

Preparing an Oral Presentation

An oral presentation gives students an opportunity to present a summary of their findings on a research question. A professor may assign oral presentations so that students engage with a topic and learn to reduce their findings to fit within the time constraints of oral presentations. In addition, these assignments allow students to become more confident and organized speakers.

Although such an assignment can be overwhelming, breaking it down into steps can help turn this project into a rewarding experience. See Sample Oral Presentation Timeline and Example of a Student Using Task Analysis for an Oral Presentation for additional help. The Academic Learning Centre has also developed handouts to break down other tasks, such as studying for an exam and writing a paper.

1. Understand the assignment

- Find out criteria and who will be grading: the professor, TA and/or students?
- What is expected of you and what do you want to learn?
- Analyze your purpose: To inform, persuade, motivate...

2. Choose a topic

- Assess your audience re: interest in and knowledge of topic
- Choose something you are interested in
- Create a working thesis statement
- Make a working or tentative outline of the presentation

3. Assess resource requirements

- What do you already know; what questions do you have?
- What other information do you need and where can you find it? Do you need Census stats, pictures, or info on how to do PowerPoint?

4. Gather information

- What kind of information do you need: definition, description, analogy, example, statistics, and/or testimony?
- Is the information useful to the presentation? Does it add to the thesis (your central idea)? Is it credible?

5. Determine your presentation style

- Once you have gathered the necessary info, how do you want to present it?
- What kind of organizational pattern do you want to create for your presentation: informative or persuasive?
- See hsc.edu link at the end of this handout for more info on presentation styles

6. Fill in outline

As in an essay, you want to have an introduction, body and conclusion

7. Revise & fill the gaps

- Are my ideas clearly and logically ordered?
- Is the presentation arranged chronologically?
- Is the presentation easy to follow?
- What do I want to change?

8. Prepare visual aids

- Use visuals that support what you are saying and keep them simple. If they cannot be easily seen and understood, they will only confuse rather than enlighten

9. Prepare for possible questions from the audience

- Anticipate possible questions and prepare responses if there will be a question period at the end of your presentation

10. Read script for timing and edit to fit time constraints

- Be sure to stay within time constraints; some professors will penalize for either going over or under the given time

11. Rehearse speech

- Decide what method of delivery you will use: memorized, read, impromptu, or extemporaneous (see hsc.edu link for more information). This last method is the preferred method because it maximizes eye contact with the audience; you use notecards to prompt you, so you won't forget and you avoid reading too much

12. Practice speech with technology (overheads, PowerPoint, or others)

- Work to maintain fairly consistent eye contact with the audience rather than shifting focus too heavily to the visuals and allow audience time to understand the visuals

13. Practice relaxation strategies

- Deep breathing and a well-rehearsed presentation will turn nervousness into positive energy
- Be aware of your voice (rate of speech, tone and volume) and non-verbal communication (nervous habits)