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How to Ace Your Oral Presentations

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Oral presentations have become a major aspect of on-going assessments in many universities as part of the subject assessment in the curriculum. A course may have three to four assessments comprising individual tests, pair work and group work. Of these, oral presentation is seen as a mode to assess students' understanding of the subject matter. Many students fear oral presentations, as having to speak in front of the class, addressing their peers within the stipulated time gives them the jitters. This is further compounded by a lack of confidence in speaking the target language, especially English (Rahmat et al., 2022). A survey of my own class students indicates that they are not comfortable with oral presentations, especially if it is done in English. Some reasons quoted are lack of confidence, shyness to speak in front of peers as well as being scared they will forget the contents. In my experience assessing students, I notice many students have started to rely on their handphones to present. They read from the slides on their handphones! Is this because they lack confidence or have not practised for their presentation earlier? This could also perhaps be because it is last-minute work, and having no time to practice, they read from their PowerPoint slides in their handphones or the LCD projector. Some students prepare beautiful and colourful slides, only to read from it. Students fail to understand that this is a presentation and not a reading exercise, although they have been reminded of these umpteen times by their lecturers. The poor performance in oral presentations needs to be addressed as it seems that students just want to finish and get over their presentations as soon as possible and move on to other areas of their assignments and assessments.



So as lecturers, we need to guide and teach our students to become good presenters, to know the importance of delivering good presentations and not turn the oral presentation into a reading exercise.

What makes a good presentation? Here are a few tips.

1. Know your subject matter/topic

Choose a topic that you like or are familiar with. You must be comfortable speaking about your topic as you are going to deliver it. Know the contents of your topic and do some background research on it. This will give you the confidence of knowing your subject matter well, and even if you miss a line, you can still go on with your presentation because it is an area you know about. Choose a topic which not only interests you but also your audience. Something current will also be an advantage.

2. Engage with your audience

Now that you have your topic or the area you want to speak on, you need to think about your audience. What area of your topic will interest them? You need to adapt your presentation to suit your audience's needs. Most importantly, remember that your presentation needs to appeal to your audience emotionally. Highlighting, emphasising, or even colour-coding your points will help to increase this emotional appeal.

3. Do an outline of your presentation

Once you have done your research on the points you want to include in your presentation, you can outline your presentation. You can list your points in an outline, and while doing this, remember to highlight the points you wish to emphasise. Do not include too many facts as it may bore the audience. Remember you also have a time limit for your presentation. So having an outline will not only keep you on track to deliver your presentation within the time limit, but it will also be good as a mental memory of what comes out of your mouth when you speak.



4. Include visual aids

It is a good idea to include some forms of visual aids in your presentation. This will capture the audience's attention. Remember, having too much text on your slides will bore your audience. They want to hear you speak, not hear you read through your slides and have their eyes feast on too much text on your slides. Have your audience focus on listening to you speak and not read too much on your slides. A good tip is to use bullets to emphasise your points. This way you will be able to emphasise your main points while avoiding the need to have too much text on your slides. Including images and pictures will be an added advantage.

5. Practice, Practice and Practice

As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. Rehearsing your presentation a few times before the actual day will boost your confidence in presenting.

6. Use non-verbal gestures

Besides your slides or visual aids, remember that your body is the most powerful tool in your presentation. You need to make full use of it- your voice, tone, eye contact, body movements, smile etc. Engage with your audience to create a powerful and impactful presentation. Modulate your voice to emphasise key details, and use your eyes to connect physically with your audience. However, remember to do this in moderation as having too much body movement can become a distraction and may make your presentation look bad. We want the audience to focus on your presentation, not your body language.

7. Pace your presentation

During your presentation, try to engage with your audience by walking around the room. A little pacing up and down is good as you do not want to be a talking statue. Instead, feel free to engage with your audience. Also, do not rush through your presentation. Even if you are nervous, do not rush as it will only do more harm and will be noticeable. Take small breaks instead like a sip of water or longer pauses. Nobody is perfect. Mistakes are bound to happen. Even if you make mistakes, it is okay, just carry on. This will only show you are in control of your presentation and your audience will get to feel this.

So, with these tips in mind, have a great presentation

Reference

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