How to Plan an Oral Presentation

The secret to a successful presentation is to think of your audience at every stage in its development. As you plan and practice, consider how you will captivate your audience with your content. Engage them by creating a logical structure for your presentation and stimulating their interest in learning more.

1. Plan for a successful presentation

Determine your presentation’s focus
Fortunately, presentations don’t last forever. Unfortunately, you only have so much time to deliver your messages.

When you create your presentation, think about the audience:

- What do they need to know?
- What’s the purpose of your presentation?
- How much time do you have to keep them engaged?

Prioritize your information into three categories:

1. Need to Know
2. Good to Know
3. Nice to Know

Include the “Need to Know” content in the presentation. The “Good to Know” and “Nice to Know” parts can be mentioned in follow-up discussions.

Create a script
Creating a script will help you plan out your presentation. Scriptwriting sets up your organization, flow, and voice.

Organize your content
Make an outline to determine the information hierarchy. The structure will affect the presentation’s logic.

Guide the audience
Apply the Golden Rule for presentations: introduce, present, and re-iterate what you have to say. This helps the audience follow your presentation’s flow.

Engage in conversation
Talk to the audience as you would talk normally. Feel free to use contractions and speak in the active voice.

Add visuals
A picture can be worth 1000 words, but not all words will add value to your presentation. Select visuals to back up your presentation. Whenever you include a meaningful image, like a graph, or a figure, explain it to the audience.
Beware of visual clutter as it can overwhelm the audience and distract them from your message.

Looking for presentation technology? PowerPoint and Google Slides are common choices.

If you want to add interactivity to your presentation, consider Mentimeter. It’s a Freemium, but you’ll be able to survey and quiz your audience.

2. Practice makes improvements

Present to an audience
Get used to presenting in person and experience how you manage your time and content.

Test your technology
Troubleshoot your transitions and animations. Learn how to use your technology ahead of time.

Use key points
Don’t read from your script. Speak freely and refer to key points to give you cues.

Get feedback
Book an appointment at the RGASC to get feedback on your presentation: https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate

Engage in eye contact
Look at the audience to gauge their interest and attention.

Check your volume
Project your voice. Ensure that every audience member can hear you.

Pace yourself
There may be a time limit, but this doesn’t mean you should speak too fast or too slow.

Time your presentation
Did you meet the time limit? Adjust your content and refine your presentation as needed.