

What We Learn from Each Other About a Successful Oral Presentation

Clear, projected articulation

Speak clearly; pronounce words correctly; don't drop the ends of your sentences; avoid mumbling or mushing words together.

Well-versed on topic; plenty to say

If you have more to say than time allows, you won't have to pause to remember or try to ad lib. When you have plenty to say, you will be more relaxed and we will find you more credible.

Relevant

Find a way to make the information relevant to us. Plan ahead for what you would like your outcome to be: do you want us to want to know more? To question our own intuitions? To approach another perspective? Draw us in through your "so what" – what drew YOU in?

Humor = comfortable & natural

It's not necessary to be funny – not everyone is – but humor is an example of something that shows your audience that you are relaxed and comfortable talking about your topic. Just let whatever happens happen (after rehearsing, of course), and don't force it!

Rehearsed, but not memorized

We appreciated the speakers who really practiced. They knew which points to emphasize, and which ones needed further explanation. Memorized presentations were boring... they were typically monotone and delivered without passion. Practice your presentation, adjust & modify, practice some more, and then you will be ready to "just talk" to us.

Eye contact

Look at everyone! That will make us feel as though you want all of us to listen.

Speak from experience: tell us what led you to the choice of topic

While it is important to stay away from personal stories (especially as evidence), we would like to know what led you to your topic. Bring us in by tying your "aha" to the presentation.

Hook or grabber, sometimes

You don't always need one, so don't force it.

Gimmick, when appropriate

This comment was initially "candy!" – but the truth is, it only works sometimes. That noted, it can be quite interesting if your creativity leads you to something that really works with your choice of presentation.

Interactive

Again, we like to be drawn into your presentation. In this case, ENGAGING us is as good as being interactive.

"Voice"

Another reason we don't like the canned, memorized presentation... we want to hear an authentic YOU.

Lack of fillers

Um, yeah, you know... it's like, uh, distracting when you, like, fill the, you know, gaps, with, um, these fillers. So DON'T. Your presentation is better without them.

Passion

YOU chose your topic because it interested you. If you are interested, then you will be more interesting to us. Show your passion!

Gesticulation

Appropriate hand gestures help – random ones detract. Pantomiming almost never works, though.

Good posture

You are credible when you stand UP for what you want to say.

Know your topic, and know your audience

Use precise language, honor what your audience already knows and teach them what you want them to know. Deliver a purposeful presentation by being specific and keeping your goal in mind. You want to be convincing and make your audience think.

Appropriate register

Practice helps.

Be "in the moment" – not with your past (rehearsal time)

Remember the analogy of approaching your parents with a request they are likely to reject: when you plan to make your case in advocacy of your desired privilege, you won't have notecards! "I want to stay out all night, and here's why you should let me..." Your ability to think on your feet, speak with conviction, and state your well-planned arguments is the same ability that will keep you "in the moment" when you present your topic to the class.

Make the most of the open structure, but plan for some type of organization

With choice comes responsibility. Plan an easy-to-follow organization, and choose the structure that will be most effective. Additionally, play to your own personal strengths. Allow yourself to stretch the boundaries of the commonplace.