Oral presentations

Many people say they are anxious about giving an oral presentation but they often leave the preparation until the last minute. The best advice is to prepare well ahead and give yourself plenty of time to practise.

Where to begin

1. Research
The best way to avoid stress is to be thoroughly prepared. If you know your topic very well, you are more able to think quickly and evenly while you are speaking.

2. Plan
What is your purpose? Is there a question you must answer or are you selecting your own topic and focus? Think about your AUDIENCE. What does your audience know about this subject? What will they be interested to hear? Write a list of main points. Put them in logical order. Think of your presentation in three parts: a beginning, middle and an end.

3. Practise
Practise your presentation. Say it aloud. Do not read it – maybe use prompt cards with dot points. Be aware of body language. Think about:
- the way you look (don’t distract the audience with loud jewellery or by fiddling)
- your posture (it’s easier to relax and breathe normally when standing tall)
- making eye contact with people in the audience.

Make sure you observe the time limit, and smile!

The presentation

Beginning – introduction
- Opening statement (can you put it in one sentence?)
- Explain how you have structured the material and the issues you will discuss. This is your opportunity to gain the attention of the audience.

Middle – the body of the talk
- Give the main points or arguments. Make any sub-points clear.
- Develop the points and where possible break up the information with visuals, questions etc
- Emphasise important points.

End – conclusion
- give a clear summary of the main points and a statement of your final position.

Visualise yourself giving the talk. How do you look? Is your voice strong and clear?

It is important to arrive early and get some feel for the room where you will give your presentation. Practise using any of the relevant equipment, such as overhead projector or microphone.

Use clear pointers such as:
Following on from this …
My main point is …
There are three main types …
It is first necessary to establish …
Finally, I want to …
Sample notes for how to give a presentation:

1. Know your audience
   • Who is your audience?
   • What do they know about the topic?
   • Do they have any particular characteristics you may need to consider—such as age, education, experience, language ability…

2. Narrow your topic
   • A broad topic can be too superficial—boring even
   • Use lively examples

3. Research well
   • The more you know the less nervous you will be
   • Use a variety of sources as this brings a range of information and ideas

4. Organise information
   • Brainstorm to clarify what you know
   • Organise using a visual mapping technique
   • Organise your material logically, eg chronologically, spatially (diagrams and maps), numerically (first, second)

5. Structure
   • Introduction—tell them what you are going to tell them
   • Body—tell them (the body needs to be organised according to the main topics to be covered)
   • Conclusion—tell them what you just told them

6. Write and edit
   • Edit the talk paying attention to content, language and structure
     • Content
       - make sure your ideas follow a logical order.
       - use examples and facts to illustrate your points
     • Language
       - use language you think the audience will understand
       - only use vocabulary you understand the meaning of and can pronounce
     • Structure
       - find suitable headings for each section
       - use signposts to emphasise transitions

7. Practise, practise, practise
   • Practise OUT LOUD—present to family and friends
   • Tape yourself

8. Give the talk
   • Use effective body language, movements and gestures. Be lively!
   • Use single page or cue cards
   • Keep eye contact
   • Use notes—single page or cue cards
   • Avoid reading

9. Keeping your audience interested
   • Try to involve the audience—ask questions, check understanding

An anecdote could be included here—a humorous memory or insight.

You might have a map of your presentation to show the audience—on overhead transparencies or Power Point.

How could you demonstrate some of the gestures and movements yourself?