



English for Professional Communication

Oral presentation

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Making a good oral presentation is an art that involves attention to the needs of your audience, careful planning, and attention to delivery. This page explains some of the basics of effective oral presentation. It also covers use of notes, visual aids and computer presentation software.

[Self evaluation](#)

The audience

Some basic questions to ask about an audience are:

1. Who will I be speaking to?
2. What do they know about my topic already?
3. What will they want to know about my topic?
4. What do I want them to know by the end of my talk?

By basing the content and style of your presentation on your answers to these questions, you can make sure that you are in tune with your audience. What you want to say about your topic may be much less important than what your audience wants to hear about it.

Planning your presentation

In an effective presentation, the content and structure are adjusted to the medium of speech. When listening, we cannot go back over a difficult point to understand it or easily absorb long arguments. A presentation can easily be ruined if the content is too difficult for the audience to follow or if the structure is too complicated.

As a general rule, expect to cover much less content than you would in a written report. Make difficult points easier to understand by preparing the listener for them, using plenty of examples and going back over them later. Leave time for questions within the presentation.

[Features of oral presentations](#)

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Give your presentation a simple and logical structure. Include an introduction in which you outline the points you intend to cover and a conclusion in which you go over the main points of your talk.

Tips on content and structure

Delivering your presentation

People vary in their ability to speak confidently in public, but everyone gets nervous and everyone can learn how to improve their presentation skills by applying a few simple techniques.

The main points to pay attention to in delivery are the quality of your voice, your rapport with the audience, use of notes and use of visual aids.

Voice quality involves attention to volume, speed and fluency, clarity and pronunciation. The quality of your voice in a presentation will improve dramatically if you are able to practise beforehand in a room similar to the one you will be presenting in.

Rapport with the audience involves attention to eye contact, sensitivity to how the audience is responding to your talk and what you look like from the point of view of the audience. These can be improved by practising in front of one or two friends or video-taping your rehearsal.

Tips on delivery

Effective use of notes

Good speakers vary a great deal in their use of notes. Some do not use notes at all and some write out their talk in great detail. If you are not an experienced speaker it is not a good idea to speak without notes because you will soon lose your thread. You should also avoid reading a prepared text aloud or memorising your speech as this will be boring.

The best solution may be to use notes with headings and points to be covered. You may also want to write down key sentences. Notes can be on paper or cards. Some speakers use **overhead transparencies** as notes. The trick in using notes is to avoid shifting your attention from the audience for too long. Your notes should always be written large enough for you to see without moving your head too much.

Tips on notes



Visual aids

Visual aids help to make a presentation more lively. They can also help the audience to follow your presentation and help you to present information that would be difficult to follow through speech alone.

The two most common forms of visual aid are overhead transparencies (OHTs) and computer slide shows (e.g. PowerPoint). Objects that can be displayed or passed round the audience can also be very effective and often help to relax the audience. Some speakers give printed handouts to the audience to follow as they speak. Others prefer to give their handouts at the end of the talk, because they can distract the audience from the presentation.

Tips on OHTs

This module is adapted from materials written by English Centre Staff for the Business Communication (BBA) course and Lillian Wong's Presentation Skills summer course.

The EPC web has been created by the **ITIP team** at the **English Centre, The University of Hong Kong**. Please **email** comments or questions to the ITIP team.