

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING EFFECTIVE ORAL PRESENTATIONS

I. PREPARE AHEAD.

A. PLAN YOUR PRESENTATION CAREFULLY.

1. Make sure your presentation is well organized. Make sure it is easy to follow the flow of your ideas.
2. Explain terms or ideas that may be unfamiliar to a general audience. Remember that *examples* are often the most economical and effective ways to illustrate ideas. Make sure the level of difficulty is neither too high nor too low for your audience—which you can assume will be interested, intelligent, and widely diverse (*i.e.*, not necessarily acquainted with your field of specialization). Use visual aids (the board, transparencies, slides, *etc.*) if and as they can help you clarify, organize, and/or illustrate what you present.
3. Avoid trying to cover too much in your presentation. If you are presenting a topic you have already presented in a written paper, you will probably have to cut out much of your written paper's content. Remember that people cannot process as much information when listening as they can when reading.
 - a. A major point needs 5 to 8 minutes to explain clearly. Aim for no more than three major points.
 - b. The average number of words a listener can comprehend is 150 per minute. So 3000 words would be the maximum number you could successfully communicate in 20 minutes.
4. BUT NOTE: *only* live rehearsal can accurately time your presentation. YOU ONLY HAVE 20 MINUTES!

B. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

1. Practice your presentation in front of a screen, or record a movie, or before a friend (whom you've urged to be entirely honest), and before a mentor. A recording can help you pinpoint problems with your presentation. But only a live audience can tell you whether or not you're communicating effectively.
2. Time your practice sessions, and cut your material until you can comfortably finish in the time allotted: twenty (20) minutes. Do NOT try to shorten your presentation by speeding up delivery. The most common problem with presentations is that they are delivered too quickly for the audience to absorb and get interested in.
3. If you are working from an outline or notes, practice until you can deliver your presentation without long pauses, stumbling over words, or an excessive number of "uh"s. If you are working from a word-for-word prepared text, practice until you know it almost by heart—*i.e.*, until you don't really have to read it, but can simply glance at it once in awhile, then look up and go on talking. You must address your audience: look at them, see them, talk to them. Otherwise, your presentation will be torture to listen to.

II. AIM FOR DYNAMIC DELIVERY. LOOK ALIVE. PROJECT CONFIDENCE.

A. MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION CLEAR TO YOUR AUDIENCE.

1. Speak up, and speak clearly. Your regular speaking voice will not be loud enough to be heard across even a small room, so when you practice, get used to speaking at high volume. And do not mumble.
2. Keep your head up, at least most of the time, and look at your audience. It is easier for your listeners to hear you if they can see you as you speak, and speaking out—rather than down—helps your voice carry.
3. SPEAK SLOWLY! Most speakers inadvertently speed up their delivery because of nervousness, making it hard for the audience to follow. Stay aware of your rate of speech during your presentation. If you notice you are speaking too quickly, *take a deep breath and/or a sip of water, and slow down*. Reading from a text almost always leads to speaking too quickly. So: if you intend to work from a text, learn it so well that you can *talk* it.
4. Use images to clarify your presentation and engage interest. Displaying unfamiliar terms, lists, and/or an outline of your presentation helps your audience follow the flow of your thought. Try to avoid filling your slides with words that you read to the audience. Limit the number of slides to no more than one a minute.

B. HELP MOTIVATE YOUR AUDIENCE'S INTEREST.

1. *Look* interested in what you are presenting. Why should anyone else be interested in what bores you?
2. *Sound* interested in what you are presenting. Use your voice to convey enthusiasm for your topic. If you drone on in a monotone, you will put your audience to sleep.

III. RELAX.

Most people are anxious about speaking in front of a large audience. With practice, you will become more at ease. The more at ease you feel, the more relaxed you will look—and the more polished and effective your presentation will be.

—LISA HAINES WRIGHT, ENGLISH, WORKING FROM A DOCUMENT PREPARED BY EVE CARLSON, PSYCHOLOGY