

Oral Presentations and visual aids (Posters, PPT, Prezis)

While you will usually submit a written version of your work, you may also be expected to present it to your class orally or online. This can be a great opportunity to learn presentation technologies such as posters, PowerPoint or “prezi”. You can make visual aids to support your spoken delivery, ranging from basic points to more complex multimedia creations incorporating film clips, pictures, graphics and animations. Most of these technologies offer free templates, or starter versions, along with online tutorials in how to use them. The websites below are only a few of those you can find via a web search (the ones we found most helpful at a basic level).

Posters: These can be made on PowerPoint or Microsoft Word. They’re not difficult to design, but before you decide to make one, check how you will get it printed, as that can be expensive if you have to pay a printer.

- Making an academic research poster using Power Point by Jerry Overmyer, University of North Colorado at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqgigwIXadA&feature=related>
- PosterPresentations.com: Free Research Poster PowerPoint Templates at http://www.posterpresentations.com/html/free_poster_templates.html
- MakeSigns.com: Scientific Poster PowerPoint Templates at http://www.makesigns.com/SciPosters_Templates.aspx
- Posters4Research: Free Templates at <http://posters4research.com/templates.php>

Oral Presentations

Structuring the presentation: An oral presentation is structured and each section has a specific purpose and organisation.

Introduction: aims to catch the audience’s attention and introduce the topic.

- Open in a way that **stimulates interest**. Tell a short story (anecdote), present an interesting fact, statistic or image related to your topic.
- Provide some **background or context** for the topic. In other words, indicate to the audience why your topic is important and/or describe the problem you are working on. Don’t assume that the audience is already familiar with your topic or project.
- Give a clear statement of the **main point** of your presentation.
- Provide a **plan** of your presentation by outlining the main points to follow.

Discussion/ Findings (body of the presentation): aims to inform your audience.

- Present **only a few main points**. It is better to discuss each point in depth.
- Use connectives to **link your ideas**, such as Firstly, Secondly, In addition, Finally, However. This provides cohesion and logic for the audience.
- In concluding, thank the audience and invite questions if appropriate.

Visual Aids

The internet has many sites where you can download templates and instructions for visual aids. Some good ones are:

PowerPoint:

Specific advice on using PowerPoint (and other presentation aids is available at La Trobe University's Achieve@Uni 'Presentations' section: <http://latrobe.libguides.com/presentations/presentation-aids> .

There is a very useful page on "Oral Communication" at Brunel University's site Learn Higher: Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/designing-visual-aids.shtml> . From here, follow the links to

- "Getting Started with PowerPoint", by Kate Ippolito & Ravinder Chohan from the LearnHigher CETL at Brunel University: <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/getting%20started%20with%20powerpoint.pdf>
- "Example of a power point presentation": <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/UsingPowerPoint.ppt>
- and "Rehearsing your presentation": <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/rehearsing-your-presentation.shtml>

Also, The Learning Centre at the University of New South Wales has a page on "Academic Skills Resources: Using PowerPoint in oral presentations", <http://www.students.unsw.edu.au/using-powerpoint.html>

Prezis: A "prezi" is a screen on which you can put text, photos, film clips, diagrams, etc, together in whatever arrangement you like and create a "path" between them. Have a look at:

- Prezi Academy Lesson 1: Step-by-Step Tutorial on Prezi Basics by Angelie Agarwal at <http://prezi.com/learn/getting-started>
- Prezi: Choose a license to start using Prezi at <http://prezi.com/profile/signup>

Finally, Monash University's site, Language and Learning Online, has a very comprehensive resource, which is full of suggestions about language you might want to use: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/speaking/index.xml>

Using PowerPoint Effectively

Keep it Simple. If using a template, choose a simple one with easy to read fonts. Avoid special effects and animations unless they are related to a point you are making. Do not overuse colour.

Avoid overcrowding slides. Use bullet points if appropriate (but do not assume all text should be bulleted). Never use full sentences (except for – rare – quotations); use key words only. It is better to use more slides with fewer points on each than to overcrowd slides.

Make it readable. If the audience cannot read what is on your slides, there is no point in including it. Font size should be at least 20. Avoid capital letters. Diagrams can be a very effective way to convey information, but make sure they are easily readable. Make sure you guide the audience through your diagram by pointing to the relevant parts as you speak.

Choice of colour is a very important factor influencing readability. The Colour Visibility Chart shows a few different coloured fonts on different background colours. White on blue isn't bad, but red on orange is horrendous! Whatever you choose, go for clarity.

| Colour Visibility Chart | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| black on white | white on black |
| blue on white | white on blue |
| red on orange | orange on red |
| red on green | green on red |

Avoid reading the presentation as there is an automatic drop in both audience attention and marks. However, it is unwise to attempt to memorise the whole speech. [For some very nervous people, a script may be useful to fall back on, but if you use one, make sure that you write in conversational "spoken" language, not formal "written" language. For example, use contractions (*didn't* instead of *did not*); build in some repetition so listeners don't have to hold too much in memory.]

Some useful hints:

1. **Use power point slides as cues:** Summarise each main supporting point. Use headings and sub-headings, a numbering/lettering system and key words. Try using the 'presenter view' function on PowerPoint. This enables you to see which slides are coming up next, while the audience only sees the slide you are presenting.
2. **Practise, practise, practise!** Practise the complete presentation **aloud and many times**. Practise in front of an audience such as family, friends, videotape or **a mirror!** **Time** the speech and **stick to given limits**.
3. Have a **backup plan** in case the technology fails! You could put your main points or examples on a handout (so try to learn how many are likely to attend).

Use visual aids to add interest, to help simplify the message and to increase audience understanding. Visual aids need to be large, clear, simple and relevant. Make any handouts available before the

speech begins. Refer directly to the visual aid in the speech. Know how to use the technology and ensure that equipment works before the presentation begins.

Know what's coming up next. Be sure to know which slide is coming up next so that you can introduce it and link it to the previous slide *before* you hit the page down button.

Voice signals are vital. Speak more slowly, pronounce words more clearly than normal, raise your voice and project towards the back wall.

Body signals are also important. Always face the audience (never board or screen unless you need to point to something on a diagram) and stand straight with chin up to direct your voice to the listeners. Keep hands open and avoid nervous gestures. Eye contact is essential. Be sure to scan across the audience rather than focusing on one or two individuals.

Remember, it's normal to be nervous! Thorough preparation and practise decrease anxiety. Organise equipment and visual aids early and ensure power point slides are simple and clear. It may help to bring detailed notes to get you started and as a 'safety net' throughout the presentation. Breathe deeply.

If you're intimidated by the idea of an audience, you can get them on your side from the beginning by asking them for help! Just say you hope they will help you to think about a (specified) problem in your project, or steer you toward more reading on some particular aspect. At the end of your talk, repeat the request, and/or ask if they would share their own experiences with a problem of this kind.