

# Giving Oral Presentations

Public speaking can feel terrifying. In fact, it is some people's greatest fear. However, with preparation and practice, you can give an effective and interesting presentation. Just remember to leave plenty of time for all the necessary steps. For more information, see chapter 11 in *The Essentials of Technical Communication*, 3rd ed., by Elizabeth Tebeaux and Sam Dragga; *A Writer's Reference*, pp. 101-05.

## Prepare

Preparation is essential for a good oral presentation. Leave yourself plenty of time for preparation, or you may experience writer's block before and during the presentation. Consider several steps in this process:

- Be sure to understand the assignment or topic and the guidelines for the presentation.
- Do research (if necessary).
- Outline and plan the presentation or speech.
- Prepare note cards.
- Prepare visual aids (posters, props, PowerPoint slides, etc.).
  - Slides should not be a verbatim copy of the notes.
  - Graphics help retention and are interesting, so use them, if possible.
  - All visuals and graphics should be simple, professional, accurate, and clear.
- Revise the outline, notes, and visuals as needed.

## Rehearse

It is very important to rehearse the presentation. Practice in front of a group of people who will volunteer to listen and give feedback, but if that is not possible, practice by yourself, ideally in front of a mirror. You should rehearse until you feel very comfortable with the presentation; most people need to rehearse at least five to six times. Keep in mind that this will take some time, but you will be much more comfortable if you have rehearsed thoroughly.

### Rehearsing will allow you to

- Practice staying within the time limit.
- Eliminate the "jitters" before the actual presentation.
- Become more familiar with the material.
- Discern areas that need revision (content, organization, and delivery).

### Tips for rehearsing:

- Find a critical audience that will point out weak areas.
- Do not script the presentation; note cards work best.
- Use visuals during the rehearsal.
- Time it.
- Rehearse it until you feel more confident (five to six times).

## **Giving the oral presentation**

Most people get very nervous right before they have to speak. There are several ways to avoid this:

### **Before the Presentation**

- Get plenty of sleep (by preparing and rehearsing early).
- Eat regular meals to avoid hunger or lightheadedness.
- Drink plenty of water to avoid a “froggy” voice.
- Look the part; you will feel more confident if you are happy with your appearance.
- Review note cards one last time.
- Remember that all students in the class or group have to experience the same thing; they are probably nervous, too. Furthermore, most people are usually not as critical as you might think they are.
- Take a few deep breaths if nervous; this will help you to relax.
- Remember that since you have prepared and practiced, you have nothing to worry about.

### **During the presentation**

Here are some suggestions for effective strategies to use during the presentation:

<b>Good Strategies</b>	<b>Avoid</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eye contact: Effective speakers look at the people to whom they are speaking.</li><li>• Speech: Speak slowly and loudly, and make sure to pronounce words clearly.</li><li>• Facial expressions: Smile, laugh, and look interested and confident.</li><li>• Gestures: Use hands to refer to visuals and the body to communicate.</li><li>• Pause if needing a moment to regain thoughts.</li><li>• Observe the time limit and adjust the speech if needed.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Looking at the floor, ceiling, etc.</li><li>• Rushed, mumbled, whispered, or monotone speech.</li><li>• A blank face or lack of confidence.</li><li>• Fidgeting: hair twirl, foot stamp, weaving, etc.</li><li>• Filler language: um, uh, like, you know, etc.</li><li>• Stopping before or after the time limit.</li><li>• Omitting large sections of the presentation to save time.</li></ul>

### **After the presentation**

- Thank the audience for their time and attention.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Answer questions completely and honestly; if you do not know the answer, say so.
- Maintain a polite and positive tone.
- If someone is asking a question that would better be discussed one-on-one, offer to speak with him or her alone after the presentation.

## **How can I make my presentation more interesting?**

When looking for some ways to make the presentation more appealing, try these tips:

- Involve the audience: Ask questions, give objects or handouts, etc.
- Have an effective introduction and conclusion (ask a question, tell a story, give a statistic, etc.).
- Have stimulating visual aids that help the audience understand the presentation.