

Tips for Conducting an Oral Presentation

Preparation and practice will improve the quality and success of your oral presentation. This list of guidelines is intended to help you create and deliver an effective oral presentation. Remember that if you are nervous, you are not alone. Previous URC students describe their experience in the following ways: *“I was incredibly nervous about it but then getting up there & realizing I am very knowledgeable increased my confidence level.”*

“The most memorable part was finishing my presentation and feeling as though I had accomplished something very challenging. It made me proud and gave me more academic confidence.”

“Giving a 10-minute presentation on my year-long research really aided me in being able to take a complex topic and explain it fairly simply. I was forced to choose the best evidence possible to make my point understood and credible.”

When preparing your oral presentation, please consider the following critical elements and key questions.

PLANNING

Be Clear about Your Purpose: It is critical to be clear about your purpose in the communication.

- Are you informing or persuading?
- Focus on getting one to three key points across;
- Repeat key points: Tell them what you are going to tell them; tell them; tell them what you told them;
- What do you want the audience to know, feel, or believe afterwards? What is the “take home message”

Think about Your Audience: Tailor your message to the audience.

- Who are they?
- What are their interests, knowledge levels, and attitudes toward your topic?
- The audience needs the answers to questions such as:
 - Why should I care about this issue?
 - I agree with the significance of the topic, but how are you justifying your ideas?

Use an Effective Introduction:

- Orient the audience, explain why it is important, and set the tone;
- Establish a relationship between the speaker and the audience and establish credibility;
- Avoid weak introductions such as apologies, jokes, and rhetorical questions.

Keep it Simple: It is important that you organize your presentation clearly and simply.

- Prioritize topics and allocate time accordingly;
- Stick to a few main points;
- Have a distinct pattern (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, problem/solution);
- Use transitions to move smoothly from one point to the next;
- Use examples, anecdotes, graphics, images, and statistics to illustrate main points and to maintain your audience’s interest;

- Use simple sentences and language because listeners have only one chance to hear your talk.

Create an Effective Conclusion:

- Summarize and set final image;
- Do not trail off;
- Do not just present data and leave the audience to draw its own conclusions;
- Share your insights, and tell them what you've concluded from your work.

Analyze the Environment: In order to become comfortable and confident, it is helpful to visit and become familiar with the room in which you will be presenting.

- Check out the size of the room, chair placement, temperature, and any distractions (e.g., fans);
- Check out the equipment available.

Be Prepared Early: The earlier that you are done with the creation of your presentation the better.

- Prepare early and let it rest a bit. Then come back to it and practice.
- Practice from start to finish using the equipment and the room if possible.
- Practice with friends and peers.
- Be prepared to answer the ten most likely questions.

DELIVERY

Presentation Style: It is important to remember that *how* you present is as important as what you present.

- Be yourself, relax, and practice some deep breathing techniques;
- Sound conversational and enthusiastic;
- Use key phrases in your notes so you do not have to read them;
- Try to use your slides more than your notes;
- Vary volume;
- Don't be afraid of some silence and do not use fillers such as "um";
- Nervousness is usually invisible, most people will not notice small changes in your voice or occasional mistakes;
- Use body language effectively (e.g., establish frequent eye contact with the audience);
- Concentrate on the message;
- Begin with a slow, well-prepared introduction and have a confident and clear conclusion;
- Make eye contact with your audience
- Don't read your slides (assume your audience is literate!)
- Practice, practice, practice.

Finally, remember these words of a former URC student, "I knew I was going to be presenting at the URC in front of a large, diverse audience so I forced myself to articulate my ideas... This became a very positive experience for me... It was also a great way to 'practice' getting over stage fright."