

Oral Presentations

Wilfrid Laurier University
Study Skills & Supplemental Instruction Centre

Welcome to Oral Presentations in 10 minutes, your starting point to developing the presentation skills that will help you succeed in your university career.

Outline

- ✧ Preparation
- ✧ Visual presentations
- ✧ Practice, practice, practice

Regardless of your program, there is a good possibility that you will be required to give a presentation at some time. These presentations can range from a few minutes to the whole class, but the basic framework of most presentations is going to be the same. In this workshop we will look at presentation preparation, the use of visual aids, and strategies to reduce anxiety and ensure you can answer questions from the audience and stimulate discussions.

Prepare Ahead of Time

- ✧ Preparation is crucial; the audience can tell if you are not comfortable with the material.
- ✧ Cue Cards:
 - use key words and phrases instead of writing out a script.
 - make the cards easy to read at a glance.
- ✧ Practice, practice, practice.

Adequate preparation is essential to the success of your presentation. The audience can tell very quickly if you're not comfortable with the material you're presenting, so practising ahead of time is vital.

If you have a lot of material to present, or are presenting complex information like statistics, consider using cue cards as a memory trigger during the presentation. If you do choose to use cue-cards, be careful not to write a "script" on the cards (which can lead very quickly to you standing in front of the room, head down reading the cards the whole time). Instead, write out bullet points, key words and small bits of information. Lastly, be sure to make the font on your cue cards large enough that you can read them with a quick glance.

Rule of Three

- ◇ Audience will remember 30%.
 - avoid specifics unless using an example.
 - tell them what you are going to say-> tell them, then tell them again!

- ◇ Three parts to the presentation

- ◇ Three points / bullets per slide

It's no accident that the rule of three can be broken down into three sections:

First of all, one of the realities of oral presentations is that the audience will not remember the majority of the information you are conveying. With that in mind, avoid lots of specifics and details and instead focus on major themes and concepts. More importantly, be sure to tell the audience what you're going to say (an outline at the beginning of the presentation, like the one we saw a few slides ago works well for this), tell them the information, then recap again at the end of presentation. Having the material presented three times will help the audience retain the information and provides continuity.

Next, try to organize your presentation into three main parts, again this will help the audience remember the material, and will provide continuity without overloading them with lots of different ideas.

Lastly, try to restrict yourself to three bullet points / pieces of information per slide. This can be difficult, but remember, your slides are there to provide support for your presentation. You can (and will) say much more than the information on your slides. Slides with too much information get tiring for the audience, and if they're reading the slides, they're not paying as much attention to you, the presenter. Use the rule of three to keep your presentations manageable for you, and accessible to your audience.

Slide Presentations

Proper use of visual aids:

- ✧ ensure the visual aids on your slides are relevant.
- ✧ don't overload the slides (text and visuals).
- ✧ choose background and text colors carefully.
- ✧ AVOID EXCESSIVE CAPITALIZATION.

Don't overload your slides with visual aids or too much text. The bulk of your presentation will be what you say to the audience, and your slides are there to augment that message, not duplicate it.

At the most basic level, you have to ensure that the visual aids you're using make sense to the audience. Complex graphs, charts, and pictures that have little to do with the material being presented only serve to confuse and distract the audience. As a rule, keep your aids as simple as possible.

Text and background colours, slide transitions and animations are basic elements of presentation software. Ensure that colours are easy to read and that transitions and animations are simple and tasteful.

Lastly, avoid excessive capitalization...it's harder to read and makes the audience feel like you're yelling at them.

Presentation Anxiety

- ✧ It's normal to feel nervous.
- ✧ Avoid excessive pacing, fidgeting, and don't rush.
- ✧ Practice is the best way to ease anxiety.

The presentation is complete and now it is time to present it. Everyone experiences different levels of presentation anxiety. It can be very frustrating to know the material, only to get tongue tied once you get up in front of the audience.

Remember that it's ok to be nervous, but try to be aware of some common nervous body language like fidgeting, pacing and talking quickly. If you notice yourself in these situations during the presentation, try either standing behind the podium, placing a hand in your pocket or consciously slowing your speech down. Avoid leaning on the podium though, it can become a crutch.

The best way by far to avoid this type of anxiety is to practise as much as possible before your presentation, the next slide has some tips on ways to practise so that you'll be as calm as possible on the day of the presentation.

Practice, Practice, Practice.

Work through the presentation out loud.

- ✧ practice in front of a mirror.
- ✧ practice with friends and get feedback.

Time yourself.

- ✧ be sure to go through the entire presentation.
- ✧ knowing how long it takes to go through your whole presentation at a regular pace can help keep you on track.

First of all, work through the presentation out loud. Practising in your head isn't the same as vocalizing the presentation itself, so even if it feels weird, talk your way through it. Ideally, practise in front of a mirror (or if possible, film yourself presenting) so you can see any unconscious body language or nervous actions you might be making. Even better, try practising in front of friends or family and have them provide you with feedback on your material as well as presentation skills.

Time yourself during the presentation and make sure to run through the entire thing, not just the difficult parts. Knowing how long it takes you to work through the presentation is a really good way to keep yourself from rushing on the actual day of the presentation itself. Make a mental note (or write on your cue cards) how long each section takes, and watch the clock. If you speed through the first section, force yourself to slow down...if you find you're taking too long, it might be ok to go through the material a bit faster. Again, without practising and timing yourself, you have no way to gauge your speed on the actual day...so practise, practise, practise.

Audience Questions

Brainstorm questions ahead of time.

- ✧ ideally get friends or family to ask you questions about the material.
- ✧ have facilitation questions prepared to help stimulate discussion.

Answering questions from the audience after your presentation can be a bit intimidating. With this in mind, try to brainstorm some questions that you might get asked and possible responses to them. (or even better have your friends and family come up with questions based on the material).

Also, it can be very awkward to finish your presentation with time to spare for questions and be met with dead silence from the room. Try to think of a few “why” / “how” questions you can ask the audience to stimulate discussion.

Still Have Questions?

For even more help with improving your time management skills, or for advice on other ways to improve your study habits, visit our website:

www.wlu.ca/study

Call to book an appointment: 519.884.0710 ext. 2220

Oral presentations can be intimidating, especially if you haven't done many of them before. Plan your presentation and practice often and the more prepared and less nervous you will be on the day of the presentation.