



Preparing For a Presentation

Here are some tips for putting together an effective presentation.

What is the purpose of your talk?

Before you start planning your talk, think about the reason you are giving it. The purpose of your talk will determine how you structure your information, what information you include, and the visual aids you choose.

Who is your audience?

What will your audience know about your topic? What background information will you need to provide? What will you need to explain and what can you assume people will already know? How can you keep your audience interested? What questions might be asked? Will your presentation be marked? If so, make sure you know what the marking criteria are.

Structure

Structure your talk carefully. It can be helpful to use a three-part structure consisting of an introduction, body, and conclusion. Suggestions for formatting a talk in this manner are as follows:

Introduction

Start by situating your topic in its wider context and giving a quick overview of how your talk will develop. Try to capture the audience's interest in your topic with some sort of 'attention grabber'. This might be some dramatic statistics, a cartoon, a relevant fact, or an interesting visual aid.

Body

Focus on the main points you want to get across. Link your ideas coherently and logically. Use clear examples to illustrate your points. Ensure key ideas stand out and keep your material relevant and to-the-point.

Conclusion

Briefly sum up your talk by restating the main points and presenting your conclusions. Thank people for their attention and invite comments and questions. Think of some strategies to handle any tricky questions and don't become flustered if you don't know the answer. If you don't understand a question, keep calm and ask the questioner to restate the question or explain further.

Visual aids

- Avoid using lots of words or full sentences. Reduce the text to keywords.
- Keep visual aids clear, simple and uncluttered.

- Use a colour scheme that is easy to look at and read.
- Use large serif fonts; all text and images need to be readable by the person sitting at the back of the room.
- Remember to appropriately reference quotes, charts, graphs, images, statistical data etc.
- Check that lower resolution images (perhaps from the web) don't become pixelated when projected.

Delivery

- Do not “read” your presentation straight from cue cards or the screen. Cue your talk with your visual aids and have brief back-up notes. Look at the audience.
- Use appropriate language – spoken language is less formal than written language so keep your tone conversational.
- Avoid “ums” and “ahs”
- Sound and look enthusiastic about your topic. If you want your audience to be interested, then you must show interest and enthusiasm yourself.
- Pitch your voice at the back row, not the front row.
- Remember to look at your audience.

Practise your presentation

Being prepared means rehearsing your presentation as many times as it takes to get it right. Even experienced presenters advocate plenty of run-throughs. This will increase your confidence and allow you to feel more relaxed and sure that everything will work on the day. You will know what is on your cue cards, that your visual aids will fit in with your text, and most importantly, that you'll get the timing right. Practise in front of a mirror or record your practice. Reflect on your practice session and see what you can improve.

Anxiety

If you feel anxious about speaking to a group, the best strategy is preparation and practice. Other tips: Know the room and how to use the equipment. In the days before your presentation, imagine yourself giving your talk just the way you would like it to go. Avoid negative thoughts; they are a rehearsal for failure.

Arrive early. If necessary, arrange the tables and chairs in the room. Greet people as they come in, as this will help to break the ice. Before you start speaking, take a few deep breaths. Nerves can often cause us to speed up our pace, so during your talk, don't be afraid to take a pause...slow down...take a breath. If you lose your train of thought, don't panic – calmly check your cue cards and continue.

Enjoy your presentation. Look on it as a performance – you are a bit like an actor playing a part. Even if you are not feeling confident, pretend you are!

Student Learning Development runs regular workshops on presentation skills so check our website for details: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/students/workshop>

We also provide links to additional online resources available from:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/students/digital>