

Presentation skills



Speaking as part of a group

In many subjects you may be required to make a group presentation, and this requires both organisational skills and taking shared responsibility.

There are advantages in speaking as part of a group rather than as an individual:

- Workload and the stress are shared
- You can use the range of abilities available
- Built in variety for the audience, both in visual and vocal delivery
- An opportunity to demonstrate your teamwork skills

Let us explore how to get the best out of group presentations.

New Team Checklist

You are part of a newly formed group preparing a presentation. Have you:

- Introduced yourselves so that you all know each other
- Exchanged email addresses and telephone numbers
- Found out group members previous experiences, including giving presentations
- Discussed possible topics if you have a choice, check strong likes/dislikes
- Chosen a coordinator
- Listen carefully to one another to gauge interests and abilities
- Ensured the workload is evenly spread across the group

Organisation & teamwork

Divide the work according to the group members' strengths to aid progression and individual responsibility. Most importantly you need to get the group together to agree the topic and the approach. This is not always easy as sometimes people have strong ideas about what they do or do not want to do. It is important that the discussion is fair, and that individuals are not bullied into a particular choice. Once the choice has been agreed by the group, it is important that everyone cooperates.

Use the individual different strengths to the group's advantage, for example, use a strong voice for beginning and ending the presentation. In a large group, you may have a natural leader who will encourage and help keep the group united and on track.

Group image

Remember part of your preparation is deciding on the image you wish to present. Is it an informal seminar or have you been advised to be as professional as possible in keeping with your professional sector, e.g. management, health, sciences, etc. The group needs to agree dress code and sitting/standing positions. Generally speaking, if you make an effort, it will make a good impression on the audience and make you feel more confident.

Another important point to remember is to keep the audience's attention on the speaker; so, it is helpful if the group members also appear to be listening to the speaker. Fidgeting by group members is another distraction for the audience; the group need to present a united front. Remember to smile and engage your audience.

The venue

If possible it is sensible to check the room where you are presenting to ensure a smooth presentation and address any issues with the location. Ask the following questions:

Venue checklist

- Is it the right size for the audience numbers?
- Where is the screen and fixed equipment points?
- Where can you place your equipment?
- Are there enough sockets or do you need an extension lead?
- Where is the speaker going to stand and the remainder of the group are going sit?
- Are there any audience obstacles, for example pillars?
- Where are the light switches? Can you dim them if needed?
- Are there blinds if you need them?
- Is there a clock to check the timings?

Rehearsing

Rehearsal checklist

- Has everyone turned up? If not, contact the missing members; you need the whole group to rehearse.
- Have you ordered the equipment for this and future rehearsals?
- Is this the venue for the presentation or a similar room?
- Is the room organised, as far as possible, as it will be on the day?
- Have you decided who will be responsible for the equipment?
- Are you confident about the order of the speakers?
- Are you all using the same form of notes?
- If you find that your presentation is too long for the time allocated, can you all agree about the cuts to be made?

Structuring the presentation

- **The introduction:** The beginning and the end of a presentation is when the audience attention is at its peak. A good introduction gives the audience time to settle down and introduces the speakers. It is a good idea to list the speakers in order of appearance, announce your subject, and explain the structure of your presentation.
- **The low point:** This generally happens about two-thirds of the way through the presentation, so you may wish to plan a change of speakers at this point or ask the audience a question. Be prepared with an answer if your audience looks anxious.
- **Humour:** This can be an effective tool but can also be very tricky, giving unintentional offence, falling flat, or just a distraction. Humour needs to be very well prepared.
- **The conclusion:** This when a high level of audience concentration can be achieved again. Give the audience the hint that this is the end and do not waste this opportunity. Present your key points again but in a slightly different way. Then finally, when you have finished, pause for a brief moment and then thank your audience for listening and invite questions.

Answering questions

Question time in a group presentation requires careful organisation.

Answering questions checklist

- What questions do you think they may ask?
- Have you encouraged the audience to ask questions by indicating you will be happy to answer questions later on a particular point?
- Who is going to be responsible for taking and allocating the questions?
- Will you remember to include all the presenters in this session?
- Are you going to stand up to answer questions, either as a group or individually?
- Will you remember to look like a team in the question session?

Top tips for group presentations

- Get to know one another and identify the skills available
- Divide the time according to the subject not the number of speakers
- Agree your subject and limit it strictly; it is easy to over run your time
- Structure your presentation, ensuring the beginning and end are strong
- Check the venue and plan how you will use it
- Rehearse together, and more than once
- Ensure all members of the group are introduced to the audience
- Listen attentively to each other; the audience will notice if you do not
- Organise the question time session, who will deal with what
- Treat your audience with respect
- Support each other all the time, both in the preparation and the presentation – this is very important

Adapted from: Van Emden, J. & Becker, L. (2010). *Presentation skills for students*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.