

Improving Oral Presentations

1. Know your material--don't read it. Take the attitude that you are bringing something to the audience that is beneficial and helpful to them and that you know more about your material than anyone in the audience.
2. Project your voice like an actor on center stage. Pick a person or persons three quarters of the way back in the audience, on both right and left side of the audience and project your voice or talk to those persons. By doing this, the persons at the back of the room will also be able to hear.
3. Vary the speed of delivery and inflection of your voice during the presentation. This technique is especially effective to highlight or accent points made during delivery.
4. Related to the above, use gestures and facial expression for emphasis, but don't use them so much that they distract from the presentation. Use these cues to make points, that is make them contingent upon what you are saying.
5. Use audio-visual aids for difficult to understand materials, such as your design, your results, or theoretical mediating processes. When using audio-visual aids, be sure to speak to the audience, not to your audio-visual aid. That is, in presenting a slide or writing on the blackboard, don't talk to the blackboard or the slide, but face the audience. Know your slides or your slides or your audio-visual materials before you see them during the presentation.
6. Be enthused about your work and about the presentation. Have fun!
7. Place the research in the context of a larger significant question. Address that question both at the beginning and at the end of your presentation.
8. Maintain eye contact with the audience. Don't dwell on a single person in the audience, but instead look at (or seemingly look at) a variety of people within the audience. It is usually best to select persons at least half-way to three-quarters of the way back (see point 2 above).
9. Be receptive to audience reactions, questions, and commentaries. Present the material in a way that is involving and beneficial for the audience rather than to yourself; thus, be prepared to alter slightly your presentation so that it best fits the audience. This can best be discerned by noting audience reactions to what you are saying.
10. Related to the above, use the "right now" line to make the work personally relevant to the audience. Your presentation should highlight the significance of your research for current questions and matters that are of interest now to the audience.
11. Use concrete examples and stories to make or elaborate upon your points. A single compelling anecdote is as convincing as a full table of base-rate information.
12. Nervousness before presentation is normal; when it's not there, worry. Nervousness usually subsides a minute or so after you begin speaking if you are prepared.

13. Utilize strategic pauses of silence. For instance, you can scan notes during these pauses. To use these effectively, however, you must know your text well.
14. Time your presentation so that you know beforehand how much time the total presentation will take and how much time should have passed for each portion of your presentation; this enables you to know whether you should speed up or slow down your delivery and whether you should delete or elaborate upon portions of your presentation.