

TOPIC

Presentations

Helping students **PREPARE, ADVANCE** and **EXCEL.**

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Presentations are part of all phases of life

Students sometimes question the value of preparing and delivering a presentation for a class. But presentations are not only a key part of a grade in school, but also of success in career and personal pursuits.

An organized presentation can effectively transmit information, or persuade others to take a particular action or adopt a point of view. Managers routinely dispense information in meetings; politicians persuade people to vote for them; activists persuade people to adopt certain practices; academics present information and convince people that their research is relevant and correct; and salespeople present product information to customers.

To function and succeed in the world, students need to be comfortable preparing and delivering presentations.

TIP:

Practicing out loud helps you become more comfortable with the material and may help reduce your anxiety.

Organizing a presentation

The key to an effective presentation is to be organized and focused. Things to consider when preparing the presentation include:

- Type of presentation
- Preparation
- Delivery
- Question-and-answer portion



Assessing a presentation project

When assessing a presentation project, one of the primary considerations is the type of presentation. Answers to the following questions will guide the preparation and delivery of the presentation.

4 STEPS TO ASSESSING YOUR PRESENTATION

1 What is the goal of the presentation?

- Transmit information about a topic
- Persuade people to adopt a particular point of view or take a specific action
- Other?

2 Who is presenting?

- Is this an individual presentation?
- Is this a team presentation?

3 What is the format of the presentation?

- Formal?
- Informal?

4 Who is the audience?

- Peers, a class, a club?
- Management at work?
- Parents?
- Adults or children?
- What is the age range of the audience?
- What is the background of the group?
- What are the likely opinions of the group?
- Are there other factors?



Effective presentations begin with this step

Preparation

Now that you have identified the structure of the presentation, the next step is to prepare the presentation. The following steps should help you organize.

- **Presentation time.** Determine how much time you will have for the presentation. Allow approximately five to 10 minutes for the question-and-answer portion. For example, if you are allocated 20 minutes for the presentation, then be prepared to speak for approximately 15 minutes, followed by a five-minute Q&A.
- **Know the room and equipment available.** Will the presentation be held in a classroom, conference room, auditorium, or other venue? What equipment will be available: computer and screen for PowerPoint, overhead projector, white board or blackboard with markers or chalk? Is there a lectern? Where are the lights? Can they be dimmed at the front of the room to allow for easier viewing of the projector screen?
- **Select a topic.** Be focused in topic selection. An overly broad topic can confuse the listener as well as the presenter. Remember the goal you set for the presentation and adhere to it.
- **Outline the presentation.** A preliminary outline should be completed at this stage. The next page includes tips on preparing a presentation outline.
- **Research and gather information and data.** Each point discussed in the presentation should be supported by facts and data. The source of the facts and data also should be noted and added to presentation materials.
- **Complete outline.** Now that your research is complete, you can complete the presentation outline by filling in the main points, etc.
- **Prepare PowerPoint slides and other media.** PowerPoint and other media such as video, flip chart, handouts and demonstrations are useful aids in communicating with the audience. Pages 3 and 4 discuss tips in preparing visual aids.
- **Practice!** The best, most effective way to ensure a good presentation is to practice it.

Outlining the presentation

A presentation consists of the sections outlined below. Complete a preliminary outline only after you have identified the goal and focus of the presentation.

TIP:

Remember the goal of the presentation when you prepare the outline.

Introduction

- *Introduce the speakers*, their backgrounds and their credentials for giving the talk. For example, has the speaker worked in the field for several years? Has the speaker extensively researched the topic?
- *Engage the audience*. What is the topic's relevance to the audience? Why should they listen? Why was this topic selected? You can ask an interesting question that the presentation will answer. Or you can present an outrageous fact that piques the curiosity of the listener or devise another clever method to introduce your topic.
- *Preview* the outline of the presentation.
- *Highlight which team member will present each section, if it is a team presentation*. It is customary for one team member to be assigned to introduce the presentation, close the presentation and possibly transition each speaker during the presentation.

Body

- *Prepare up to three main points*. Use facts and data learned through your research to support each point. Remember to identify the source of the facts and data as you present them during the presentation and also to put the sources on the visual aids.

Conclusion

- *Persuasive presentation*. For a persuasive presentation, draw the conclusion from the three points presented. For example, if A, B and C are true, then D can be concluded.
- *Informational presentation*. For an informational presentation, present a conclusion if it is applicable.

Summary

- *Review the introductory opening*. If you began with the question that you were going to answer during the presentation, ask the question again. If you presented data as an opening, present the data again.
- *Summarize the main points* presented and the conclusion.
- *Ask* if there are any questions.



Preparing visual aids – PowerPoint

PowerPoint has become the tool of choice for presenters. The slides are easy to develop and the presentation can be easily transported on a flash drive or notebook computer. The presentation also can be saved online and just called up at the computer to be used during the presentation. In a PowerPoint format, the presentation can be outlined in bullets so that the audience easily follows the flow of the discussion on the screen. Facts and data can be presented in chart or graph format to provide rapid communication of data trends, etc. Clip art and animation can be used to highlight important information and provide levity at key points in the presentation.

Important things to remember when using PowerPoint include:

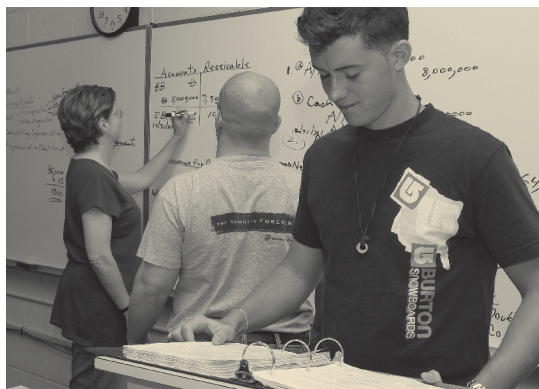
- *Use words sparingly*. Refrain from writing an entire paragraph on the slide. Use bullets and indents to highlight main ideas and supporting data.
- *Use a font size of 20 points or larger*. The larger the better. This helps keep the audience focused on the main thought during that part of the presentation.
- *Use contrasting colors in graphs and charts*, but beware of creating a multicolor collage.
- *Estimate a maximum of two slides per minute of presentation*. Some slides (e.g., charts and graphs) may require more time. If information is presented at a quicker pace, the audience may become frustrated trying to keep up and could lose interest in the presentation.

Tips for using PowerPoint

If the computer is some distance away from the front of the room, ask someone to help change the slides at the appropriate times. The best preparation when working with another person is to practice with your assistant prior to the presentation. But you can also slightly nod your head or use some other prearranged signal to indicate when the slides should be changed.

If the computer is near the front of the room, or if there is no one to help you change the slides, use the following steps:

1. Stop talking at the end of the slide.
2. Walk to the computer (*if you do not have a hand-held advance device*) and push “page down.”
3. Return to the front of the room.
4. Continue speaking.



Additional visual aids

Video. Pertinent video enhances presentations.

A video clip of one to two minutes during a 20-minute presentation can help communicate a point to the audience and keep audience members interested.

Tips for using video include:

- Queue the video prior to the start of the presentation.
- If using a monitor, check the position of the monitor in the room before the audience arrives. Does each audience member have an unobstructed view?
- Check the volume prior to the start of the presentation and before the audience arrives to make sure you can hear the video from all points of the room.

Demonstration. Demonstrations can effectively illustrate points in a presentation. Providing something tangible for the audience to pass around and hold or manipulate enhances the learning process. For example, a significant portion of the car salesperson’s presentation is typically the test drive. The salesperson points out features and performance of the car while the customer is on the road and can experience the features and performance firsthand. Another example of how demonstration could be useful is during a presentation on forms of dance. The presenter can arrange to have people skilled in the type of dance highlighted in the presentation demonstrate certain steps for the audience. Watching a person perform live is frequently more meaningful than seeing pictures on a screen. During a presentation on the metric system, the presenter can pass around a meter stick and liter flask to help the audience visualize the difference between the metric and English systems of measurement.

White/blackboard. A whiteboard or blackboard provides an opportunity to draw graphs, equations or key words during the presentation. If using a whiteboard, use different color markers to distinguish between key points or terms. This media allows the presenter to adapt to audience questions or clarify a point made in the PowerPoint presentation.

Flip chart. A flip chart enables the presenter to lead exercises with the audience, then remove the pages to strategically hang them at various points in the room, if appropriate. The audience can gain a sense of accomplishment and feel that they are part of the presentation.

Handouts. Handouts prepared ahead of time and distributed to the audience either at the beginning of the presentation or at appropriate times during the presentation can enhance the information in the presentation. It can be useful to distribute copies of the PowerPoint portion of the presentation, for example. Prepare copies with three slides on a page. This size allows for easier reading and provides room for the audience to take notes.

Handouts also can be effective tools to reinforce main points or ideas; the audience can take them home for further reading and review. Colored paper can be used to identify different topics and draw the attention of the reader. In the United States, red is frequently the color of alert; green has come to be

known as a color attributed to environmental issues; yellow is a color indicating caution, etc. When presenting to people of different cultures, however, be aware that colors have different meanings in different cultures.

Overhead projector. This technology uses either prepared transparencies, or “foils,” or the presenter can create transparencies during the talk in lieu of a white or black board. Overheads can be advantageous when speaking to an audience in a large room.

Delivery of Presentation

Once the presentation is outlined and created, you now need to focus on the delivery. If your presentation is organized and focused, the delivery is easy. This section outlines tips that will help your delivery proceed smoothly.

Appearance. A neat, groomed appearance enhances the presentation. For the formal presentation, women typically wear a suit or dress and jacket, and men typically wear a suit or jacket and tie. For an informal presentation, women typically wear a sweater or blazer, or a nice shirt and slacks or skirt. Men typically wear a shirt and sweater or a nice shirt with slacks. Jewelry should be at a minimum, depending on the situation. This minimizes distraction for the audience. Clothes should be clean and pressed, and hair should be combed.

Many students may consider this advice to be overboard for “just a school” presentation, but, remember, this is your chance to try out your professional demeanor and work clothes before you enter the world of work. Also, dressing professionally conveys to your instructor your respect for him or her, the project, and your classmates.

Arrive at the room early to set up. This will allow you to load the PowerPoint, clean the white board or blackboard, arrange the audience chairs if necessary, adjust the lighting, and also become comfortable in the room.

Check AV and computer technology of room. Prior to the day of your presentation, be sure to check the AV and computer equipment and software of the room to make sure that they match the requirements of your presentation.

Using a pointing device. A pointing device such as a laser pointer can be useful to draw the audience’s attention to specific points on the screen. Remember to always face the audience when speaking. So, when using the pointing device, stop talking, point at the appropriate place on the screen, then turn again to the audience to continue speaking. Sometimes it is unavoidable to turn sideways and speak while pointing, but these instances should be few and far between.

Notecards. If PowerPoint is unavailable, you can consider using one or two 3-by-5-inch index cards for short notes to remind you what you were going to talk about. For example, writing your outline and key facts on the cards might be useful. When speaking, glance at the card and then place it on the table or lectern while you speak on that topic. Remember to look at the audience while you speak – not the card. Glance at the card when you need to remember the next transition. Another option is to hold the card in your hand at waist level in front of you, glancing down when necessary. If you opt to hold the card, refrain from waving it around as you speak.



Transitions. Effective transitions can greatly assist the audience in following your presentation. A transition occurs at any point where there is a change in topic in the presentation. For example, there can be a transition between bullet points or between slides. To transition a section, first summarize the topic you have just completed, then tell the audience what the next section will be and how it relates to the previous section(s) or overall topic. Then, transition to the next section of the presentation.

NOTE:

Practice your talk several times. Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple Inc. and co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios, practiced a multimedia talk for a convention several times on the actual stage where he was to give the presentation.

TIP:

Memorizing the opening, key transitions, conclusion, and summary can help focus your thoughts during the presentation.

Demonstrations or group exercises. These should be thought out and prepared in advance. At the appropriate times in the presentation, cue the audience that a demonstration or group exercise is going to take place. Introduce the exercise or demonstration and its relevance to the topic of the presentation. When the exercise or demonstration is completed, wrap up by talking about what was learned and how it relates to the presentation topic. Then transition to the next section of the presentation

TIP:

As everyone has told you since you were young, “stand up straight!” Also be sure to keep your feet slightly apart to provide a stable platform. Even if you are nervous, a confident stance will project confidence.

Body language

Body position and movement

- *Face the audience* with your head up while speaking. You have something interesting to say to the audience. Be proud of the work you prepared, and be excited about sharing it with them.
- *Make eye contact* with audience members while you are speaking; this keeps them engaged and helps focus your delivery. Look at people in the same manner as you do while holding a conversation with someone.
- *Use gestures* to enhance your delivery. Keep hands by your side when speaking, but add effects such as pointing to each bullet on the slide as you introduce it. You also can spread your hands apart in front of you to indicate width, raise your hand high to indicate height, etc. After making the gesture, return hands to your sides. Use gestures at appropriate points, but beware of looking like a windmill on a breezy day.
- *Walk along the front of the room* to address various sections of the audience, stopping at a spot to speak. This can generate energy during your presentation and help calm your nerves. But use this energy sparingly; be cautious of appearing to pace.

Voice

- *Pitch* refers to how high or low your voice your voice is when you speak. Keep your voice at medium pitch, but vary it within your normal speaking range. It is normal for pitch to be higher when you are nervous, so try to drop your pitch a bit.

- *Projection* refers to how your voice carries within the room. Ideally, the person in the last row should be able to hear you. Breathing from your diaphragm will help with this. Projecting should not be confused with shouting.
- *Pacing* refers to how quickly you speak. The goal is to use a moderate speaking pace, enunciating words for clarity. If you speak too fast, the audience will be unable to follow you. If you go too slowly, audience members will tune out because they will decide that they can think of something else and tune in again without missing anything in your presentation.
- *Pausing* at transitions between sections of the presentation and when you would like to emphasize a particular point can be an effective tool to moderate the pace of the presentation. Pausing also can indicate to the audience that something important is happening. Pausing means to close your mouth and stop talking – not inserting an “um” or “ah.” “Ums” and “ahs” are distracting and detract from the presentation.

Question-and-answer portion

The question-and-answer portion of the presentation is typically at the end of your talk. It provides the audience the opportunity to clarify points made during your presentation or to ask questions about your general thoughts about the topic.

The following tips should help you get the Q&A with flying colors:

- Repeat the question so that the entire audience knows what you are answering and to ensure that you understood the question.
- Answer as succinctly as possible.
- If the question was answered in the presentation, refer to data in the presentation or use additional facts or examples to back up the answer.
- *Remember, you probably know more about the topic than the audience.*