

Tips for Class Presentations

Dr. K.A. McEvoy

It is important that everyone, regardless of career interests, become accustomed to speaking in front of an audience. I promise that at some point in your lives, whether farther up the college food chain or when you're out in your jobs, you will be asked or required to give a presentation.

Below are some basics tips for how to structure and deliver a presentation:

1. Think and plan ahead. Consider the layout of the room. Decide in advance where you will position yourself, whether you'll sit or stand, how you'll move around.
2. An outgrowth of the above: If using audio-visual material or equipment, test it! Make certain the room is set up for your equipment and that everything works properly. Monitor volume control carefully and have a back-up plan ready in case disaster strikes and the technology fails.
3. Find out precisely what type of presentation is expected of you—there is a great deal of difference between formal and informal presentations, and you don't want to adopt an inappropriate tone or style.
4. Don't read from a prepared manuscript. First, it causes you to talk to the paper rather than your audience, muffling your voice and inhibiting eye contact. Second, it makes you speak in a monotone, inhibiting your natural vocal inflections. By the same token, don't just memorize your speech—this creates the same problem as reading from a manuscript and can cause you a lot of grief should you lose your place or forget a line.
5. Know your material—become an expert on it. It will be easier to speak extemporaneously if you know your subject well. Being an expert will eliminate awkward silences or embarrassed pauses if you lose your place by giving you other things to talk about.
6. Provide visual aids or handouts. If your audience is unfamiliar with the material you're presenting, help them out. Provide overheads, posters, or handouts illustrating important or interesting information. A caveat: When you give people a handout, they'll read it rather than listening to you. Either make it so simple it will only require a few seconds to peruse, give it immediately preceding whatever point it illustrates, or wait until the end of your presentation.
7. Practice! Go through at least three timed trial runs of your presentation to make sure you don't go over your allotted time or too far under. If possible, videotape your presentation and then analyze your performance—you'd be surprised at what you'll find watching yourself present.
8. Remember that nervousness may make you do things you wouldn't ordinarily do—such as speak at the speed of light or pace back and forth. When you're up there and all eyes are

on you, try to keep part of your mind aware of what you're doing with your voice and body. Speak at an even pace and use pauses to your advantage. Try to avoid body movements or mannerisms that may be distracting to your audience.

9. Look at the people in the audience. Don't just make cursory eye contact—try to sustain eye contact with individuals for a second or two. Also, feel free to smile at the audience.
10. Leave a couple minutes at the end of your presentation for questions and try to be ready for any that may come up. And if you don't know the answer to a question, admit it. Don't try to cover. Instead, say something like, "That's a good question; I'll have to look into that."

Group presentations require some special preparation and awareness of potential problems. In addition to all the above tips, here are some other things to keep in mind if you are giving a group presentation:

1. Make sure everyone has a role, not just in the creation of the presentation but in the presentation itself. While not everyone has to speak, all participants should have something to do during the actual presentation.
2. Make sure different group members' parts don't overlap too much and that everyone knows what order the group will be speaking in (developing an outline helps).
3. Take the room layout into careful consideration. Decide in advance how you will position yourselves: who will be where and what they will do while another member is speaking? Many a group presentation has been ruined before it begins by members showing confusion and bumping into one another at the start. You need to look poised and professional from the moment you stand to take your places.
4. Take pains to make sure everyone in the group is doing their share and will perform well on your presentation day. A single member's screw-up can torpedo an entire presentation.