

# Presentations

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This handout offers guidelines for preparing, practicing, and delivering presentations to help make the presentation process effective. Writers should remember to tailor each presentation to their assignment and audience.

## Preparing

Presentations must have both a purpose and a specific audience in order to be effective. Before you begin putting your presentation together, ask yourself:

- Who is my audience?  
Each audience has different interests and criterion for what constitutes a good presentation. Determine your target audience (professors, classmates, managers, peers) and what they want to hear. Once you know what they want to hear, you can thread it throughout the presentation, adopting the tone and style most likely desired by your audience.
- What is my purpose?  
To help determine your purpose ask yourself: What do I want to achieve through this presentation? Do I want to inform, convince, or do something else? What do I want my audience to know, feel, and do?

## Organizing Your Presentation

Outlining your presentation provides a structure to build your presentation on and makes researching much faster. Determine first your main point or thesis for the presentation. This will determine the rest of the organization, which should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

The **introduction** usually includes a hook, a simple introduction of yourself and the title, and your thesis. Hooks often include funny or interesting stories, questions, statistics, facts, or inspiring quotes. Engaging hooks are your first impression and your first (and potentially last) argument on why your audience should listen. The rest of the introduction should be kept brief to keep the momentum of the hook into your main argument.

The **body** is comprised of individual parts of your main point, divided into smaller, easier to understand sections. In transitions between the several main points of your main idea it is important use words or phrases signaling a transition, such as “first, second, moving on, another, for instance,” etc. or repeating key words from the thesis or outline of your presentation as you introduce each point. This makes transitions clear, which prevents your audience from getting lost.

The **conclusion**, in oral presentations, allows the speaker to interact with an audience in the moment; if time and circumstance allow, ask for questions from the audience at the end of your presentation. A short review of your presentation helps your main point stick with those who were listening or inform those who may not have understood.

## Preparing Visual Aids

Visual aids help your audience stay engaged in a presentation and make information easier to see and understand. Visual aids can be slideshows, handouts, posters, or other objects. Remember the following as you prepare:

- Visual aids should be attractive and easy to read. Use color and images to draw interest to your topic and ideas. Limit the amount of color you use to two or three different colors. Try to use no more than 2-3 images per slide, if using images. This keeps your slideshow from becoming visually distracting.
- Proofread any text to maintain professionalism and to ensure readability and coherence.
- Don't have the aids talk for you. If using a slideshow, limit the amount of text on each slide, and don't try to include every word you want to say. This suggestion applies to handouts and other aids as well. Too much text distracts your audience as they try to read rather than listen.
- Most importantly, visual aids should support your presentation. Your words and the visuals should work together to accomplish your purpose and create the presentation.

## Practicing

Practicing before giving a presentation builds confidence and develops skills for successful presentations, and the feedback you receive helps bolster weaker areas and fine tune your strong areas. Try to practice your presentation as if you were really presenting, following the tips below. If possible, present to someone or record a video of yourself to review your presentation.

When reviewing your performance (with a friend, video, or in your head) be sure to note strong and weak sections. In weaker areas, identify what made it feel that way. Try to eliminate filler words (“um, er, like”), distracting body language, and confusing or repetitive areas. This is also the ideal place to review your **pacing**, checking whether or not your points have enough material to last roughly equal amounts of time. In repetitive areas or areas where there is little to say, brainstorm more to add. You may be able to split an area where you had a lot more to say into two, and replace the weaker point or absorb it into another point.

## Presenting

Your goal as you present is to keep your audience comfortable and engaged with you and your topic so that they both understand your purpose and learn from the presentation. As you present, remember the feedback you received from practicing and apply the same things to your presentation. As you present, remember to:

- Look at your audience while you are speaking. Try to avoid staring at one point in the room; instead, scan your audience and make eye contact with different individuals as you speak. If you need to look at notes or a slide to remind yourself of a point, do so briefly.
- Maintain good posture to look confident, relaxed, and composed.
- Speak slowly and pause occasionally so that your audience will be able to understand you and keep up with you. Pauses will also allow you to think ahead to your next point.
- Pay attention to the time. If you start to run out of time, remember that it's ok to skip some smaller points as long as you communicate your main idea and conclusion.
- Use body language and gestures to emphasize points. If you can, move around the space—this will help you to keep the audience's interest and to engage different sections of the audience. Be aware of the audience's body language as well so that you can adjust your explanations if you see confused or bored looks. Stop to clarify when you need to.
- If you do not have a microphone, speak loud enough that all of your audience can hear you.
- Dress appropriately. If your presentation is for a class, you may not need to dress up, but if you're presenting at a conference or in a business meeting, wear professional attire.