

Basics

At university or college, a presentation is a talk in which you present your research, your ideas or a piece of work to a group of fellow students or academic staff.

The academic context

Most college and university courses expect you to make a presentation at some point – it could be a presentation to a small tutorial group or to a larger audience. You will often be given a mark for your presentation, so it is very important to plan well.

Key features

There are a number of things you should consider when planning a presentation.

Context

- Be clear what the aim of your presentation is: What is it about? Who is it for? How detailed should it be? What is your message?
- Think about your audience – for example, are they your peers, your tutors, or people who are uninformed about the subject? Do you need to simplify the content for your audience? Should you use formal or informal language?

Content

- Think about the organization of your presentation. Start by getting all your information and ideas together and sorting them out logically.
- Make sure your information is correct. Gather any data that you can use to support your main points and help your audience understand your message.

Visuals

- If it will make your presentation better, create visuals to engage your audience, e.g. using PowerPoint slides. However, keep slides to a minimum, so the audience focuses on you; and keep them simple so that the audience doesn't have to read a lot. Be very selective in what you include.
- Use the same design and font on every slide. Think about your choice of font, the size of the text and the colour of the background – if the room will be dark, use a dark (not a white) background to make your slides easier to look at. If you can, look at the slides in the room you will be using, and make any necessary changes. Make sure any graphics are clear.

Preparing to speak

- Ensure you will do well by familiarizing yourself thoroughly with the speech – you may be asked questions during the presentation which could affect how you deliver the information. This won't matter if you know your subject well. Knowing your material well will also make you feel more confident.
- Remember that timing is important. Practise your presentation, time it, and ensure it is the correct length. If you go over the time allocated, you could lose your audience's interest or get a lower mark.
- Signpost your presentation – show what you will say with signposting language such as:

Today I am going to talk about ...
There will be three sections to my presentation.

Also, emphasize where you are in your speech. For example:

Firstly, ...
My third point is ...
Lastly, ...

Summarizing will help the audience, too:

So we have considered three main ideas ...
In summary, ...

Finally, don't forget to thank your audience and ask if they have any questions. For more information on signposting, see **Signposts and signals**.

- Don't just write out your speech word-for-word. You need to look at your audience, addressing them directly so that they engage with your message, and this is harder if you have a 'script'. If you prefer to write out every word, don't stop there! Break each section down into key areas. Write these as titles on cards and add keywords to prompt your memory for what you should say.
- Practise! Practice makes perfect, so have a rehearsal, checking that your equipment works, your cards are adequate and your timing is good. Practise in front of a mirror or with a friend, and record yourself. If you feel well-prepared, you will be more confident and more likely to engage your audience.

Challenges / difficulties

The two greatest challenges are ensuring you have a good, well-structured presentation and feeling confident when delivering it. If you follow the steps outlined above, you can overcome these difficulties.

How can I develop this skill?

You need to practise. As you do so, you can try *improvising* (doing something you haven't practised before) in a safe environment. You could add a little humour or change the order of two points. Most speakers improvise in small ways – in the way they greet the audience, for example, or in answering a question. Even if everything goes to plan, practising in this way will make you feel more confident and prepare you to deal with anything unexpected. If you work with another student, get them to ask some questions so that you can practise improvising answers.

Learning outcome

- When you have developed this skill, you will feel confident planning a presentation.
- This will also give you more confidence to present your material and communicate with your audience.

Theory to practice

Look at a student's checklist for planning their presentation and answer the questions.

- Topic: What is 'progress'? Does it exist?
- 30 people (students and my lecturer)
- 12 mins
- Intro?
- Main points?
- Conclusion?
- Visuals?

1 Should the style of presentation be informal or formal?

2 For this 12-minute presentation, how should the speaker organize their time?

- 3** Suggest what should be in the introduction. What kind of phrases could be used?
- 4** What should be included in the main part of the presentation? What topics would you address? What language would be useful here?
- 5** What needs to be included in the conclusion? What language would help here?
- 6** What should the speaker think about when using visuals? What photos, illustrations or graphs would you include?

Ways to get more practice

Learn from others. Take notes at your peers' presentations on what they do well or not so well, so you can avoid the same mistakes and get ideas about how to improve your presentations. Practise with a partner and help each other to improve.