



Counselling & Learning Support

North Vancouver Campus

Student Success Workshops

Giving Oral Presentations



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Giving Oral Presentations

Most students will be required to give an oral presentation of some sort during their university education and most students find the prospect of speaking in public very anxiety provoking. Like most fears, the only way of overcoming the fear of public speaking is to know how to prepare an effective presentation and to practice presenting as many times as possible. Consequently, this handout will explain the steps involved in putting together an effective oral presentation and will provide suggestions as to how and what to practice.

Step One: Choose Your Topic

Some instructors will give you a definite topic to present, but most often you will be asked to choose your own topic. In this case consider the following when making a choice:

1. Choose a topic that would be of interest to you and that you would like to learn more about yourself. Researching information for a presentation is a learning opportunity not only for your listeners for also for you as the presenter.
2. Choose a topic that you can fairly easily find information on. You do not want to spend an excessive amount of time doing your research and then not have enough time to prepare and practice the presentation itself.
3. Finally, choose a topic that is relevant and of interest to your audience. Your main goal is to engage and inform your audience, so choose a topic that they will want to listen to and learn about.

Step Two: Narrow Your Topic

Once you have picked your presentation topic, your next task is to narrow the topic by deciding which specific aspects of the topic you wish to present and/or have time to present. One strategy for narrowing your topic is to decide which aspects the topic you wish to address. For example, if your topic is on *anxiety*, you might first ask yourself “what type of anxiety will I discuss”? Exam Anxiety, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety, etc. Once you have decided, you would then narrow your discussion once more. For example, if I chose Exam Anxiety, I could discuss the following aspects of the topic:

- What is exam anxiety?
- How many people suffer from it?
- What are the symptoms?
- What are the causes?
- How can it be overcome?

Depending on the length of your presentation, you might discuss one aspect of this topic or several.

Step Three: Conduct Your Research

Once your topic is narrowed, you are ready to do the research. As when doing research for a paper, research for an oral presentation should include a variety of sources. These sources could include:

- Books
- Journal articles, professional magazines
- Websites associated with professional and legitimate organizations
- Videos, DVDs, Films
- Personal interviews

Step Four: Write the Speech

Once your research is conducted, it is time to put the speech together. It is important to remember that a good speech has three distinct parts:

1. introduction,
2. body, and
3. conclusion.

1. The Introduction

Your first job as a speaker is to get your audience's attention. Some ideas for getting their attention include: asking the audience a question, presenting a startling statistic or shocking piece of information, or telling a relevant story. Once you have the audience's attention, your next job is give a rationale as to why your topic is important and to give them some back ground information about this topic. Finally, at the end of your introduction, you need to tell the audience what you are going to talk about or teach them in your speech. This is called your *thesis*.

2. The Body

The first step in putting the body of the speech together is to make an outline. The outline should clearly indicate, in order, the main sections/ideas of the speech and the key ideas that will develop each main section/idea. Once the outline is complete, you may like to write the body out in-full to get a sense of how the information will flow. It is important to note however, that your speech will not consist of you reading the written speech word-for-word. Effective presenters use other methods of delivery. These are discussed in Step Five.

3. The Conclusion

The role of the conclusion is to make it clear to the listeners that your speech is about to end and to bring your presentation to a close. When concluding, consider using one or more of the following ideas:

- a) Restate your thesis.
- b) Summarize the important points (keep it brief).
- c) End with an appropriate anecdote.
- d) Present recommendations.
- e) End with an impacting quotation or poem.

Step Five: Choose a Delivery Method

Delivering an effective presentation involves using materials to prompt and guide you through your speech as well as the ability to discuss your topic in an impromptu way. The types of material that allow you to do this include Cue Cards, Overhead Transparencies or PowerPoint Slides. Regardless of which delivery method you use, there are a few important guidelines to follow when putting the delivery material together:

1. Only include the main points. The details explaining or expanding your main points should be memorized and not written on your delivery material.
2. Do not include too many main points on each sheet. This will overcrowd the sheet and make it hard to the audience to follow.
3. The information on the delivery material should be large and easy for you and your audience to see.
4. If using PowerPoint or Transparencies, add some colour or pictures to your sheets to make them more visually appealing.
5. If you are using Cue cards, add a visual aid to your presentation such as a poster, a picture, a physical object, a map, a bar graph, etc. The visual aid always needs to be big enough to be seen by the people at the back of the room without them having to move. Also, make sure you remove the visual aid once you have finished talking about it or it will be distracting.

Step Six: Practice Your Speech

This is the most important step in the preparation processes because this is when you actually get to practice what you will say and how you will say it. To make your speech predictable and professional you need to:

1. Practice at least 3 – 5 times with the last time being in a room similar to the one you will present in.
2. Tape record, video tape, or have a friend listen to your presentation. This will give you invaluable feedback.
3. Time your speech several times and then adjust it if it is too short or too long.
4. Practice both your verbal and non-verbal delivery.
 - a) Verbal Delivery – practice talking slowly and clearly, projecting your voice so people at the back of the room can hear you, and using intonation so you are not monotone and flat when you speak.
 - b) Non-Verbal Delivery – practice smiling at the audience and looking confident, making eye-contact, moving around the room rather than standing in one spot all the time, and using gestures to emphasize important points.

Step Seven: Reduce Your Anxiety

While not everyone gets nervous before a presentation, most people do. In fact many professional performers or speakers get nervous before they perform. The key to coping with performance anxiety is to use strategies such as:

1. being properly prepared and having practiced adequately.
2. viewing your anxiety as normal and the extra energy you need to do a good job.
3. using positive self-talk and positive affirmations.
4. using relaxation techniques like breathing deeply and tightening and then relaxing key muscle groups.
5. using positive visualization; imagine yourself giving a successful speech with everyone clapping at the end.

Conclusion

If you follow the guidelines given in this handout you will be well on your way to giving a successful, effective, professional presentation. However, practice makes perfect and the more opportunities you have to speak in public the easier the process will become. Toast Masters International is a public speaking organization in Vancouver that provides people with an opportunity to improve their public speaking in a non-threatening supportive environment. For more information on Toast Masters International, you can go to www.toastmasters.org.

For more information or help with giving oral presentations, please email studyskills@capilanou.ca