A guide to preparing and delivering presentations in class

Many students find giving a presentation difficult and confronting, but there are ways to make the experience easier. Careful planning and rehearsal beforehand can increase your confidence, and your chances of getting a good mark.

If you have been asked to deliver a presentation in class try following the steps below:

1. **Identify the purpose of the presentation.** To do this ask yourself the following questions:
   - What are you hoping to achieve with your presentation?
   - Is the presentation to inform, persuade or entertain?
   - Do you aim to get ideas or feedback from the audience, as well as sharing your ideas? If so, how will you do this?

2. **Consider the audience.** Your audience will make or break your presentation, so take some time to think about things from their point of view. Ask yourself:
   - From the audience's perspective, what makes a successful presentation? List these characteristics and try to adopt them.
   - From the audience’s perspective, what makes an unsuccessful presentation? List these characteristics and try to avoid them.

When thinking about your audience it’s also important to take into account their prior knowledge. Do they know a lot about your topic, or is it new to them? What will they be most interested in hearing? If you’re not sure try asking your audience a question at the beginning of your talk (e.g. How many of you have experience blogging?). This will allow you to quickly gauge their prior knowledge and their interests. It will also encourage them to think about what you are saying and show them that you are interested in them!

3. **Choose your content.** Do your research. Make a draft of the points you want to cover in your talk. Try to choose interesting or engaging examples to illustrate your points. Make sure you keep track of your sources. You may be asked to provide a reference list.

4. **Organise the structure of your talk by preparing an outline.** You outline should include:
   - Introduction - Tell them who you are and why you are giving this presentation. Tell them what the presentation is about and what you will be covering.
   - Body - Give details of your topic in a logical, smoothly linking order. Use anecdotes and real examples to illustrate your points.
   - Conclusion - Summarise and highlight your main points. Ask for questions. Close with a strong statement. Your audience is likely to remember your last words.

You might find it helpful to write your key points on palm cards, or you may decide to use PowerPoint (more on PowerPoint below).
5. **Consider using visual aids.** Visual aids include PowerPoint slides, videos, handouts, whiteboards, props etc. When used the right way visual aids can help you get your point across and keep the audience engaged, but they can also cause problems. If you decide to use visual aids make sure you practise with them beforehand.

If you’re using PowerPoint try to follow these guidelines:

- Make your 1st or 2nd slide an introduction or outline of your presentation.
- Use 1-2 slides per minute of your presentation.
- Limit the number of bullet points per slide to four or five at most— if your slides are too full your audience will have trouble following you.
- Use short sentences on your slides.
- Don’t just read your slides aloud— each slide should be a summary or a guide. Glance at it quickly to keep yourself on track, and then expand and elaborate on your points.
- Pick an appealing colour scheme, but keep the animation light. Too much animation can be distracting and gimmicky. You want the audience to listen to what you have to say.
- Keep the font consistent. Use at least 18 point. This makes it easier for the audience to read.
- Use short sentences on your slides.
- Use a conclusion slide to summarize the main points of your presentation.
- Include a slide with your reference list.

6. **Rehearse your presentation.**

- Practise your presentation aloud. This will help build your confidence. Try to speak clearly. Try not to go too fast.
- Look at your watch or clock before and after your rehearsal to ensure you haven’t gone over your allocated time.
- You may find it helpful to rehearse with a friend or family member. Ask them for feedback.
- If you’re using any visual aids, have a practise run with these too. Make sure you’re comfortable using them. Consider that things may not go smoothly on the day. For example if your using PowerPoint, consider what you’ll do if you have I.T problems. You may want to print out copies of your slides to give as a handout.

7. **Deliver your presentation**

- Remember it’s normal to feel nervous. Most people find public speaking nerve wracking. Your teacher understands. If you’ve prepared carefully you’ll be ok!
- Walk confidently to the front of the room. Your audience won’t know if you’re faking!
- Stand up straight and face the audience head-on.
- Remember to breath. Speak a little slower than you usually do. Most people speed up when nervous.
- Use your hands to emphasise and reinforce your points.
- Nod your head and smile to emphasise what you are saying.
- Try to make eye contact with all members of the audience. You don’t have to stare, just make eye contact with one person while you’re making a point, and then move on.
- Once the presentation is over ask your teacher for feedback – this may help you next time you need to make a presentation!

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