the audience knows what you have told them.
- Ask for questions. If you do not understand the question ask them to rephrase it. If you do not know the answer say so.
- Don't rush back to your seat; stay standing and thank everyone calmly.

Presentation checklist

- **Have you established the purpose/ approach of your oral presentation?**
- **Have you determined what the requirements are from your tutor?**
- **Are you familiar with all aspects of your presentation?**
- **Have you prepared all the materials for your presentation?**
- **Are you ready for questions or discussion?**
- **Have you practised your presentation and checked time constraints?**
- **Have you checked the room facilities and do you know how the equipment works?**

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