

I. What is a Presentation?

A presentation is a formal method of communication where information, ideas, or opinions are conveyed to an audience. Presentations typically involve a speaker or group of speakers who deliver content to an audience using various mediums such as spoken word, visual aids (such as slides or charts), and sometimes interactive elements. The purpose of a presentation can vary widely, including informing, persuading, teaching, or entertaining the audience on a particular topic or subject matter. Presentations are commonly used in educational settings, business meetings, conferences, seminars, and public events. They often include elements such as introductions, main content or arguments, conclusions, and opportunities for audience engagement through questions or discussion.

II. What is the Purpose of Presentations?

Students are often asked to give presentations, either alone or in groups, in order to:

- ▶ provide a focus for class discussion
- ▶ enable different groups to explore various aspects of a topic or course material in detail
- ▶ share the results of group projects



- ▶ gain practice in speaking in front of others, particularly useful for viva exams, job interviews, workplace presentations, and life generally.

III. Types of Presentations

In educational settings, presentations can take various forms depending on the goals of the instructor and the nature of the subject matter. Some common types of presentations include:

1 Informative Presentations

These presentations aim to provide the audience with new knowledge or information about a specific topic. They often involve explaining concepts, presenting facts, or describing processes.

2 Instructional Presentations

Instructional presentations focus on teaching the audience how to do something or perform a task. They may include step-by-step instructions, demonstrations, or tutorials.

3 Explanatory Presentations

Explanatory presentations aim to clarify complex concepts or ideas by breaking them down into simpler terms. They may involve using analogies, examples, or visual aids to enhance understanding.

4 Research Presentations

These presentations involve sharing the findings of research projects or studies. They typically include a review of the research question, methodology, results, and conclusions.

5 Interactive Presentations

Interactive presentations engage the audience in active participation, such as through discussions, group activities, or hands-on exercises. They promote collaboration and enhance learning through engagement.

6 Creative Presentations

Creative presentations involve using innovative approaches to convey information or ideas. They may include storytelling, multimedia elements, role-playing, or artistic components to captivate the audience's interest.

7 Project Presentations

Project presentations involve sharing the progress, outcomes, or results of a specific project undertaken by individuals or groups. They may include project reports, presentations of findings, and reflections on the project process.

8 Review Presentations

Review presentations summarize and consolidate information from previous lessons, readings, or discussions. They help reinforce learning and provide opportunities for reflection on key concepts.

IV. Common Presentation Pitfalls and Mistakes

As well as the positive strategies we have outlined above, have a look at the most common mistakes that presenters often make:

- ▶ Flying through the content at top speed.
- ▶ Not having an introduction or a conclusion.
- ▶ Not providing time for questions and answers.



- ▶ Reading from a prepared text.
- ▶ Being overreliant on PowerPoint.
- ▶ Being afraid to go into too much detail.
- ▶ Worrying too much about ambiguous signals from your audience.

V. What Makes a Great Presentation?

1 Strong content

The knowledge base is relevant, accurate, pitched at the right level for the course and the audience.

2 Direction

The talk leads the audience towards a point, such as to understand the reasons behind your position, conclusions or recommendations.

3 Clarity

The audience can follow the argument easily because of the way it is organised and presented: well structured, logically sequenced. Its key points stand out.

4 Persuasiveness

It provides a strong case.

5 Points of interest

This could be a topical issue, a compelling argument, new data, visual material, good examples to illustrate the points.

6 Well-paced

It moves at a speed that maintains attention, neither tediously slow nor gabbled. The speaker doesn't 'go faster' in order to cover more material than there is time for.

7 Selective

What is omitted can be as important as what is included, for clarity, relevance and pacing.

8 Researched

Your advance research should be evident in the talk and also in the way you answer reasonable questions put to you by the audience: you should know your material well.

9 Enjoyable

Aim to help the audience enjoy the talk through the content and style of presentation. It helps if you are confident and enjoy what you are

saying (or appear to be). A little humour can help (but is not essential so don't force it).

10 Audience awareness.

This needs to be evident from the way the talk is both designed, prepared and presented.

11 Technical proficiency

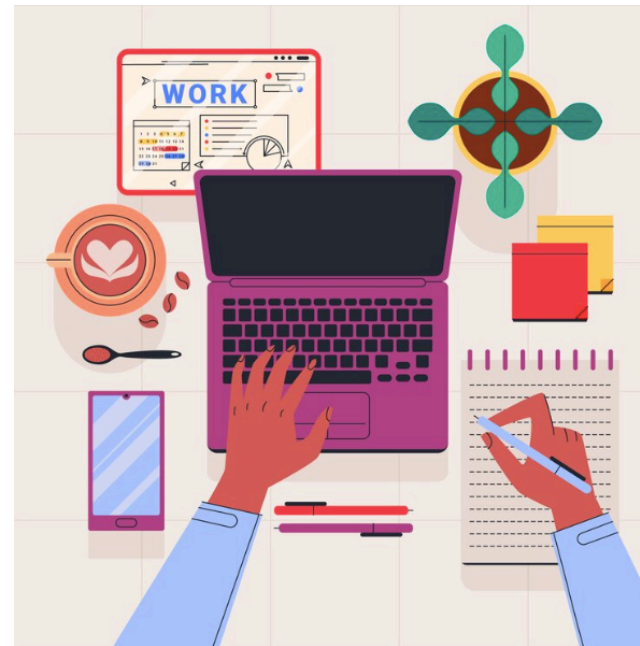
Materials and slides are ready. You can use the technology fluidly.

12 Preparation and practice

Presenters put time into thinking through exactly how it will work, and practise until they are confident everything will work and fit into the time available.

V. Preparation

The crucial elements of any presentation are the information that you have to deliver and the audience that have to receive it. The best presentations are focused with a precise aim and the supplied information is appropriate and addresses the clear-cut, unambiguous question. Poorly prepared presentations are those which include just a bit of everything. Thus, before you start working on the presentation, answer the following questions:



► What is the main aim of the presentation and what message you want to deliver to the audience in the time limit set?

► What is the current knowledge level of the audience and what new knowledge or awareness do you

want the audience to have gained from your presentation?

► What is the most effective way to communicate this knowledge?

You should remember that planning a presentation can be even more demanding than working on a written assignment. The main challenge is to try to fit all gathered information that you usually consider relevant into the time that is allocated. Some people solve this issue by planning and writing a lengthy piece which can be later reduced to key points. The advantage of this approach is that you will be well prepared with very detailed information which you can freely use during the presentation particularly if questions are asked.

Otherwise, some people compile a set of headings, and based on these headings prepare a short paragraph for each point of their presentation. This is your personal decision which approach to use, but it would be more advantageous and safe to prepare a detailed paper and then reduce rather than creating a brief set of headings and trying later to add more information. At any rate it would be propitious to have a set of notes to use as a guide during the presentation.

1 Preparing your material



Divide your material into the essential points that you definitely want to make, and a little extra material you can use if there is time.

Organise the material so that it flows logically – help the audience follow your line of reasoning.

Ending. Prepare a strong closing summary that sums up your argument or recommendations.

Introducing. Prepare your introduction, including a brief overview.

Include a 'Hook'. Consider including a brief statement, image, quotation or similar – to hook your audience in at the start.

2 Preparing for your audience

People listen differently to talks than they do in general conversation, especially if they have to sit still for more than a few minutes. You might have noticed this in lectures or seminars. When preparing your own presentation or talk, it can be useful to consider the following.

- 1** As an audience's attention tends to drift in and out, your key points could be missed. Repeat key messages or essential points, using slightly different words.
- 2** An audience's attention span is usually short. Divide your talk into a few sections, with a planned brief pause between each.
- 3** Focus on your key points. Avoid unnecessary details. Don't break off into unplanned tangents – you may confuse your audience and throw out your timing.

4 It can be challenging for an audience to follow a complex argument or a sequence of points when listening rather than looking. Slides, posters, charts or a handout help.

5 Audiences usually like 'stories'. Use a strong structure and relevant examples, images and case studies to engage their attention.

6 If you run short of time, don't speed up to fit in more material or rush through slides at a great pace just to show them. Your purpose is to engage and inform, not 'cover the material'. Instead, edit the talk to fit the available time. Check this when you practise your talk.

VI. Deciding on the Structure

Whether the audience can understand what you are trying to communicate will be determined by how you structure your presentation. You should focus on the development of a clear structure that will help to map out and guide you in your preparations and in your final delivery.

As a very general principle, the rule of three is offered.

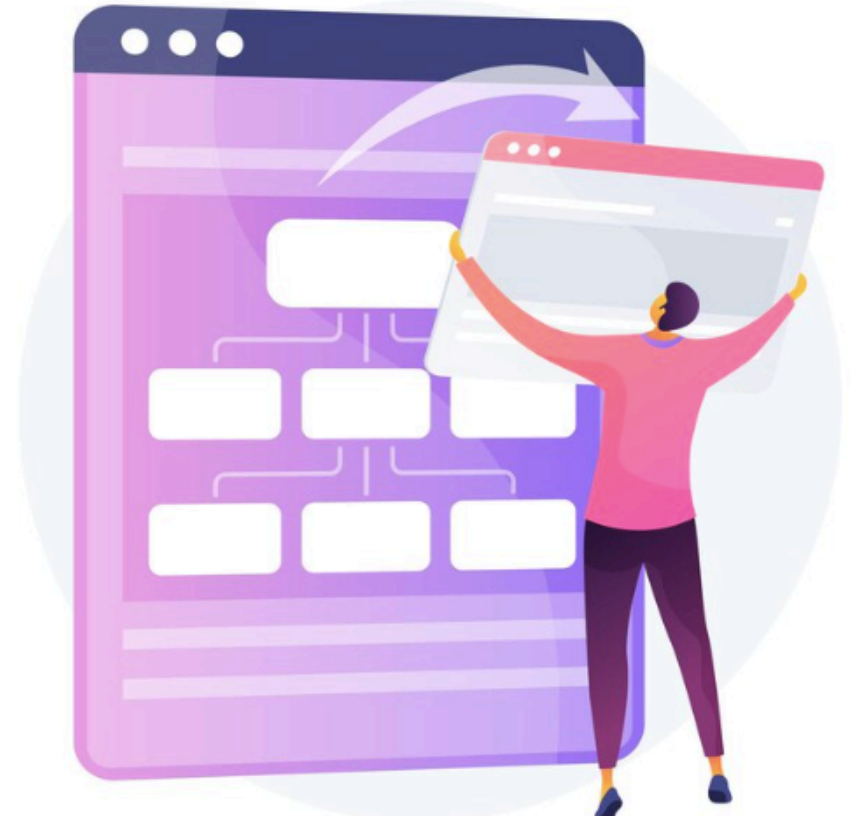
1 Tell them what you are going to tell them.

2 Tell them.

3 Tell them what you have told them.

You need to think about how to build your presentation by dividing the material into sections, each one dealing with one important point. Structure your ideas so that you move seamlessly from one

point to another. The structure of your presentation will depend on the topic that you are dealing with, but in general there should include:



- ▶ An introduction, outlining the aim of your presentation and the areas your talk will focus on
- ▶ The main body, containing the substance of your talk and developing the ideas outlined in the introduction

- ▶ A conclusion, drawing together the main points and containing the 'take home message' for the audience

1 Introduction:

- A strong introduction is crucial for a successful presentation.
- Introduce yourself and the topic while considering your audience's needs.
- Begin with something attention-grabbing, like a question, puzzle, picture, or story.
- Avoid offensive or overly familiar jokes.
- Outline the main points of your presentation to set expectations.

2 Main Presentation:

- Tailor the content and approach to the context, audience, and goals of the presentation.
- Choose between a broad overview or detailed focus.
- Limit main points to three or four for shorter presentations, or up to seven for longer ones.
- Use a mix of speech, text, images, and handouts strategically.
- Support key ideas with relevant examples and engaging content.

3 Conclusion:

- End your presentation with energy and clarity, avoiding rushed endings.
- Summarize key points and reinforce them visually if possible.

- Leave the audience with a memorable takeaway or invitation for discussion.
- Thank the audience and invite questions or further dialogue.

VII. Deciding on the Content

1 Decide your topic and position

To clarify your thinking and provide a focus, sum these up in one sentence. If you can't, pause and think this through, to avoid a confusing presentation.

2 Research the topic well

Know more about the topic than you can present – you will feel more confident about handling the talk and answering questions on the day.

3 Relevance

Make sure all material fits the brief, your course, the audience, your title and argument.

4 Select carefully

Choose material that lends itself well to the format of a presentation, such as key data, core points, images, short video clips.

5 Less is more

Whittle material down. If you researched well, you will have more material than you need. Remember that, typically, it takes longer to say *it* than to *read* it, and also that you should speak more slowly to an audience, so they can absorb what they hear.

VIII. Common Forms of Presentations

1 Slide presentations

If using PowerPoint, Prezi, or similar software:

- 1 Aim at a few lines of text per slide (1–7 lines).
- 2 Keep font sizes, images and data large and easy to read even from the back of the room.
- 3 Use relevant images to add interest.
- 4 Introduce new slides from the same direction.
- 5 Keep video clips short (1–2 minutes).
- 6 Time yourself speaking to each slide – the number doesn't matter as much as how long you spend on each. Don't include material you can't really use.
- 7 Avoid animations and effects unless essential.
- 8 Avoid waving laser beams at the screen.

Tips for PowerPoint presentations

- ▶ Avoid clutter slides at all costs
- ▶ Select a clear font such as Arial or Helvetica.
- ▶ Use bold rather than underline and avoid italics;
- ▶ A dark background (deep blue or black) and light coloured text (white or yellow) for contrast will make your words stand out (Use of colour that detracts from the main content of the slide, or that makes reading the text difficult.)

- ▶ Use a font size of 20 or over: use a 36 point for titles and a 28 point for body text
- ▶ Spelling and /or grammar mistakes
- ▶ Use pictures and icons and beware of the special effects, e.g. spinning words or sound effects
- ▶ Keep the presentation consistent, e.g. background and style. Do not suddenly switch fonts half way through. You may not notice but your audience will



- ▶ Less than 30 words per slide, 5–6 words for headings a maximum of five bullet points per slide

- ▶ Keep the number of slides down to one per minute or even one per 40 seconds

2 Handout material

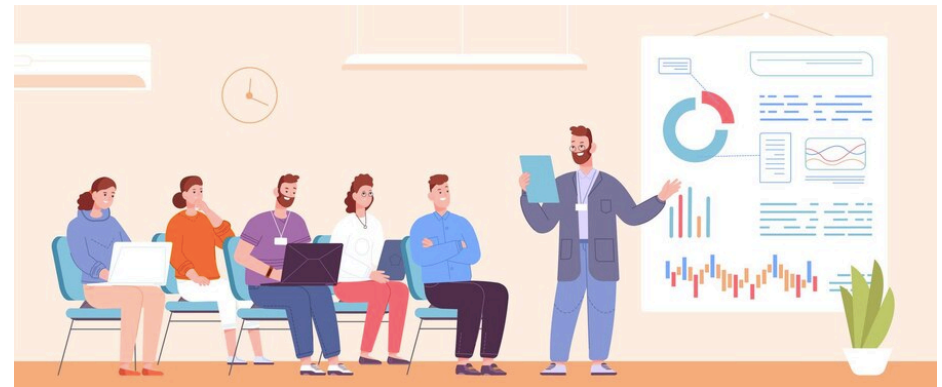
Sometimes you will be expected to produce a handout of some kind. Handouts can be taken away as a reminder of what you said. Handouts can have details that might clutter up your presentations. Handouts distributed at the end can be a good way of concluding, but you need to tell people at the beginning that you are going to do this, otherwise they can feel annoyed if they have taken careful notes which the handout makes superfluous. You need to consider the style and content of handout material, as well as the purpose. Some options are:

- ▶ Main points/headings.
- ▶ Notes generated by the presentation software that you have used. Possibly an edited version of a long presentation would be a good idea.
- ▶ Headings/main points, with space to write notes.
- ▶ Diagrams.
- ▶ Charts.
- ▶ Statistics.
- ▶ References. Avoid giving handouts while you speak. The distribution of handouts while you are talking distracts people, and you will lose

your audience. It does not matter how often you say of a handout 'don't read this now' – the temptation to look at it immediately seems universally irresistible.

3 Poster presentations

- 1 Make posters large, visually appealing and informative: use images, colour and a strong structure.
- 2 Don't neglect academic content.
- 3 Use 4–10 blocks of text beneath numbered headings.



- 4 Use a simple, clear structure so that it is obvious which order to read the information.
- 5 Ensure the title and headings stand out.
- 6 Avoid overloading the poster – leave spaces.
- 8 Aim for a professional finish. Use PowerPoint or a suitable software, unless an informal look is required.

IX. Group Presentations

Group presentations should be well coordinated with everyone contributing. Practise it all (including entering and leaving) until all runs smoothly and you look like a great team.



1 Play to individual strengths

Use practice to identify who is best for each section of the talk. Some are better at introducing a talk with the right tone for the audience, others are better at talking through data or answering questions.

2 Allocate tasks

Decide exactly who is presenting which points, for how long, and in which order.

3 Trouble shoot

Plan what you will do if someone forgets key information or runs over their time. Other people might need to adapt their talk subtly to cope with this. Practise covering potential problems and tricky questions so they are manageable if they occur on the day.

4 Listen carefully during practice runs

know what everyone else will cover. It will help if you have to cover team absences later, and avoids repetition. It reflects poorly on the group if members don't seem to know what each other will say or can't cover for each other.

5 Practise transitions from one person to the next. Agree on your *cues*.

6 Practise opening and closing the talk

These contribute to the impression you make.

X. Useful Resources

1 Stories

Tell a story that illustrates a key theme in your presentation. Keep it brief and interesting and make it clear why it is relevant to the key question or goal of your presentation.

2 Pictures

Trying to explain something can find you rushing round in circles and overloading your presentation with detail that might be a lot easier to present with a simple picture. Design or select pictures that will shed most light on the things you need your audience to have a grasp of.

3 Puzzles

Invoke your audience's natural sense of curiosity by asking: Why is it that . . . ? Or how come . . . ? Or how does it work? Or what is it for? Or what does that mean? By presenting a puzzling question to your audience, you set up the psychological conditions that induce curiosity and motivation – and such conditions provide just the right climate for an energized and interesting performance.

4 Examples

If you have abstract ideas or concepts to present, make sure you also offer good examples and illustrations which demonstrate what you mean. So if you speak in theoretical terms ('Motivation is really important for EFL learners') – follow up by giving a concrete example of what you mean.

5 Role plays

Acting out a scenario in order to explain or present important principles of your presentation can be a really great way of engaging your audience. But be careful – a badly rehearsed or half hearted role play can just cause your audience to cringe. A good one though can be a slick and entertaining demonstration of an issue you want them to understand.

XI. Pre-Presentation Skills

1 Practise! Practise! Practise!

- ▶ Practise your talk several times: note and amend anything that doesn't seem to flow well.
- ▶ Time yourself speaking at a reasonable, calm speed. If the talk is too long, edit it down until you are confident that you can deliver it comfortably in the time available.
- ▶ Don't assume things will sort themselves on the day. Make the process easier on yourself by taking control of the talk from start to finish. Reduce the chances of unwanted surprises.

2 Have a 'dress rehearsal'

Ask 2 or 3 friends from a different course to observe your presentation when it is ready to test out on a 'mock' audience. They don't need to be experts in the subject. Decide in advance which kinds of specific feedback from them would help you most. Ask for an honest opinion.

Run through the talk or presentation exactly as you intend to on the day.

3 'Mock audience' evaluation: Key questions

The following key questions can help you in gaining useful feedback from your mock audience. Alternatively, use some or all of the questions on the more detailed checklist provided for your own assessment of whether the talk is ready.

- 1 What worked best? What did they enjoy, find interesting or engaging? (Aim to retain those aspects.)
 - 2 Did the main message come across clearly? (Check that they can tell you what it was. If they can't, that is a priority to clarify for your next audience.)
 - 3 Did anything sound confused or hard to follow or understand? What would have helped them make more sense of what was being said?
 - 4 Was anything annoying or irritating for the audience?
 - 5 Was the material presented at about the right pace?
 - 6 What, if anything, could be better about the style of presenting (such as how you greeted the audience)? Did the talk fizzle away at the end or finish on a strong note?
 - 7 Could any slides or materials be improved?
- For group presentations*
- 8 Did the talk come across as well- coordinated?

9 Did it flow well when one person took over from another?

10 Did you all come across as an effective team?

XII. Managing Nerves

Nervousness is probably the biggest problem that most inexperienced speakers face. Actually, it's good to feel a bit nervous, as this provides the adrenalin rush we need to give a good performance. However, excessive nerves can have the opposite effect and no-one enjoys the physical or emotional symptoms of fear. So how can nerves be managed?

1 Practice, practice, practice *(again)*

Rehearse in front of the mirror, or with friends. Feeling prepared goes a long way to alleviating your nerves.

2 Name your fears

Write down exactly what it is you're afraid of, then you can devise strategies to cope.



3 What is the worst case scenario?

Thinking of the worst case scenario often puts things back in perspective.

4 Relaxation techniques

Regular deep breathing gives your body the oxygen it needs to burn off excess adrenalin, thus calming you down. A walk should have the same effect.

XIII. Managing Audience Questions

- ▶ Focus on engaging with the audience rather than just focusing on yourself as the speaker.
- ▶ Establish rapport by standing straight, making eye contact, and smiling.
- ▶ Encourage interaction by asking questions, giving activities, and checking for understanding.
- ▶ Be open to unexpected questions as opportunities for further discussion.
- ▶ Use humor judiciously to enhance engagement.
- ▶ Facilitate discussions by assigning group activities or discussion points.
- ▶ Handle questions effectively by providing time for Q&A sessions during or after the presentation.

- ▶ Check with the organizer about ground rules for questions and time limits.
- ▶ View questions as opportunities to clarify, expand on, or challenge the presentation content.



- ▶ Prepare for questions in advance and anticipate probable queries.
- ▶ Manage question sessions by setting limits and clarifying the scope of questions you'll address.

- ▶ Listen carefully to questions, write down key points if needed, and seek clarification if necessary.
- ▶ Respond tactfully to questions, acknowledging valid points and seeking suggestions for improvement.
- ▶ Stay calm and composed when faced with rude or hostile questions, avoiding retaliation and focusing on constructive responses.

Key Tip

Some advice from experts:

We choke under pressure because we are often 'too deliberate' about what we're doing rather than relaxing and relying on our automatic brains to pull out the stops.

Don't try too hard to monitor the quality of your performance while you are performing. It's counterproductive and distracting – just get on with it.



References

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