

Guidelines on Oral Presentation

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1. Introduction

Communication skills are extremely important for engineers and designers. If you cannot present effectively and make the case, no matter how good your design ideas may be, people cannot understand it and you are not going to see your ideas reach fruition. It should be noted that presenting information through verbal means is different from describing information in written form. Some guidelines are provided here to enable you to develop or improve your skills in oral presentation.

Generally speaking, oral presentations are brief discussions of a focused topic delivered to a group of listeners in order to impart knowledge or to stimulate discussion. They are similar to short papers with an introduction, main body and conclusion. The ability to give brief, concise presentations is a learned skill and one that is called on frequently in the workplace or academic institutes.

2. Basic Strategy

Preparation. It is the key to giving an effective presentation and to controlling your nervousness. Know your topic well and try to boost your self-confidence.

Organisation. Your presentation should be well-organised. Know what you are going to say, when you are going to say it, and how you are going to say it.



Clarity. Your ability to use English to express ideas orally will affect the audience's perception. This does not mean that you will be counted every error that you make. The audience will focus on the message you are trying to express and noting any major problems that are disruptive. You should focus on explaining your ideas as clearly as possible without getting worried about trying to say everything perfectly.

Style. In order to be a good speaker there are a few simple rules which you should follow.

- Speak loudly.
- Look at your audience; make eye contact.
- Use visual aids effectively (powerpoint slides, blackboard, drawings, models, handouts).
- Put yourself in the position of the audiences (can they hear you or see clearly your slides?).
- Begin by telling your audience what your topic is and what you will be covering.
- Avoid the tendency to read word by word from slides or note cards.
- Respond to questions politely, good-humoredly, and briefly.
- Show some enthusiasm.
- Adhere to your time limit.

Relax. Try not to be nervous or intimidated by your audience. Give the appearance of calm confidence, and focus all your energy and concentration on the message in your presentation.

Learn by observation. Take the opportunity to learn from the mistakes that others make, and borrow (steal) techniques that you find effective. Attending the oral presentations of other students or persons and observing their presentation are useful to improve your own skills.

3. Effective PowerPoint Presentation

The design of your presentation is key to making an effective impression on your audience. The way to do this is to make sure your slides are well organized and visually interesting. Table 1 describes the important considerations for creating an effective PowerPoint presentation.



Table 1. Creating an Effective PowerPoint Presentation

(Source: Virginia Montecino, George Mason University, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/powerpoint.html>)

<p>Hints for a successful presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan carefully• Do your research• Know your audience• Time your presentation• Practice your presentation• Speak comfortably and clearly <p>Effective PowerPoint slides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use design templates• Standardize position, colors and styles• Include only necessary information• Limit the information to essentials• Content should be self-evident• Use colors that contrast• Be consistent with effects, transitions and animation• Too many slides can lose your audience	<p>Text guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally no more than 6 words a line• Generally no more than 6 lines a slide• Avoid long sentences• Larger font indicates more important information• Font size generally ranges from 18 to 48 point• Be sure text contrasts with background• Fancy fonts can be hard to read• Words in all capital letters are hard to read• Avoid abbreviations and acronyms• Limit punctuation marks <p>Clip art and graphics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should balance the slide• Should enhance and complement the text, not overwhelm• No more than two graphics per slide
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To deliver an effective presentation, the following practical hints will be helpful.

DOs

- Remember your overall purpose or main point.
- Introduce your topic and make it interesting to your audience.
- Include a title slide, an overview slide, a conclusion slide, and a slide for questions.
- Make sure each slide has a title header. Drawings and diagrams shall be clear.



DON'Ts

- Don't cram your slides full of information.
- Don't make your type so small that it cannot be read in the back of the room.
- Don't put your name and section on every slide.

References

- Guidelines for Oral Presentations (Ohio Wesleyan University) <http://go.owu.edu/~dapeople/ggpresnt.html>
- Oral Presentation Skills: A Practical Guide http://people.engr.ncsu.edu/txie/publications/oral_presentation_skills.pdf
- Powerpoint: Presentation Tips <http://www.bates.edu/ils/2011/how-do-i/software/powerpoint-presentation-tips/>