

## Appendix D Oral Presentation Skills

The following guidelines will help you prepare the oral presentation that is part of your culminating project for this course. These guidelines will take you, step by step, through the preparation and delivery processes of your presentation.

### Know Your Purpose and Audience

#### Purpose

- Your purpose can often be found in the assignment you have been given. Ask yourself these questions:
  - What are you being asked to do?
  - What guidelines are given in the assignment?
  - How will your topic answer the requirements of the assignment?
  - What is your goal in this presentation?
- Your purpose is affected by the method of communication you are using. It is not enough just to read your written report; you must adapt your investigation, data, and conclusions to the circumstances of an oral presentation.
- Your goal is to give your audience a clear understanding of your findings, so your presentation has to be firmly based on your research, data, and analysis of the data. When presenting your research assignment, your content should be objective and informative.
- Select a topic that will meet the requirements of the assignment, fulfill your purpose, and be comprehensible for your listeners to follow in the allotted time given for the presentation. Select the parts of your investigation and report what you think will best serve your purpose.
- You will need a clearly defined central idea, or focus, and an appropriate selection of specific and concrete details to support the central idea. The focus needs to be maintained all the way through your planning and delivery. Lack of focus is one of the most frequent causes of weak oral presentations.
- Have a strong command of your subject. Remember that your audience is going to have a chance to ask you questions.

#### Audience

- Keep your audience's level of knowledge about your topic in mind while you plan your presentation. They will not be as knowledgeable as you about your topic, and they will not have collected the data or completed the analysis.

- Explain points so that the average listener can understand and see the significance of your problem, your investigation, your data, and your suggested solution.
- Explain anything they are not likely to know or need to be reminded about.
- Create a structure that will enable learners to understand your conclusions and how you arrived at them. Keep your examples and evidence clear, and ensure they are within your audience's understanding of the subject being investigated.

## Planning Your Presentation

- Lack of planning and organizational structure is a major reason for poor oral presentations. The more carefully you prepare, plan, and organize your presentation, the better it will be. Take the time to create a clear, understandable, tight, and efficient outline for your presentation.
- Use brainstorming, tree diagrams, mind maps, or any other planning strategy to help organize your thoughts.
- Make sure that you have a clear, single focus.
  - What is your main idea?
  - What evidence do you want to show for your main idea, your investigation, and the solution that you are suggesting for this problem?
- Ensure that the structure of your argument is clear and logical and that your presentation will make that structure understandable to your listeners.
- Include all parts of your presentation in your outline.
  - Write down your main message and focus, and then construct an opening, a body, and a conclusion that support that main message.
  - Decide where the divisions will be and plan how you will let your listeners know about those divisions.
- Decide which organizational strategies will help your audience understand your main idea and your supporting arguments for that idea.
  - How will you take them through your argument (i.e., chronologically, or by comparison, description, analysis, or problem-solution organization)?
  - Your organizational strategy and your structure will all depend on your topic, your purpose, and your audience.
- Include all necessary definitions and descriptions to help your audience understand the significance of your findings.

- Anticipate what questions your audience might ask about your subject and your evidence, and build the answers to those likely questions into your presentation. This will eliminate any confusion in the audience and will help you stay in control of the presentation.
- Determine which visuals you will need and how they can be created to help illustrate points and data in your presentation.
- Rehearse your presentation to ensure it is within the proper length of time.
  - Remember to allocate five to ten minutes for questions and answers at the end of your presentation.
  - In case you finish early, have some optional items ready that would enhance your presentation, but that are not critical to include.

## Planning the Introduction

- Plan an effective and interesting opening that explains your main message and catches your audience's interest.
  - Open your presentation with a summary of your investigation and your written report.
  - Define your problem clearly in the beginning so that your listeners know precisely what you are going to be talking about.
- Keep your introduction brief, but also include enough information so your audience knows what the problem is, how it was approached, and what evidence/rationale is going to be offered.
- Make your key ideas very clear in the introduction—these are the points that your audience has to understand.
- Keep your introduction focused so that the presentation is easy to follow.
  - Give your audience a clear statement of your objective and your key points. This statement is your opportunity to focus your audience and to give them a reliable roadmap to follow during the rest of your presentation. Your listeners have to know where you are going to take them, otherwise they may get lost in the details of your investigation.
- Offer any background information that your audience will need to understand the significance of your problem and your solution. Keep your background comments brief so that they do not take over the presentation.
- Explain any limitations of your study and any assumptions that you made.
- As you move from the introduction to the body of your presentation, use a transition. Let your listeners know that you are moving into the evidence for your conclusions.

## Planning the Body

- The body of your presentation should include:
  - a description of the criteria used in your investigation
  - a discussion of your findings with relevant factual details
  - a description of your method and the steps you took in your investigation, and the process that you followed
  - an analysis of your data and the methods that you used to perform that analysis
  - the implications of your results and an explanation for your recommendation or conclusion
- The body of your presentation should help your audience understand the rationale for your investigation and the reasons for your conclusions.
  - Build a clear structure for this part of your presentation, and let your audience know the structure. Do not leave it up to your audience to figure out the structure or to draw their own conclusions.
  - Offer your audience a full development of your key ideas and show how your evidence clarifies and justifies your conclusions. Be sure to relate each key idea back to the focus of your presentation.
  - Carefully select details and evidence because you likely will not be able to include all the evidence that you had in your written report.
  - Your examples, evidence, data analysis, and details should all support your main idea and the conclusion of your investigation.
  - Be sure that your evidence is accurate, pertinent, and complete within the boundaries of your subject and your purpose.
  - Use transitions to help people stay on track, to show the logical steps of your argument, and to bridge ideas.
    - You may use something as straightforward as telling them that first you will examine evidence A, then evidence B, and then evidence C.
    - Periodically summarize what you have already discussed and introduce what you are going to say next. This helps keep your listeners on track.

## Planning the Conclusion

- The conclusion of your presentation should offer your audience a clear summary of your main ideas and focus of your presentation. Briefly review your main idea and summarize your evidence.
  - You may want to leave the audience with something interesting to think about. Be careful about adding entirely new information in your conclusion, however, as you want to ensure that you leave your listeners with a clear idea of your main message.
- Do not rush in an effort to quickly finish. Planning and practice will help you resist the temptation to hurry your conclusion when you are speaking. Remember that a good presentation deserves a good conclusion.

## Creating and Organizing Your Visuals

- Be sure that your visuals are pertinent, readable, and illustrative. They should help your audience understand your data and your evidence. The careful selection and presentation of visuals can dramatically enhance the impact of your message.
- Visuals should be easily seen and read by everyone in the room.
  - Graphs should be clear and uncluttered.
  - Font size should be large enough to be read from the back of the room.
  - Text slides or overheads should be brief and to the point.
  - Mathematical terminology and notations should be clear and correct.
- Visuals should illustrate particular key points or data results of your study. Choose specific, concrete, and significant details and evidence that will support your main focus and purpose.
- Plan how the visuals will fit into your presentation. Note on your outline where you will introduce each visual and how you will explain its purpose. Do not put up visuals and leave your audience to wonder what purpose they are serving.
- If you are using overheads or computer presentation media, be sure you know how to operate the technology and check to be sure it is working on the day of your presentation.
- If you are including handouts, keep them simple and carefully tied to your topic so that they will be helpful rather than be a distraction. If you are including additional background material in your handouts, ask your audience to refrain from reading them during your presentation, so as not to distract their attention.
- Do not forget that most classrooms have a chalkboard, whiteboard, or flipchart as an option for visuals. These tools can be useful for showing the separate steps of a process or demonstrating a mathematical procedure. Be careful when using these types of tools; if you spend too much time writing with your back to your audience, you will lose their attention.

## Practising and Rehearsing Your Presentation

- Practise your presentation using cue cards, outlines, or other presentation aids. Practice will make you a better speaker and will make it easier for you to get your message across.
- You can use a tape recorder to listen to how you sound and to see how long your presentation will take. Using a tape recorder can also help you to listen for and eliminate the “ums” and “ahs” that can be distracting to listeners.

- Rehearse your presentation before a live audience, and ask for feedback. Use your visuals during this rehearsal. Tell your listeners beforehand what kind of feedback you are looking for.
  - Can they follow the logic of your structure and understand the focus of your presentation? If they are having trouble, then you probably need to do some revisions.
  - Where are the gaps? What needs to be more fully explained?

## Delivering Your Presentation

### Follow Your Plan

- As you deliver your presentation, follow the outline that you developed during your planning stage.
- Refer to your outline and use it as your roadmap. Explain the structure of your presentation so your listeners will know exactly where you are taking them.
- Stay focused on your main message, purpose, and audience throughout the presentation.
- Support your main message with appropriate evidence using factual details and relevant examples.
- Use your visual aids effectively and follow your plan when introducing and explaining them. Be sure to give your audience time to read or view the visuals.

### Speak Clearly

- Speak loudly and slowly enough so that everyone in the room can hear. Remember that your voice has to be heard as there is no opportunity for your audience to “re-hear” your important points. And once you lose your audience’s understanding it is very hard to get it back again.
- Resist the temptation to rush because of nervousness. Practice will help you avoid feeling too nervous.
- Try to avoid using “ums” or “ahs” and unnecessary gaps. The occasional brief pause, however, can be an effective way to emphasize a key point.
- Address everyone in the audience and make eye contact.
- Use body language and gestures appropriately. Try to be natural and relaxed.

## Watch Your Language

- Use clear and correct language that is appropriate for the purpose and audience of your presentation. Be sure that your mathematical terminology is correct and consistent throughout your presentation.
- Remember that in a speaking-listening communication situation it is up to you to avoid misunderstandings—you are the speaker so your meaning should be clear at all times.
- Use terms correctly. Be very precise in your word choices, and practise the pronunciation of any difficult words.
- Consider writing difficult words or technical terms on a blackboard, a flip chart, a transparency, or a presentation software slide.

## Consider Your Audience

- Watch the reactions of your audience. You may have to adapt content and delivery to your audience's needs. You may need to slow down or to further explain some unfamiliar points if you see that your audience is not following your presentation or has found some point difficult to understand.
- Keep your listeners on track. They will be watching for the main points in your presentation. Make it easy for them to follow and understand those main points.
- Speak to the people in your audience. If you read your presentation to them, you will lose your connection with the audience, and their attention. Use your cue cards or an outline to ensure that you do not just read.
- Bring along your written report, and have it handy in case you need it to answer students' questions.

## Answering Questions From the Audience

- Focus your attention on the question and the questioner so that you can respond clearly and directly.
- Remind yourself that when people ask you questions related to something you have said in your presentation, it means that they have identified with your ideas. They have incorporated your presentation into their own minds long enough to consider it and to ask for more information.
- Treat questions from the audience as an opportunity for you to gain some fresh insights into your presentation and to clarify anything that your audience has not understood.

- Practise being an effective, active listener as you listen to the questions. Watch for the key ideas in the question. If you do not understand the question you may want to paraphrase—put the speaker’s words in your own words—to be sure the question you have heard is what the speaker intended to ask.
- Try not to let questions disrupt the flow of your presentation. If the question is directly relevant to the particular topic being discussed and can be easily answered without digressing from the topic, then answer it immediately. However, if the question is on a topic that will be addressed later in the presentation, or if it is only peripherally related to the focus of your presentation, then acknowledge the question, but politely defer it to the appropriate time in the presentation or afterward.
- Answer all questions courteously, thoughtfully, and completely. This will demonstrate your flexibility and understanding of your subject.