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PRESENTATIONS



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# Presentations

Here you'll find lots of good advice on presentations, including organising your ideas, choosing the right language, preparing a visual presentation, reducing anxiety, and more.

## **Presentations**

Giving a speech to show and explain content to an audience is an essential part of life and work. It's important to feel comfortable in front of groups of people – from tutorial class discussions to giving a presentation for assessment to addressing a meeting. A successful oral and/or audio-visual presentation combines both planning and practice, so get started using the links below.

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## **STUDY SMART WEBSITE**

Find this section on the Study Smart website here:

[https://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/assignment\\_help/presentations](https://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/assignment_help/presentations)

## FIRST STEPS

IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO START BY **ANALYSING YOUR TASK** (PDF, 177 KB), AS YOU WOULD FOR ANY OTHER ASSESSMENT.

Analyse the task and think about what you need to say (the content) and who you will say it to (the audience).

Next, brainstorm your content – write down everything that comes into your head about the topic. Remember, there's no right or wrong in brainstorming, so write down everything you can think of.

Now you have a basis from which to write an outline and organise your presentation. If you need to do any research or find out more information about the topic of your presentation, now is the time to do it. You might like to refer to other parts of the [Assignment help](#) section to help you here.

The University of Queensland also provides a helpful page on **Task Analysis**.

## ORGANISING YOUR PRESENTATION

Now that you know your audience and you know your content, you need to organise your presentation in the way that best conveys your main message(s) to your audience. You can structure your presentation a bit like you would an essay, with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, although remember that speaking requires different language patterns to writing – see written language vs spoken language for details.

The University of New South Wales provide additional information on **Planning and Structuring a Presentation**.



## Structuring your presentation

It is vital to structure your presentation in a logical way so that the audience can follow your argument. Just as any written assessment requires several drafts and editing, writing an oral presentation requires you to draft, redraft, and edit your work.

There are several ways to structure a talk but an easy and simple way is by dividing the presentation into the introduction, body, and conclusion, just as you would an essay.

### Introduction

In the introduction of the presentation you introduce the topic and preview what you will say.

It's important to give a preview so that the audience knows what to expect – otherwise they might be confused and lose the thread of your argument. Some people also like to start a speech with a joke or a quotation to get the audience thinking.



### Example introduction

topic of talk → My talk today is about the government's policies on mass unemployment — in particular about the Green and White Papers on unemployment and how effective these policies are. I'm going to begin by giving a brief summary of their main policy recommendations, and then I'm going to focus on just three of their recommendations and talk about each one in terms of how practical it is, and how effective it is likely to be in dealing with the problems of mass unemployment. At the end I'll make a few suggestions for other alternatives that the government did not think of.

outline of talk ↗ ↘

From Inglis (2007), p. 340.

### Body

- Present your main ideas in a logical sequence, following the outline you gave in the introduction.
- Speak slowly, and leave pauses between each main idea so that the audience has time to take it in.
- Use transitional language as you move between ideas, e.g. 'Now that I've explained the third policy recommendation, I'm going to discuss how practical and effective it is.'
- Refer back to our [Assignment Help](#) section for more information on structuring your ideas.
- Use [visual aids](#) (PDF, 124 kB) to support your ideas and keep the audience interested.

## Conclusion

Summarise what you've said and end with a strong closing statement or recommendation, just as you would in a written essay.

If required, invite the audience to ask questions or give comments – or you could even end by inviting the audience to answer a question of your own.

### Should you thank the audience for listening?

There are two schools of thought on this issue. One is that yes, it's always polite to thank your audience; the other is that the audience should in fact be thanking the speaker for presenting. So it's really up to you.

You might like to thank your audience at the beginning of your talk instead, and say something like 'Thank you for being here today'. However, if you're not sure how to end your talk, or how to show the audience that you've finished speaking, saying 'Thank you for your attention' sends a clear signal that your talk is over.

See for example this TED talk: [Arthur Benjamin, 'Teach statistics before calculus!'](#) (Online video, 2:58)

Adapted from Inglis, M. (2007). *Unistep. Academic skills guide*. (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia.

## WRITTEN VERSUS SPOKEN LANGUAGE

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION WE TALKED ABOUT WRITING YOUR PRESENTATION, BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT WRITING AND SPEAKING ARE TWO DIFFERENT LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES.

If you write your presentation in the language of a formal essay and read it aloud without changing anything, you'll sound overly formal and stiff. Not only that, but the audience will have trouble following what you're saying, because you designed your words to be read. You'll need to adjust the words you use and the length of your sentences so that you speak in a more natural manner and your audience can understand you.

Think of your presentation as you explaining something to a friend: would you use lengthy, subject-specific words, or would you choose more simple words that you know your friend can understand? Your audience is your friend, and your aim is to help them understand.

Furthermore, instead of reading out your full speech you should try to condense the main points into notecards that you use to prompt your memory. That way, your speech will seem spontaneous and interesting. If you spend the presentation with your eyes on your notes, your audience won't be able to hear you properly or see your face, two important components of effective presentations. Speaking from notes can be a difficult technique to master, so don't be discouraged if it takes time for you. As always, practice is key.

## MORE INFORMATION

- PDF on Useful language for oral presentations from University of South Australia study help website, available from their Study Help website (look in Improving your academic skills: Speaking)
- UNSW: Tips for speaking to an audience



## Written language vs spoken language

Here is an example of the same idea written in a formal style, and in a less formal style as a spoken text.



Read the two texts and see if you can note any differences in the table below:

Written text	Spoken text
In general, the Green and White Papers successfully highlight the government's well-placed concern for equity towards the unemployed, and propose practical recommendations which are likely to lessen the problem of mass unemployment such as the training wage.	So, generally speaking, the Green and White Papers are successful because they show that the government cares about equity towards the unemployed. Also, they've come up with recommendations that are practical — what I mean by this is that their recommendations are likely to help without the problem of mass unemployment. For example, they recommended the training wage, which is a good way of trying to deal with the problem of unemployment.

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**Written text**

**Spoken text**

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The following image and table highlights some of the differences:

Written text	Spoken text
<p>In general, the Green and White Papers successfully highlight the government's well-placed concern for equity towards the unemployed, and propose practical recommendations which are likely to lessen the problem of mass unemployment such as the training wage.</p>	<p>So, generally speaking, the Green and White Papers are successful because they show that the government cares about equity towards the unemployed. Also, they've come up with recommendations that are practical — what I mean by this is that their recommendations are likely to help without the problem of mass unemployment. For example, they recommended the training wage, which is a good way of trying to deal with the problem of unemployment.</p>

The diagram includes several callouts pointing to specific features in the text:

- Sentence connectors:** Points to 'In general' in the written text and 'So, generally speaking' in the spoken text.
- Formal vs informal vocabulary:** Points to 'highlight' and 'concern' in the written text, and 'show' and 'cares' in the spoken text.
- Repetition:** Points to 'recommendations' in both the written and spoken texts.
- First-person:** Points to 'I' in the spoken text.

Written text	Spoken text
→ Shorter	→ Longer
→ 1 long sentence	→ 3 shorter sentences
→ Formal language e.g. 'highlight'; 'concern'	→ Less formal language e.g. 'show'; 'cares about'
→ Written in the third person only (e.g. 'It, they')	→ Uses the first person occasionally (e.g. 'I, me, we')
	→ Uses more sentence connectors
	→ Uses repetition to aid understanding

**Summary**

- Spoken text is more informal and longer than written text, and uses more words and more sentences.
- Spoken sentences also tend to be shorter than those found in essays.
- The first person (I, me, we, etc.) is more acceptable in speech than in most academic writing, and signposting words like 'also', 'next', and 'for example' are used more often than in written work.
- Some level of informality is acceptable, although judge carefully and don't use slang, rude words, or words unfamiliar to your audience.
- Take care to explain any unusual or new words, and provide a visual of the spelling or meaning of any unfamiliar words and phrases.

Adapted from Inglis, M. (2007). *Unistep. Academic skills guide* (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia.

## USING VISUAL AIDS

### WHY SHOULD YOU USE VISUAL AIDS IN A PRESENTATION?

Well, for one thing, giving the audience something to look at takes their focus away from you – and if you're nervous about speaking in front of a crowd, anything that takes the attention off you will be very welcome! Visual aids should also aid the understanding of the audience. If your visual doesn't help the audience understand, then it's only going to distract them, and you don't want that. So don't just do a Powerpoint presentation for the sake of it – make sure that any visuals you provide will attract and hold the audience's attention and interest, and/or explain or clarify your key points. Visual aids can enhance your presentation, but they can't do all the work for you. You still need to plan and deliver an engaging talk that can be understood without relying on visual aids.

## MORE INFORMATION

- [Princeton University: Guide to using PowerPoint for Image-Based Presentations \(PDF, 1 MB\)](#)
- [University of Melbourne: Oral Presentations](#)
- [University of Queensland: Visuals](#)
- [UNSW: Using PowerPoint in Presentations](#)



## Types and uses of visual aids

Visual aids have many uses when giving a presentation. Visuals can help:

- capture attention
- increase interest
- clarify an idea
- reinforce a concept
- provide a reference point e.g. the spelling of an unfamiliar word, or a chart showing trends.

However, your visual aids can't do all the work for you, and they shouldn't distract from the main content of your presentation.

### Types of visual aids

- presentation software e.g. PowerPoint
- whiteboards
- handouts
- overhead transparencies (rarely used)

### The pros and cons of individual types of visual aids

#### Presentation Software

There are a lot of programs and apps available to help you design visuals to accompany your talk. Here are just a few:

- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Prezi
- emaze
- Projqt
- Haiku Deck
- PowToon

See also [Online Presentation Software: 51 Alternatives to PowerPoint](#).

PowerPoint is probably the most common slideshow software in use. As a Western student, you can download it as part of Microsoft Office for free – see the '[Student Advantage](#)'. Other online presentation software is often free but might require a login to save your presentations.

The following table provides a list of points to consider when using PowerPoint.

Pros	Cons
→ PowerPoint allows you to create slideshows featuring embedded multimedia e.g. pictures, videos, music.	→ There are a couple of different versions around so make sure your version is compatible with the computer you will use to display your presentation.
→ A range of design options are available.	→ It's easy to get caught up in using animations, transitions, and fancy backgrounds – so remember to keep it simple!
→ Can be hands-free if you use a wireless presenter or presentation remote (you can also get an app for your phone that can do this!).	→ Requires you to stay near the computer to click to the next slide unless you have a hands-free device.
→ Comes with Microsoft Office and is available on university computers.	→ Somewhat limited when compared to specialist presentation software such as <a href="#">Prezi</a> .

Regardless of which software or online tool you use to design your visual aids, you then need to connect a computer or other device to a data projector to project the image onto a screen. Most classrooms at Western should have a data projector, but check with your teacher to make sure one is available to you.

Also check whether a laptop is provided and if you can load your presentation from a USB stick, or if you will need to bring your own computer or tablet to connect – and if so, make sure you have the right kind of connector.

While you're presenting, take care not to block the projector with your body, and make sure you only include information that is strictly necessary.

Whether you use PowerPoint or another tool, make sure you're getting the best from it. See [10 tips on how to make slides that communicate your idea](#).

### Whiteboards and Blackboards

Yes, we're talking old-school. It may be low-tech, but while not all classrooms or presentation rooms will have a data projector, it's rare that they won't have a whiteboard.

Pros	Cons
→ Readily available.	→ Need to have a proper whiteboard marker (NOT a permanent marker) for a whiteboard, and chalk for a blackboard.
→ Easily erased.	→ You have to turn away from your audience to write anything.
→ You can write as you go.	→ Can be time-consuming to write and you need to write neatly.

## Handouts

This is perhaps another old-fashioned method, but there's still a place for handouts in presentations. By 'handout' we mean one or more sheets of paper with information relevant to your presentation, that you distribute to your audience before or after your talk.

Pros	Cons
→ The audience can make notes directly on the handout.	→ Printing and photocopying costs money.
→ You can give out a handout at the start of your talk and direct the audience's attention verbally, without physical interaction.	→ Not environmentally friendly – but you could create and distribute digital versions to save paper.
→ Can supplement other visual aids, for example by putting your references on the handout rather than on the PowerPoint.	→ Can distract the audience.
→ Can be interactive.	→ You need to anticipate numbers and ensure you have enough handouts.

### General tips for visual aids

- Use all visual aids as a prompt, and don't read them word-for-word to the audience. Trust the audience to read the information for themselves.
- In addition to the above, don't put your whole talk on your visual aids. They need to supplement your speech, not substitute for it.
- Make sure the audience can see the visual from all points in the room.
- Use a large font – preferably 18pt or bigger – and make sure the text can be seen from the back of the room.
- Don't limit yourself to text – include pictures, symbols, graphs, and other visual representations where appropriate.
- Allow the audience time to read and absorb the visual.
- Keep your visual aids simple for maximum effect.
- One idea per slide is a good rule for PowerPoint.
- Have a backup plan in case technology lets you down, and be prepared to give your presentation without visuals if necessary.
- Practise using the aids in your presentation so you know exactly what to do and when.

Adapted from Inglis, M. (2007). *Unistep. Academic skills guide*. (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia.

## BODY LANGUAGE AND GESTURES

WHAT YOU SAY ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS WHEN GIVING A PRESENTATION: THE AUDIENCE WILL ALSO PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU SAY IT.

Your presentation starts from the moment you walk in the room, not from the moment you open your mouth. So download our PDF to learn how to give a good impression and communicate your intentions from the get-go.

## MORE INFORMATION

- The Telegraph: Scientists map 21 facial expressions (slideshow)
- Listverse: 10 Common Facial Expressions Explained
- The Guardian: More Than a Feeling
- Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are | Amy Cuddy | TED Talks (21:02) PDF, 1 MB)





## Body language and gestures

What you say isn't the only thing that matters when giving a presentation: the audience will also pay attention to *how* you say it. Your presentation starts from the moment you walk in the room, not from the moment you open your mouth. So here's how to make a lasting impression.

### Dress the part

All eyes will be on you, so wear something that looks good on you. You don't have to dress up, and indeed your first priority is comfort: if you're not comfortable in your clothes, the audience will pick up on your discomfort. We're just saying it's a good idea to wear something clean that suits you. Think of it like an actor putting on a costume: this is your presentation outfit, and when you wear it, you will be awesome.

Keep your hair off your face so your audience can see your eyes and mouth. If you wear makeup, consider highlighting your lips and eyes – these are the most important parts of your face when it comes to oral communication.

### Check your posture

Stand in a neutral, open stance, with your feet hip-width apart and toes pointing straight ahead. Make sure you're balanced on your feet, and not rolling onto the heel or ball of the foot. Keep your shoulders back and don't slouch. This stance will support your lungs and allow you to take deep breaths, which is essential for good voice control.

### Keep your hands by your side

Well, unless you're making a gesture. Alternatively you can use one hand to hold your notes if there isn't a lectern. Some people don't like using a lectern or desk because it places a physical barrier between the speaker and audience that can become a mental barrier. Do what feels best for you.

### Before you start, SMILE!

It might sound stupid, but [science has our back on this one](#): when you smile, you relax and communicate to your anxious brain that there's nothing to worry about. When your audience sees you smile, they feel like you're happy to be there and they relax too. Amy Cuddy discusses the importance of body language in this TED talk: '[Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are](#)' (Online video, 21:02).

### Face the audience at all times

Don't turn your back to the audience while you're speaking, because then your voice will be much more difficult to hear.

If you need to turn away to adjust technical equipment or for another reason, pause your speech. Practising using visual aids or changing PowerPoint slides will stop you from interrupting yourself just to adjust the visual.

However, you don't have to stand in one spot, either. Move around the room if it feels right to you, although take care not to pace unnecessarily and distract the audience.

### **Make eye contact with the audience**

Firstly, if you are looking your audience in the eyes, then your head is raised and your voice will be audible. When a shy speaker stares at the floor, their voice goes to the floor, too.

Secondly, looking individual audience members in the eye makes them feel like you're really speaking to them. It makes them feel included and interested. Don't hold eye contact too long, though.

If you have difficulty looking people in the eye try looking at the forehead between their eyes instead – it has almost the same result.

### **Use gestures appropriately**

Gestures can be used to make a point, explain a concept, or emphasise a word or idea. Let your gestures come naturally, rather than forcing them. Practising your presentation will really help you here.

### **Use your face**

Lastly, don't forget about your facial expressions, because they help you tell the story. Practise looking at yourself in a mirror while talking if you're not sure what you might look like. Ask for feedback from a trusted friend on how you can improve.

## MAKING YOURSELF HEARD

GIVING A PRESENTATION ISN'T LIKE CHATTING TO YOUR FRIENDS. YOU CAN'T JUST STAND UP AND READ YOUR SCRIPT WITHOUT ANY PRACTICE. YOU SHOULD TAKE TIME TO FIND THE RIGHT VOLUME, PACE, TONE, AND PITCH FOR YOUR VOICE AND YOUR MEANING.

It's important to speak loudly, so that you can be heard, but don't shout or strain your voice. Instead, learn to project your voice: this means that you can be heard in the back of the room, but you're not yelling. It can be difficult to learn at first but there are plenty of resources available.

Adjust your volume to the size of the room, as well. You can also change your volume for emphasis or to get your audience's attention (not just by shouting – lowering your volume slightly will make your audience lean forward to hear what's coming next).

Speak slowly and clearly, especially for key points. Don't be afraid of silence – it's fine to pause for effect or to remember your next point! You might vary your pace for effect, as well, for example by speaking more quickly when you get to an exciting point. The general rule of thumb for speaking is that 100 words on the page equals roughly 1 minute of speech, but your own rate may vary.

You should also vary your vocal tone and pitch. Tone is the rising and falling pattern of speech. The classic example is when someone's voice rises at the end of a sentence to indicate a question requiring an answer. Pitch is how high or low your voice is, and you can modulate pitch for various effects. People tend to speak at a higher pitch when uncomfortable or running out of breath, so you may want to practise your presentation and avoid ending up at a higher pitch. If you make a conscious effort to start at a low pitch you won't find yourself reaching the high pitch too quickly.

Lastly, don't forget to pronounce sounds clearly so that your audience can understand you. Practise pronouncing unfamiliar words and check pronunciation with a friend, a dictionary, or an online resource. Find more helpful information at the following:

→ **UTS: Guide to Pronunciation**

→ **Training Zone: Tips for projecting your voice**

## REDUCING ANXIETY

BEING NERVOUS BEFORE GIVING A SPEECH IS TOTALLY NORMAL. ANXIETY IS YOUR BODY'S WAY OF GETTING READY TO DO THE JOB. HOWEVER, IF NERVES ARE GETTING IN THE WAY OF YOU PREPARING OR PRACTISING YOUR PRESENTATION, THEN YOU MIGHT WANT TO TRY SOME OF THE FOLLOWING METHODS TO REDUCE ANXIETY.

First, remind yourself that it's OK to be nervous. One surefire way to reduce anxiety is to make sure you're really prepared – so practise, practise, practise.

Try some deep breathing exercises. Any time you slow down and focus on your breath you will calm both body and mind, but it's also excellent practice for public speaking because you need to breathe deeply to speak effectively. Take a big breath just before you begin your presentation, also.

Don't give in to negative self-talk. Instead of telling yourself, 'I'm so nervous about this speech,' reframe your thoughts in positive language. Tell yourself instead: 'This speech is a big challenge for me, but I'm ready.' Visualise yourself giving the speech and getting the result you want (thunderous applause, a good grade, or even just the relief that it's over).

If you can, find time before the speech to practise a high-power pose. Research by Dr Amy Cuddy (YouTube: **Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are | Amy Cuddy | TED Talks**, 21:02) suggests that two minutes in a power pose raises your testosterone levels and reduces your cortisol levels, making you less stressed and more confident for the task ahead.

Just before you speak, take a deep breath and smile. If you're still feeling anxious, channel that nervous energy into enthusiasm instead. If you're excited, your audience will be too!

During your speech, use pauses effectively. Don't be afraid to stop speaking at the end of a sentence to take a breath, smile at the audience, or sip some water. There's nothing wrong with a moment of silence.

And last but not least, fake it until you make it! Put on your costume, act confident, and tell yourself that you're not nervous. No one will know the difference!

## OTHER WESTERN RESOURCES

→ Sign up for a Counselling Service workshop

→ Download eBooks on Group Work and Public Speaking Skills, or Managing Stress in Life and Exams (via the Study, Money and Life Skills vUWS site)

→ The Study, Money and Life Skills vUWS site also has a section on public speaking

## MORE INFORMATION

→ University of Pittsburgh: Speech Anxiety

→ James Cook University: Coping with nerves

→ University of Iowa: 30 Ways to Manage Speaking Anxiety



## Reducing anxiety before giving a presentation

Being nervous before giving a speech is totally normal. Anxiety is your body's way of getting ready to do the job. However, if nerves are getting in the way of you preparing or practising your presentation, then you might want to try some of the following methods to reduce anxiety.

### **It's OK to be nervous**

First, remind yourself that it's OK to be nervous. One sure-fire way to reduce anxiety is to make sure you're really prepared – so practise, practise, and practise again.

### **Focus on your breath**

Try some deep breathing exercises. Any time you slow down and focus on your breath you will calm both body and mind, but it's also excellent practice for public speaking because you need to breathe deeply to speak effectively. Take a big breath just before you begin your presentation, also.

### **Stay positive**

Don't give in to negative self-talk. Instead of telling yourself, 'I'm so nervous about this speech,' reframe your thoughts in positive language. Tell yourself instead: 'This speech is a big challenge for me, but I'm ready.' Visualise yourself giving the speech and getting the result you want (thunderous applause, a good grade, or even just the relief that it's over).

### **Strike a (power) pose**

If you can, find time before the speech to practise a high-power pose. Research by Dr Amy Cuddy suggests that two minutes in a power pose raises your testosterone levels and reduces your cortisol levels, making you less stressed and more confident for the task ahead (see her Ted Talk: '[Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are](#)', Online video, 21:02).

### **Just before you start...**

Just before you speak, take a deep breath and smile. If you're still feeling anxious, channel that nervous energy into enthusiasm instead. If you're excited, your audience will be too!

### **It's OK to pause**

During your speech, use pauses effectively. Don't be afraid to stop speaking at the end of a sentence to take a breath, smile at the audience, or sip some water. There's nothing wrong with a moment of silence.

### **Fake it until you make it**

And last but not least, fake it until you make it! Put on your costume, act confident, and tell yourself that you're not nervous. No one will know the difference.

## OTHER RESOURCES

THERE ARE SO MANY RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU GIVE SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATIONS. JUST A FEW ARE LISTED BELOW:

- Sign up for a Counselling Service workshop
- Download eBooks on Group Work and Public Speaking Skills, or Managing Stress in Life and Exams (via the Study, Money and Life Skills vUWS site)
- The Study, Money and Life Skills vUWS site also has a section on public speaking
- Put your new presentation skills to good use and join a student council

## MORE INFORMATION

- Nancy Duarte, 'The Secret Structure of Great Talks', video, 18:11



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