

Preparing An Effective Oral Presentation at UGS

NOTE: UGS oral presentations should be about **12 minutes long** (not including questions). There will also be a **three-minute Q&A** portion, which will take place immediately after you finish. Managing your time is a key part of a successful presentation, so practice to be sure your talk falls within the 12-minute window.

Although many people can be a bit intimidated by the idea of speaking to an audience about their work, most of the concerns that arise can be easily overcome. Probably the biggest mistake made most commonly made is trying to cover too much in your talk. Twelve minutes is not a lot of time in which to explain your work to your audience, especially to one who may not be familiar with your topic. So in the end your presentation may not be your entire research or creative project but only a part of it, but that is perfectly acceptable. Identify the three or four points you'd like to make, and you are on your way.

The Opening: In preparing your presentation, consider opening with some sort of attention getter, such as a quote, an unusual fact or even a question. This will draw your audience in immediately. You can then introduce your topic and give a short outline about those points you have identified for discussion. Be clear about what you want to convey; think about the explicit take-away points you want your audience to leave with after your presentation.

The Body: As you move into the main part of your talk developing these points, try to be clear about explanations and be sure to provide evidence to support your points. The organization of the body will vary greatly by discipline, and it is difficult to give a set of rules that works for all, but this is where your mentor can give you valuable guidance. Even think about attending the Graduate Symposium on campus on Tuesday, April 3, to see many fine examples you might emulate.

However regardless of the topic of the presentation, the following suggestions may be helpful.

- Since your audience cannot go back and relisten to parts they might not have caught (remember even the most attentive audience members will be distracted at times by noises in the hallway or even their own hunger pangs), you have to continuously guide them through your presentation. If you say there are three theories concerning a certain phenomenon, then it is helpful to explicitly say “the first theory is...” and then “the next theory is...”.
- As you transition to a new part of the talk, be sure to signal this to your audience. For example, as begin to provide support for your points, again be overt about it; for example, say “There are a number of other works that have used this literary metaphor...”. Since you will have already given an overview of your presentation at the beginning of the talk, these transition prompts will let your audience know exactly where you are at any given point.
- Remember to always keep in mind that your audience members are not specialists in your field, so at times it may be helpful to restate points in simpler language rather than using impressive jargon (“So in short this complex reaction is a new way to be able to produce cleaner fuels.”).

The Conclusion: Upon approaching the conclusion of your talk, signal the move; even overtly say, “In conclusion, ...”. Provide a summary of the main points you have made, and perhaps discuss future work that might be done on your topic. Close with “thank you” and ask for questions. If you do have questions, answer them as concisely as you can, again using approachable language. If you don't know

the answer, say so, and do not be embarrassed; one of the major reasons to present at a conference is to elicit suggestions that can make your project even stronger.

Visual Aids: Most presenters will have a Powerpoint, Evernote, Prezi, or other kind of visual aid to accompany the talk. Even if your work is highly abstract, it still is helpful for your audience to have an opening slide listing the title of your presentation, your name, your department and perhaps some sort of image associated with the topic. A slide of the major points you will be making also is helpful since it will provide a roadmap of your talk. You probably will also want to close with an Acknowledgments slide where you thank those who have been supportive of your work and note any sources of funding.

In preparing your visual accompaniment, guidelines abound about effective presentations and likely you have heard about most of them. In fact, you probably have seen most of them violated as well.

However, here are some basic tips to keep in mind:

- Try to limit the amount of wording on the slide to five lines with at most ten words per line. Remember, slides are free; so if necessary, make new ones rather than cramming too many words on a single slide.
- Make sure your font size is sufficiently large to be read at the back of the room (likely at least 24 pt). Don't use crazy fonts but rather stick with Arial, Helvetica, Garamond, and other easy to read types.
- Don't include lots of animations, like text spiraling into place or sparkles appearing at the end of each slide. They generally only distract the audience in presentations.
- Use visuals (photos, diagrams) whenever possible since they often convey complex information more effectively than do words, but so make sure the visuals aren't overly complex to read or understand.

The Actual Presentation: Once the presentation is prepared, run it by your mentor for suggestions, and then practice! You want to be sufficiently familiar with your talk to have it nearly memorized, but not so that it sounds robotic or scripted. And never, ever read from your visual slides unless it might be a quote you are discussing; this is an obvious presentation faux pas that happens far more than you might anticipate. As you deliver your talk, be sure to move around a little and not be tied to the lectern. If possible, give your talk before some sort of audience, such as your friends or even your grandma. Ask them if they could easily follow your points or if they lost the flow at certain spots. Also ask them to note if you are talking too fast or using distracting gestures. Try to enjoy the experience; you have something special to say! And UGS 2017 offers a non-threatening, supportive setting for a professional academic presentation.

If you'd like even more information about oral presentations, you may wish to visit these links:

- [NC Central Oral Speaking PDF](#) (very comprehensive source)
- [Carleton College](#) (gives list of other resources to consult)