

Title of Module: Oral Presentation

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Video 1: Oral Presentation Skill Areas

- Types of oral presentations you may encounter in your classes
- Key skill areas necessary for effective presentations
- Oral vs. written communication

Video 2: Oral Presentation Preparation

- Preparing on your own
- Working together with a group
- Creating slides and/or handouts for presentations

Video 3: Oral Presentation Delivery

- Pacing
- Intonation
- Body Language

Video 1: Oral Presentation Skill Areas

Welcome to our Oral Presentation module. In these three videos, we will talk about formal oral communication in academic settings—that is, about speaking in class as part of individual or group oral presentations.

Video 1 will cover Oral Presentation Skill Areas and will lay out some different types of oral presentations you may encounter in your classes, as well as the key skill areas necessary for effective presentations and some differences between oral and written communication.

Video 2 will discuss Oral Presentation Preparation, including preparing on your own and also working together with a group, as well as creating slides and/or handouts for your presentations.

Video 3 will address Oral Presentation Delivery, including pacing, intonation, and body Language.

Now let's address some of the different types of oral presentations you may encounter in your classes. You may be asked to deliver extemporaneous--unplanned--presentations or planned ones. You may be asked to prepare and deliver an oral presentation on your own, or in a group. You may be asked to prepare a text to be read aloud to an audience, or you may be asked to memorize a text or a speech and deliver that. You may also be asked to lead a portion of class time, or facilitate a discussion among your classmates, rather than do all the "presenting" work

yourself. Other speaking tasks you may be asked to participate in in your classes include debates, role-plays, and skits or short plays.

Some of the key skill areas necessary for effective oral presentation include elocution--speaking aloud clearly, coherently, and expressively; extemporaneous speech--speaking aloud in unscripted situations, improvising, and thinking on your feet in real-time, perhaps in debates or other related formats; leading or facilitating class discussions--guiding your classmates to a deeper understanding of a text or topic, and anticipating and responding to questions and comments (in essence, "teaching" a portion of the course); memory, or oral retrieval, tasks--that is, recitation or declamation, summarizing or quoting from previous readings or materials without slides or note cards; and metacognitive reflections--reflecting on and evaluating your own or your classmates' speech and oral presentations, live or via video recordings.

Oral vs. Written Communication

Oral and written communication have some similarities. In both, you need to be organized and clear, and always communicate with your audience in mind. It's not enough that something is clear to *you*, the writer/speaker—it also needs to be clear to your audience, your readers/listeners.

There are also some differences, however. When reading an essay, readers can look back up to the paragraph before to remind themselves of a previous point. They cannot do that during an oral presentation, so you need to be much clearer about connections between points, given the constraints of your listeners' working memory.

Video 2: Oral Presentation Preparation

Preparing an oral presentation is in many ways more work, and takes much more time, than delivering it.

First, be sure to find out exactly what is expected of you during the presentation: should you stand or sit? Use slides, a handout, both, or neither? Your instructor may have very specific requirements, or may be more flexible in her expectations. Some instructors have very specific timing requirements, and some may want you to submit an outline of your presentation in addition to delivering it orally. Double-check these details before you begin the work of preparation.

You should also confirm how the presentation or other oral task will be evaluated. What criteria will the instructor be looking for? Often, professors evaluate presentations based on how clear and audible your speech is; how well you stay within the time and assignment constraints; and how easy to follow the content of your talk actually is. There may be additional criteria as well, with more or less emphasis placed on the style--delivery--of your presentation, versus the content, depending on the class, instructor, and purpose of the assignment. Your professor may

be looking for you to express yourself clearly and thoughtfully about complex ideas in a range of genres and styles, maybe speaking extemporaneously from notecards, or maybe giving a poster talk next to a large poster board presentation of a research project. Sometimes, your audience will be asked to evaluate you instead of, or in addition to, your professor.

Working with a Group

When working with a group on an oral presentation, you will also need to consider a fair division of labor that maximizes the strengths of the group members but does not exclude any of the members. It's usually more effective to have at least one in-person meeting for your group, rather than simply relying on technology (shared documents, chats, etc.). Use whatever system of technology can help you as a group work together more efficiently without resulting in one person doing the bulk of the work. There is no substitute for practicing together aloud: you will need to consider how and where to stand or sit while your partners are speaking, especially in relation to the screen (if you are using slides).

As a group, you will also need to consider how you will begin the presentation, and how to hand off your part of the presentation to your groupmates. You may even want to script a transition sentence to use when passing the presentation off to a partner—"Now I'm going to turn things over to Juan, who will talk about--" etc.

Creating Visual Aids--Slides

Your instructor may require or recommend that you use one or more visual aids with your presentation, including a slideshow or PowerPoint presentation, or a handout. It's important to plan these visual aids carefully.

The best visual aids should meet four criteria: they must be relevant—that is, based on the purpose of the talk; important—not merely redundant, but images or slides that should enhance and illustrate the content of the presentation; accessible—visual aids should be mentally accessible, that is, comprehensible to your particular audience, and also visually accessible—clear, vivid, and legible; and simple, not too busy or distracting.

Generally, slides are constructed without large blocks of text and without dense sentences that your audience must read. Your slides should help your audience make sense of your talk, not distract them from it. Slides should contain text large and clear enough for your audience to read; do not use fonts that are too small or hard to read. Be sure you use parallel constructions for all the bullets in a given list.

Creating Visual Aids--Handouts

If you are giving your audience a handout during your presentation, the handout should be constructed in the order in which you will refer to it during your talk.

Handouts longer than one page are discouraged. Keep it concise and easily digestible. Handouts

(or slides) should contain any image, graph, table, quotation, etc. that you plan to discuss in detail. Always call the audience's attention to the handout or slide before addressing it.

Consider using bold headers or section divisions, numbered lists, or other means of helping your audience navigate through your handout. Again, your handout should help your audience during your presentation, not distract them.

Video 3: Oral Presentation Delivery

Practice Pacing

When you are preparing always practice delivering your presentation aloud, it's not sufficient to just write out the presentation--either in outline form or as a full script; rather, effective presenters practice the presentation aloud, and become used to the sound of their own voice speaking in a calm, clear, and natural manner. Delivering an oral presentation is related to, but distinct from, reading aloud a script. Some people prefer to practice in front of a mirror, and others in front of friends or a small audience.

Consider your pacing and speed. Be sure to time yourself while you practice, and practice watching the clock—a clock in the back of the room, or a watch on the table in front of you, or the clock on your computer in “presenter view” as you navigate through your slides. You don't want to get distracted during your actual presentation by checking the clock and then not finding your place again in your talk, so practice moving back and forth between the two.

Remember that unpracticed or nervous presenters tend to speak too quickly. As a rule, slow down: one good way to avoid verbal fillers—your “um”s, “ah”s, etc.—is to slow down and speak thoughtfully.

When you have practiced and timed yourself enough that you are confident of the timing, make note of some minute and second intervals at key points in your talk. For example, you might make a note to yourself (on paper or in the “notes” field visible in presenter view) that you should be at a certain slide by no more than 5 minutes into your talk, in order to keep on pace.

Practice speeding up and slowing down your talk, so that if you are running behind you will know how to recover. Where will you say less, to make up time? Plan that in advance so you aren't worried during the actual talk.

Practice Intonation

When delivering your presentation, whether alone or with a group, you'll need to speak clearly and naturally, and not sound as though you are reading a script or reciting from memory, which can be tedious for your audience. Effective intonation, emphasis (stress), and pauses help capture your audience's attention.

Be aware of the intonation of your voice: don't speak in a monotone, but don't allow all your sentences to rise in intonation either, as that can make you sound very unsure of yourself, even if you are well prepared.

You may want to practice where to emphasize words and where to pause; if you have a script, consider marking it up to better help you during the actual presentation. Your audience will rely on your emphasis to help understand the connections between ideas or to see contrasts that you are making. Pausing functions as oral “punctuation marks” when you speak, and can help listeners follow along, so plan to pause, briefly, at the end of phrases, or between items in a series, and a little longer at the end of a sentence. Overall, be sure to enunciate clearly, not swallowing your words, and speak at an appropriate volume.

Practice Body Language

You will need to consider where you're going to look and how you will gesture during your presentation. In general, try to look out at your audience, not simply down at your notes—but of course, be sure you can find your spot again if you *do* need to look back at your notes.

Try to smile when you are speaking, or at least keep a neutral expression on your face. This can be hard, but practice helps.

Plan to make eye contact in a natural and approachable way with your audience. Avoid only looking at your instructor and avoid turning around to face the screen, with your back to your audience.

Try to use natural posture and gestures, rather than stylized or overly dramatic gestures, and consider dressing in a manner that does not distract from your presentation.

Finally, if you are presenting with a group, make sure that you've considered where you will stand and where and how you will look even during your groupmates' portions of the presentations, not just your own. You don't want to be distracting your audience from your groupmates' part of the talk, and you don't want to be blocking your audience's view of the screen while a partner speaks.

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