

How to Make an Oral Presentation

The very thought of making an oral presentation is enough to make many people -- old as well as young -- want to stay in bed on the day of the presentation. So daunting is the thought of standing up in front of a room full of people and speaking that most people will avoid this as far as possible. Unfortunately there are many situations in life, especially during school life, where you are required to make an oral presentation as part of your subject grade. If you find yourself in the position of needing to speak in front of the class there are a few things that you can do to prepare yourself for this experience, and if you follow them, you won't find it nearly as traumatic as you think it's going to be. You might even enjoy it!

Presentation Preparation: Know your stuff. Whatever it is you're going to be speaking about, make sure that you know it backwards, forwards, inside out. Practice what you're going to say, and if possible have someone time you so that you manage to get in all the important points within the time limit you're given for the presentation. Create a cheat sheet of all the questions -- with the appropriate responses -- that you think will come up if there's to be a question and answer session after your presentation you're already prepared. Of course there's always a possibility that someone will ask something that's not on your list, but at least you'll have done some thinking about the questions and so be prepared about how to go about answering the ones that aren't on your cheat sheet.

Who's the Audience? Know who you're going to be speaking to. This will help you to make your presentation interesting. If you're presenting to your classmates, keep it on their level. Make it interesting. Where possible, use examples that they can relate to. If you can, make it funny (within the context of your subject area) so that they don't start to chatter or switch off. Involving the audience in some way is another way of actively engaging with them, perhaps asking them a question relevant to your presentation such as "how many of you know?" Or "how many of you have ever?" If no-one responds, ask again. If still no response, make a comment like it's obviously a good thing that you're there then or they'd miss out on knowing about it! If some people respond, then indicate that this is great because they'll already have some idea about what you're talking about.

Audio Visual Aids: During your presentation preparation think about ways that you can use any audio or visual aids in your presentation. These could include music, speech, overhead projection sheets that show bullet points of your main presentation themes (only reveal each point as you start to speak about it so that you are keeping their interest going by not showing the entire list at once. **Speak -- Don't Read:** A presentation isn't to show that you know how to read. You are presenting your subject, not reading about it. Make sure that you know your information, and you have a plan of what you're going to say but don't read word-for-word from a "script" that you've created. A presentation where the person at the front of the room is making eye contact with the audience, and has a tone that is varied, is going to hold the audience's attention. Someone who looks down constantly at their papers and speaks in a monotone voice won't. **End with a Bang:** Well not literally! But finish your presentation with some form of audience interaction such as "Do you feel you've learned anything?" "Hands up if you're still awake?" Or some other form of question that requires action from them will ensure that you've ended with them all still with you. You could also end with some form of humor related to your subject area which again will give interaction as they will laugh. Oral presentations are rarely as bad as you think they're going to be. Make sure that you're prepared and you remember to look at your audience instead of reading a "script", and to interact a little with them, and you'll be just fine!

About the Author

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