



Making Oral Presentations

Science Communication

LOLO.00.037

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How Do Oral Presentations Differ from Written Forms of Communication?

Two Key factors



1 - There is no written record

- Usually there is no complete written record for your audience to consult - you talk; they (hopefully) listen.
- This means that simple, direct presentations are best: otherwise you risk losing your audience's attention.
- In other words, don't just present to your audience, but rather guide them through your presentation.

2 - You must be the Centre of Attention

- Remember, you are delivering your message in person, and in front of other people.
- This means that your message will not simply be what you are saying,
but how you are saying it.

Factors to consider

Let us examine each of the following in turn because they all have an important bearing on the presentation.

- Your voice.
- Your use of eye contact.
- Your positioning.
- The use of body language.
- Involving hand/ face/ whole body gestures.
- Your overall appearance.

Techniques associated with Voice

Clarity

- Speak clearly. Don't slur words together. Try to make each word count.
- English is a language that requires the presenter to pronounce all parts of the word, especially the beginning and the end (clearly distinguish between 'b' and 'p', 'v' and 'w' and 'd' and 't').
- **Muttering** over a slide, or not realising that you are blocking the projection of the image, **is terrible.**

Loudness

- Make sure you speak **loud enough** so that all of your audience can hear you, especially those at the back of the room.
- This may require some practice (but I am not asking you to strain your voice !!).
- If you speak loudly and distinctly your voice will project much better. (But not if you look at your feet or out the window instead of at the audience).
- And of course, to project your voice, you must open your mouth. This is especially true when you pronounce the letter 'O'.

Monotony of voice

English is not a tonal language. You can thus use tone for emphasis.

You can use :

change of tone (pitch),

change of pace (speed),

change of loudness (volume), and even

elongation

to avoid a presentation being monotonous.

Gaining attention

And don't forget two additional, very important components:

- **the pause**. You don't have to talk all the time – pausing can be very effective, especially in drawing attention to finishing one point and starting another.

attention getting words/phrases - Welcome, Now, Look, Let me begin, Attention ! Even Good morning/afternoon/ evening can be used this way.

Speed of Speaking

- The optimal rate for a research presentation, in English, is about 80-100 words per minute.
- **Be careful** – foreigners tend to speak English much faster than native people. (It seems other languages are spoken at a faster rate). It is OK to speak English slowly (provided it is done in an affected way).
- Often, oral presenters, who are nervous, talk too fast. That makes it hard for the audience to follow.
- Slow down, take it easy, be clear.

Verbal Gestures

Watch out you do not use negative aspects when speaking.

The following can be very irritating (such expressions often comes about if your are nervous) :

- 'um,' 'er,' 'yeah,' 'uh,' 'you know,' 'OK' and other kinds of nervous verbal habits.
- (Instead of saying "uh," or "you know" etc. every three seconds, try not saying anything at all).

Eye Contact

The audience wants you to look at them. Therefore, look at the audience as much as possible.

But, don't fix your attention on one individual - it can be intimidating. Even looking at a select, few individuals only can also be intimidating (and annoying to others, especially if these persons are in the front row).

And whatever you do, **DO NOT**

- Face the display screen behind you and talk to it.
- Look at the computer screen and talk to that.
- And, of course, reading a script is *forbidden* !

Positioning

- Position yourself so that everyone can see all of you. (The audience likes to see the person speaking and if you are going to be better than a television screen, it will be by **your actions!**)
- If you cannot avoid blocking the screen, etc. for some persons, then **try to move** so that you are not continually blocking the screen for the same audience members all the time.
- However, **avoid moving about too much!!**. Pacing up and down can unnerve the audience, (although some animation is desirable as we will mention later).

Body Language

What is this ?

Imagine that that you are watching through a window as someone does a presentation to a group of people in a room. You can't actually hear the presenter's voice, but :

- he or she seems to be speaking clearly,
- is making eye contact with various people in the room,
- is emphasising points using appropriate gestures,
- appears to be in command of the material, and exudes enthusiasm.

What would be your reaction ?

Body language

In contrast:

imagine that you are watching, under similar circumstances, a second person giving a presentation. This time, you notice that the person :

- avoids direct eye contact with their audience,
- keeps their hands in their pockets or at their sides,
- shifts their weight uncomfortably,
- generally appears unenthusiastic about their topic.

How do you now react?

Body language

Body language is important.

It covers

- use of the hands
- use of the face
- use of the whole body
- your enthusiasm, your excitement, the fact you are enjoying the occasion.

Use of Hand Gestures

- You can use your hands to emphasise points. Not only does it draw the attention of the audience, but it can be very useful in aiding clarification.
- **But don't indulge in a grand display of hand waving. This can be distracting - and a bit comical.**
- Use the hands in different ways so that there is not one style.
- But in general, plan to keep your hands clasped together or holding on to the podium, cue cards, etc. and only occasionally making some gesture.
- Be careful, presenters, over time, develop particularly habits. We all have them. Some can be irritating. Try to avoid habitual behaviours using your hands (fumbling change in pocket, or twirling the chair in front of you, for example).

Use of Face Gestures

Do you think the audience will like it if :

- you appear to be happy?
- you are smiling ?

Do you think the audience will notice if:

- you appear tired ?
- you are angry (at the audience or any person) ?
- you are nervous ?

Facial expressions can show most of these.

A happy, smiling face, showing interest, in the audience is important.

Avoid an expressionless face (who wants to see such a face).

Use of Whole Body Gestures

Whole body gestures cover aspects such as –

- your general posture (how you stand),
- your use of action (body orientation),
- even aspects such as dance.

How do you stand - at attention, at ease, leaning against something, sitting on the edge of a table, (sitting on a chair – unlikely we hope) ?

In many cases, gestures are used to draw further attention to yourself. And often the more exaggerated they are, the more attention you get.

Dress

- Your appearance is part of your (non-verbal) message.
- Dress appropriately.
- The Americans may like casual dress, but often Europeans (and especially, I think Estonians, like a more formal style).



Use of Cue Cards

- To keep yourself on track, you can use cue cards with a few key words, instead of a complete text.
- But remember, maintain eye contact with the audience.
- If you use cue cards, try to read the cues while the audience is focussing on something. For example,
 - a research question you have displayed on the screen,
 - a graph you have displayed on the screen,
 - a verbal question you have asked.

Be enthusiastic

- If you are liking the situation and are enjoying the presentation, the audience will sense this and be happy also.
- Be enthusiastic about your topic; but not unnaturally so.
- Try to make your presentation something special – it is different from all the other presentations.

Jokes

Are you good at telling jokes ?

The recommendation is :

- Unless you intentionally have had experience as a stand-up comic, avoid making jokes.
- The results can be disappointing, and may suggest an unprofessional attitude.
- Also jokes may not transcend different cultures (can you follow English jokes about the Irish?)

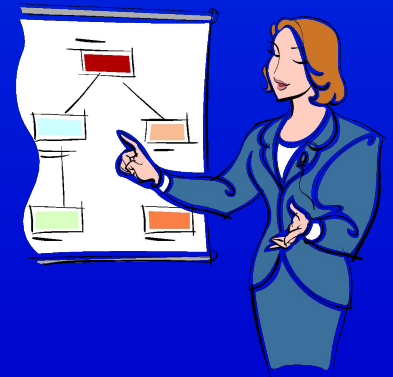
Oral Presentations

We can consider a Presentation in 2 parts

1. Preparing the Presentation.
2. Delivering the Presentation.

We have said much about part 2.

Let us look at the preparation part



Presentation of Content

Preparing an oral presentation often requires the same kind of research as needed for a written report.

1. **Goals** - What content will help to convey **the goal** you have for your presentation ?
2. **Audience** - What information to choose to **appease your audience** - particularly their attitudes, interests, biases, and prejudices about the topic.
3. **Coverage** - What do you need to **cover** ?
4. **Effectiveness** - Because listening is more difficult than reading, **how to make the narrative (stories) particularly effective** to retain the attention of your listeners ?

Questions to analyse audiences

1. How much do my audience know about the subject?
2. How much do they know about me?
3. What do they expect from me?
4. How interested will they be in what I say?
5. What is their attitude towards me?
6. What is their attitude towards my subject?
7. What is their age group?
8. What is their educational background?
9. What positions do they occupy ?
10. What is their cultural/ethnic background?
11. What kinds of cultural biases will they likely have towards me and my topic?

Comments on the questions for analysing audiences

- In viewing this list, you will note the prevalence of questions on **attitude**--the audience's attitude toward you as well as the subject. Some attitudes will matter more than others (depends to the situation).
- The questions are important, since you need to know, **before** you begin planning your presentation, whether your audience will consider you trustworthy and credible.

How to approach planning for the presentation

Talks will differ from writing papers, creating poster papers, or writing reports.

The major difference is that the oral presentation needs to be more repetitive.

The standard advice goes like this:

- **Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em.**
- **Then tell 'em.**
- **And then, tell 'em what you told 'em.**

Presentation of ideas

Based on your purpose, in what order should you present your ideas? This sequence needs to be simple and easy to follow.

It is usual follows the sequence – introduction, main body, summary (conclusion).

You will develop this if you divide your presentation

- (a) an introduction – tell ‘em what you are going to tell ‘em,
- (b) the main body – tell ‘em, and
- (c) the conclusion – tell ‘em what you have told ‘em.

The Introduction

(telling 'em what you are going to tell 'em)

The presentation should be organized in a manner similar to your report e.g.

- The **introduction** should clearly tell the audience what the presentation will cover so that the audience is prepared for what is to come.
 - In planning your introduction, be sure that you state your goal(s) for the presentation near the beginning.
 - Even if you start with some type of anecdote, or question to interest your audience, state the goal(s) of your presentation **next**.

The Body of the Presentation

- The **body** should develop each point previewed in your introduction, in the same sequence.
- Thus, in designing the body of the presentation, you develop what you want to say about each of these main points or ideas as clearly and succinctly as you can.
- An important point, however, is to **demarcate** (separate), each point in the presentation as you come to it. In this way, your audience knows when you have completed one point and begun another.
- *(How might you do this ?)*

Body of the Presentation (contd)

Results

The **Results** should be a clear and concise (you will probably present these visually).

However, don't make the mistake of showing a figure or graph and then saying, "This is what we got." and then sitting down and saying nothing else.

Lead the audience through the visual.

Discussion

The **Discussion** will be your interpretation of your results, such as whether the data support your hypotheses.

This part is particularly important as it presents your very own thinking.

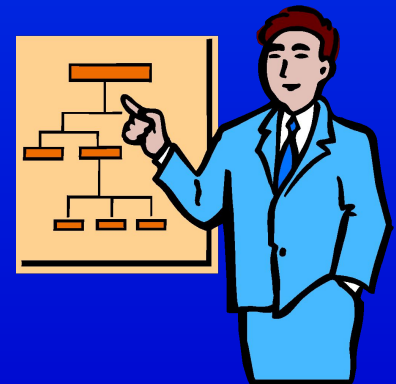
The Conclusion

- The **conclusion** should reiterate the ideas presented and reinforce the purpose of the presentation.
- It is the tell 'em what you have told 'em and usually answers the question: "so what?"
- **At a minimum**, you should restate the main issues you want your audience to remember, but do so in a concise way.
- Do not make the conclusion long; it is just enough to leave the audience with a positive feeling about you and your ideas.

Timing and Coverage

- The presentation should last no more than 15-20 minutes, since there must be time for questions and discussion with the rest of the class afterward.
- In preparing the main body of your presentation, you may find it helpful to keep the following questions in mind:
 1. Will you convey why you did your research?
 2. Will you clearly state the question(s) you are trying to answer?
 3. Will you clearly present what you did to try and answer your question(s)?
 4. Will you offer explanations/comments on your results/findings, especially any inconsistent or unexpected results/findings?
 5. Will you explain what your data means? Will you present answers to the question(s) from number 2 above?

Preparing at the time of the Actual Delivery of your Presentation



The Moment of Truth

- So you are sitting there, about to be introduced. Now what?
1. Relax. Take several deep breaths as you are being introduced (but don't sigh!). Visualize your rehearsed opening statement; don't improvise at the last moment.
 2. As said earlier, state your objectives at the start of your talk, then restate them again at the end of the talk. In between, discuss how your material relates to these objectives.

Your Presentation

- **Never** read from a script.
- You should know most of what you want to say - if you don't, then you should not be giving the talk!
- You can prepare ***cue cards*** which have key words and phrases (and possibly sketches) on them. Postcards are ideal for this. **Don't forget to number the cards** in case you drop them.
- Rehearse your presentation - to yourself at first and then in front of some colleagues.

Remember

- Stick to the plan for the presentation, don't be tempted to digress – you will use up much of your time !
- As a rule of thumb, allow 2 minutes for each powerpoint slide, but longer if you want to use it for developing specific points.
- Note:, the audience will get bored with something on the screen for more than 5 minutes (especially if you are not actively talking about it). Switch off or cover the display.

At the end of the Presentation

- At the end of your presentation ask for questions – but avoid being abrupt when you do this.

(The Danger - the audience may find it intimidating as it may come across as if you are saying “*any questions? - if there are, it shows you were not paying attention*” !!!).

- If questions are slow in coming, you can start things off by asking a question of the audience - so have one prepared !!!

Confidence

The audience wants to know you are confident. They will feel more relaxed themselves.

How will you convey that confidence?

- You can begin by following the usual points:
 - don't fidget (move nervously for no reason)
 - look at your audience (not at your overhead slide – this is so important we will return to this point later)
 - don't hold papers that rustle, or click a pen, or have coins in your pocket which you can clink.
 - don't **read your talk**. (If you try to do this in our presentation sessions, you will be stopped !!)

Speaking Techniques

- *Don't over run.* Shorten your talk by removing details, concepts, and information, not by eliminating words.
- If it becomes absolutely essential to supply details, supplement your presentation with a handout. Make about 10% more handouts than you think you'll need. Include your e-mail contact.
- Always leave time for a few questions at the end of the talk.
- Remember that there is no point in giving a presentation, if the audience isn't listening. You should make a big effort to help them to be interested in what you have to say.

The Question-to-Answer Slide.

- This is the slide that follows your conclusions and remains in the background as you answer questions from the audience.
- **I suggest you Avoid:**
 - turning off the projector (you may need it and have to turn it on again - and wait while it warms up).
 - projecting a blank white (dazzling) or blank black (too dark) slide.
 - leaving your conclusion slide in place as you answer questions - just not as interesting or as provocative as the strategy suggested above.

Handling Questions

- Your presentation doesn't end once you've finished what you have to say. The question period often is the part of the talk which influences the audience the most. After all, you've had time to practice the rest of the talk.
- This is the part of the presentation where your ability to interact with the audience will be evaluated.
- Since you can't always predict what you will be asked, how can you prepare for the questioning?

Some Answering Guidelines

1. Repeat each question so the entire audience knows what you've been asked.
2. Before you answer, take a moment to reflect on the question. By not rushing to give an answer, you show a degree of respect for the questioner, and you give yourself time to be sure you are answering the question that actually was asked.
3. If you are unsure of the question, try to restate it, (and then check you have it correct), or don't forget you can ask for a clarification of the meaning.

Answering questions

4. Wait for the questioner to finish asking the question before you begin your answer!

The exception to this comes when it is necessary to break in on a vague, rambling, or unnecessarily long question (usually because it is more of a **comment** than a question)

- Here we remember - this is **your presentation** and you have only a limited time.
- However, it is important that you break in tactfully. Say something like "So, are you asking?" This will focus the question and give you a place to begin an answer.

Answering questions

5. If a question is asked during the talk, and it will clarify an ambiguity, answer it immediately.
6. On the other hand, postpone questions aimed at resolving specific problems (or arcane knowledge) until the end of the talk, or in private discussions.
 - This is particularly important if the answer will distract either you, or the audience away from the flow of your presentation.

Answering questions

7. Avoid prolonged discussions **with one person**, extended answers, and especially arguments.

8. If you can't answer a question, just say so.

Don't apologise (although it is OK to say – I am sorry, I cannot answer that).

You then may:

- Offer to research an answer, then get back to the questioner later.
- Suggest resources which would help the questioner to address the question themselves.
- Ask for suggestions from the audience.

Answering questions

9. Finish your answer by asking the person who asked the question - whether or not you answered the question sufficiently for them.
 - This approach is a way in which you can acknowledge and thank the questioner; it lets the rest of the audience feel comfortable asking questions (because it shows you are genuinely interested in addressing audience issues, not just in lecturing to them), and it gives you a chance to more fully answer the question if your first effort was not quite on target.
 - If the questioner says you didn't answer it and you believe you did, either ask them to clarify the question, or suggest that the two of you go into more detail at a break or after the presentation.

Using pointers/monitors

- Pointers are best used by flashing the pointer on and off, so that the place you are indicating is illuminated briefly.
- Don't swirl the pointer around and around one place on the projection screen, or sweep it from place to place across the screen.
- This is very distracting for the audience, and they will end up watching the pointer and not listening to what you are saying.
- Likewise, and for the same reasons, avoid using the cursor as the pointer in your computer presentations.
- If you find yourself pointing to the monitor, power-off or disable the monitor to force yourself to concentrate on the projection screen!

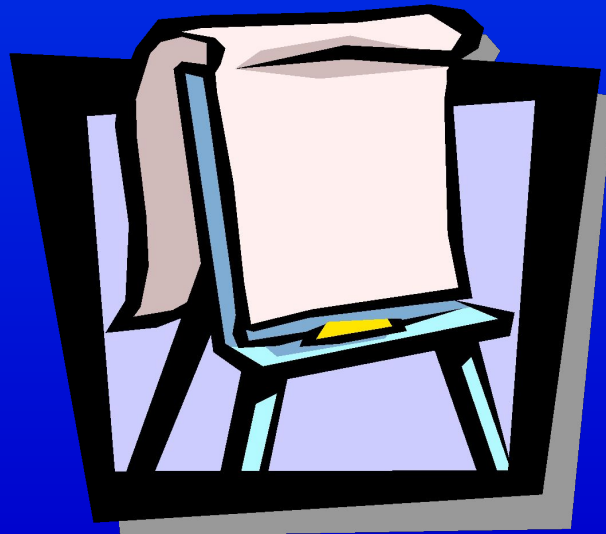
Be Prepared

Be prepared for interruptions (late arrivals, cell phones or pagers, burned out projector bulbs, fire drills, *etc.*).

If you must turn down the room lights, don't turn them off entirely.

Don't leave the lights down any longer than necessary - remember to turn them back up! Of course, the snores from the sleeping audience may remind you to turn the lights back on if you've forgotten.

Other Aspects



Hand-Outs

Try not to provide the audience with handout materials before you begin.

To do so encourages your audience to read rather than listen.

If you must provide written material, be sure the material is coordinated with your presentation.

That way, you have a better chance of keeping your audience's attention on what you are saying.

Visual Aids

- Visual aids significantly improve the interest of a presentation. However, they must be relevant to what you want to say. A careless design, or a poor slide can simply get in the way of the presentation.
- What you use depends on the type of talk you are giving.

Using Slides

- Make sure you know in advance how to operate the equipment and also when you want particular displays to appear. Sometimes a technician will operate the equipment.
- Arrange beforehand, what is to happen and when and what signals you will use. Edit your slides as carefully as your talk - if a slide is superfluous then leave it out. If you need to use a slide twice, duplicate it.
- And always check your slides - for typographical errors, consistency of fonts and layout.

Use of Slides

Try to limit words per slide. Use a reasonable size font and a typeface which will enlarge well. Typically use a minimum of 18pt Times Roman on OHPs, and preferably larger.

A guideline is: if you can read the OHP from a distance of 2 metres (without projection) then it's probably OK.

Avoid using a diagram prepared for a technical report in your talk. It will be too detailed and difficult to read.

Use colour on your slides, but avoid orange and yellow which do not show up very well when projected. For text only, white or yellow on blue is pleasant to look at and easy to read.

Guidelines for using visual aids:

What type of visual aids should I use?

- You can use drawings, graphs, props and objects, a blackboard with an outline, charts, demonstrations, pictures, statistics, cartoons, photographs, maps, etc.
- Use anything that will help people SEE what you MEAN!

How do I design effective visual aids?

- Because your visual aids will be seen while the audience is listening to you, you will need to be sure that all visuals are as simple as possible and easy to read.

Using my visual aids effectively

- Begin your presentation with no aids, as you want your audience to be listening to you, not looking at props, specimens, or other visual aids (or have the title only).
- Present the aid at the appropriate point in your presentation.. Present the aid; give your audience a few seconds to comprehend it, and then comment on the aid.
- Turn off/block the projector lamp between slides. Do not begin talking about another topic while a slide, depicting a past topic, is still showing.
- Remember: people cannot see and listen at the same time.

The Acknowledgements slide.

This is an important slide! But avoid reading a list of names and agencies as this:

- takes time
- may give the appearance of 'name dropping' no one will remember names of people they don't know anyway

Consider using a collage of photos of your collaborators in their natural settings for this purpose At a crowded conference a collaborator is more likely to be recognized in the hallway or at a restaurant if your audience has seen his or her photo during your talk.

Self Assessment Checklist

Did you introduce yourself to your audience ?	Yes	No
Did you aim to arouse the interest of your audience ?	Yes	No
Did you begin with a clear introduction of your topic with an overview of what you will cover ?	Yes	No
Were your ideas presented clearly with a logical flow from one point to the next ?	Yes	No
Did you conclude by summing up what you had said ?	Yes	No
Were your visual aids presented clearly ?	Yes	No

Did you have good control over your material with everything in the correct order	Yes	No
Did you present the right amount of facts and figures? Could your audience understand them ?	Yes	No
Did you avoid reading too much from your cues ?	Yes	No
Did you look comfortable and relaxed ?	Yes	No
Did you display any nervous gestures, such as hand waving or pen clicking ?	Yes	No
Did you look and sound interesting and enthusiastic ?	Yes	No
Did you get your timing right ? Was it too long? Too short ?	Yes	No
Did you provide hand-outs for the audience?	Yes	No

Did you take up a good position(s) during your presentation ?	Yes	No
Was your voice loud enough to be heard clearly by all ?	Yes	No
Did you speak too quickly ?	Yes	No
Did you look at, and speak to, the audience ?	Yes	No
Were there any words you had difficulty in pronouncing ?	Yes	No
Did you allow time for questions and invite the audience to make comments?	Yes	No

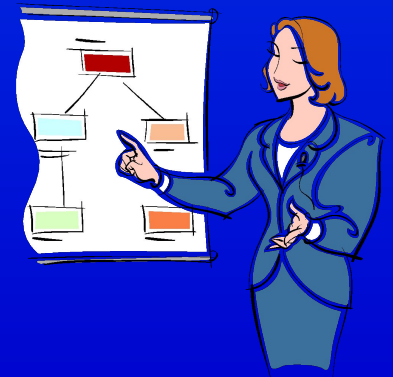
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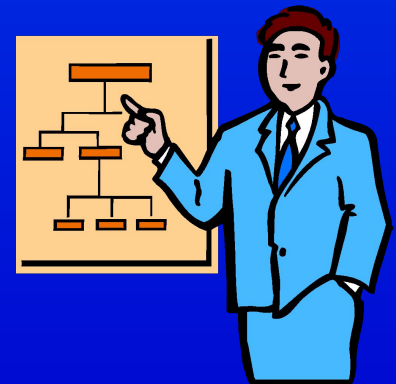
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- You can begin by following the usual points:
 - Speak loud enough so that the audience can clearly hear what you have to say.
 - Look at your audience (not at your poster or overhead slide).
 - Look happy. You are nervous, but the audience does not know this unless you look scared/lack confidence
 - Don't **read your talk**. (If you try to do this in our presentation sessions, you will be stopped !!)

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- Remember that there is no point in giving a presentation, if the audience isn't listening. **You MUST make a big effort to help them to be interested in what you have to say.**

Handling Questions

- Your presentation doesn't end once you've finished what you have to say. The question period often is the part of the talk which influences the audience the most. After all, you've had time to practice the rest of the talk.
- This is the part of the presentation where your ability to interact with the audience will be evaluated.
- Since you can't always predict what you will be asked, how can you prepare for the questioning?

Some Answering Guidelines

1. Repeat each question so the entire audience knows what you've been asked.
2. Before you answer, take a moment to reflect on the question. By not rushing to give an answer, you show a degree of respect for the questioner, and you give yourself time to be sure you are answering the question that actually was asked.
3. If you are unsure of the question, try to restate it, (and then check you have it correct), or don't forget you can ask for a clarification of the meaning.

Answering questions

4. Wait for the questioner to finish asking the question before you begin your answer!

The exception to this comes when it is necessary to break in on a vague, rambling, or unnecessarily long question (usually because it is more of a **comment** than a question)

- Here we remember - this is **your presentation** and you have only a limited time.
- However, it is important that you break in tactfully. Say something like "So, are you asking?" This will focus the question and give you a place to begin an answer.

Answering questions

5. If a question is asked during the talk, and it will clarify an ambiguity, answer it immediately.
6. On the other hand, postpone questions aimed at resolving specific problems (or arcane knowledge) until the end of the talk, or in private discussions.
 - This is particularly important if the answer will distract either you, or the audience away from the flow of your presentation.

Answering questions

7. Avoid prolonged discussions **with one person**, extended answers, and especially arguments.

8. If you can't answer a question, just say so.

Don't apologise (although it is OK to say – I am sorry, I cannot answer that).

You then may:

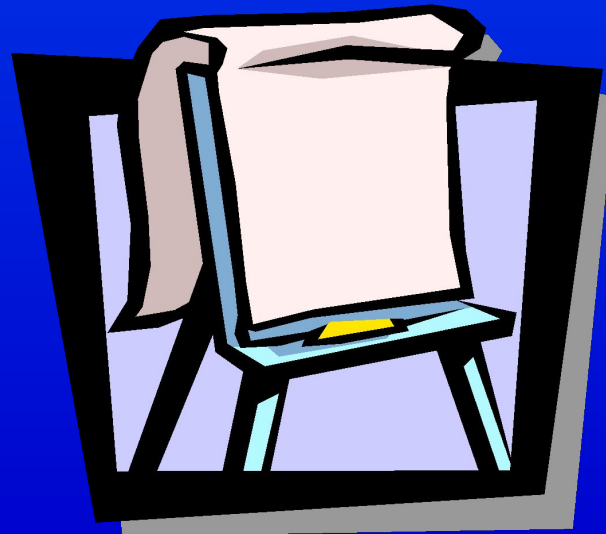
- Offer to research an answer, then get back to the questioner later.
- Suggest resources which would help the questioner to address the question themselves.
- Ask for suggestions from the audience.

Answering questions

Finish your answer by asking the person who asked the question - whether or not you answered the question sufficiently for them.

- This approach is a way in which you can acknowledge and thank the questioner; it lets the rest of the audience feel comfortable asking questions (and it gives you a chance to more fully answer the question if your first effort was not quite on target).
- If the questioner says you didn't answer it and you believe you did, either ask them to clarify the question, or suggest that the two of you go into more detail at a break or after the presentation.

Other Aspects



Hand-Outs

Try not to provide the audience with handout materials before you begin.

To do so encourages your audience to read rather than listen.

If you must provide written material, be sure the material is coordinated with your presentation.

That way, you have a better chance of keeping your audience's attention on what you are saying.

Self Assessment Checklist

Did you introduce yourself to your audience ?	Yes	No
Did you aim to arouse the interest of your audience ?	Yes	No
Did you begin with a clear introduction of your topic with an overview of what you will cover ?	Yes	No
Were your ideas presented clearly with a logical flow from one point to the next ?	Yes	No
Did you conclude by summing up what you had said ?	Yes	No
Were your visual aids presented clearly ?	Yes	No

Did you have good control over your material with everything in the correct order	Yes	No
Did you present the right amount of facts and figures? Could your audience understand them ?	Yes	No
Did you avoid reading too much from your cues ?	Yes	No
Did you look comfortable and relaxed ?	Yes	No
Did you display any nervous gestures, such as hand waving or pen clicking ?	Yes	No
Did you look and sound interesting and enthusiastic ?	Yes	No
Did you get your timing right ? Was it too long? Too short ?	Yes	No
Did you provide hand-outs for the audience?	Yes	No

Did you take up a good position(s) during your presentation ?	Yes	No
Was your voice loud enough to be heard clearly by all ?	Yes	No
Did you speak too quickly ?	Yes	No
Did you look at, and speak to, the audience ?	Yes	No
Were there any words you had difficulty in pronouncing ?	Yes	No
Did you allow time for questions and invite the audience to make comments?	Yes	No

Finally

Enjoy yourself.

The audience will be on your side and want to hear what you have to say!



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