You may be asked to give presentations in a variety of situations. Make detailed preparation, starting in good time.

**Why are you doing it?**

It could be one of a number of reasons:
- for an assessment
- for a seminar paper
- for a job interview
- as part of your job
- as part of your voluntary work (e.g. student union representative)

**Its purpose might be**

- to explain your subject
- to start a discussion or debate
- to demonstrate your ability in giving a presentation
- to demonstrate something practical
- to persuade your listeners

**Make sure you have the guidelines/instructions that you need**

- how long will the presentation last?
- where will it be held?
- who will the audience be, and what knowledge of the subject will they already have? how many will be in the audience?
- what are the assessment criteria (if any)?

**How can the preparation be organised?**

It helps to make a time planning chart, to avoid forgetting things or leaving them until time is too short. This is especially useful for a group presentation, or for a long/complex one. Allow time for:

- collecting research material
- deciding what to include, and what to leave out
• devising a logical structure
• preparing and reproducing visual aids/handouts
• rehearsing

Research
As for any piece of research, start it early enough to make sure you can get the variety of sources that you need.

Look out for any particularly appealing examples to support what you will be saying.

Sources need to be acknowledged, the same as for a piece of written work. You could mention them verbally and (if required) provide a written bibliography.

Structuring your presentation
Your presentation needs to have a very coherent structure so that the audience can easily follow the points you are making

Beginning
Start clearly. You could:
• introduce the speaker(s) and topic
• show a summary of what the presentation will cover
• engage the audience’s attention – perhaps say how the talk will be relevant, or use an interesting example or a rhetorical question*
• say when you will be taking questions – throughout, at a certain stage, or at the end

Middle
Contains the points you wish to make, backed up by evidence.

Arrange it in sections which follow a logical sequence.

To allow the audience to follow the sequence, you can use linking phrases/sentences – (‘I’ve dealt with X, now I’m going on to Y..’); or questions (‘but what of Z?’); or you may decide to recap at the end of each section. These links may be particularly important for ‘sign-posting’ in a longer presentation, or a group one.

If you are short of ideas about how to make your point, you could brainstorm with a friend, or try and think creatively – this could lead to a more unusual presentation.

Similarly, you may need an original approach if your presentation is one of several on the same topic.

Ending
The end needs to be as well planned as the beginning – a presentation which just tails off appears unprofessional, and will make you feel uncomfortable. You could:

• summarise
• recap your main point
• get the audience thinking about further ideas on your topic which you have not the chance to cover
• invite questions
• suggest future action (business presentations)
Visual aids and memory aids
Decide whether you'll need any and what kind/s.

Using memory aids
Rehearsal is the best memory aid, but many people feel more confident if they use notes as well.

Notes are useful because
- they remind you what your points are
- they keep you in sequence
- they stop you omitting points

Constructing notes
Write or word-process them in large letters which you can see at a glance. Some people find hand-written notes easier to use – their irregularity can be easier on the eye.

Use key words only, so you don't struggle to keep your place.

You can use colours, highlighting, boxes, underlining or symbols – whichever makes it easier. On the other hand, too much embellishment could be confusing.

Mind maps can be used – their concise format is appropriate.

Format
If using cards, consider numbering them or tying them together so that you don't lose your place.

You might find numbered A4 sheets easier to handle – there is less page-turning.

You can use your visual aids to remind you what to say (e.g. a well designed OHP slide setting out the points you are making).

Don't read it out
- reading from a script causes you to lose spontaneity and risk sounding rather like a spoken essay
- the 'spoken word' is often very different from the 'written word'
- listening is very different from reading – a presentation therefore needs to be less dense

Direct quotations can be read out; but practise first so that you don't stumble.

Rehearsing
There are real benefits to be had from devoting adequate time to practice

Rehearsal helps you
- increase your confidence
- remember your material
- get the timing right
- perfect the 'shape' (where you stand, how you arrange the equipment, where the audience sits)
- get used to your visual aids and notes
How to rehearse

Ideally, practise in the correct room, with visual aids, and with all of the group (if applicable).

Pay special attention to the beginning and the end – these need to be well thought out, and included in the timing.

Get a friend to listen to your practice. Ask your friend to give you honest advice about loudness, speed and tone. Bear in mind that a monotonous voice won’t be easy to listen to.

If practising alone, still speak it out loud – this takes longer than reading it in your head, and you get used to projecting your voice.

Consider taping your practice. Listening to the tape helps you to improve your technique, and to remember what you will be saying.

Remember that there are bookable syndicate rooms in the library where you can rehearse your presentation if the actual room is not available.

Check the room beforehand

What size is the room? This affects your voice projection.

What is its layout? Can it be changed? If you are to have discussion, questions or participation, audience members need to be able to see and hear each other, as well as you.

Will you sit or stand? Will you move about amongst the audience?

If it’s a group presentation, agree and practise what part everyone takes – when to speak (running order and cues) and where to stand or sit.

Plan the positioning of your visual equipment. If you are using more than one projector, make sure that the screens are in the right place, and that there are enough electrical sockets. Anticipate trailing flexes – slide projectors often have two. Make sure that your screen will not be masked.

Are there adequate curtains/blinds, should you need to darken the room?

Will there be outside distractions to cope with – noise, passers-by?

Is there a clock? Can you use it to watch your timing, or will your audience be distracted by it?

Dealing with anxiety

Most people feel anxious about giving a presentation. There are measures you can take to reduce or eliminate anxiety – many depend on good preparation; others help you in the short term and can be used on the day.

Try and pinpoint exactly why you are anxious – this will help you decide what to do about it.

It may be that your ‘anxiety’ is actually the adrenalin working – this can stimulate you to approach the experience positively.
Beforehand

If you are generally nervous of speaking in front of a group, you can practise by making more contributions in seminars, or asking questions in lectures.

Be very familiar with your material – boost your confidence by doing several practices, not just one.

Good planning and memory aids can provide a ‘safety net’, boosting your confidence.

Practise your opening words until they flow really well – a stumble at the start would distract you.

Try and emphasise the most interesting angles of your subject, to get the audience on your side.

Use a reasonable number of visual aids – the audience will look at those (not just at you); and they will act as a memory aid for you.

Consider varying your approach by including a demonstration or some form of audience participation. This could make it feel less formal.

To feel more relaxed on the day
- arrive on time
- if your audience is unknown to you, try making an informal connection before you start – smile, say ‘hello’
- before starting to speak, breathe in and out slowly a few times
- move around while you’re speaking, to release your tension
- if you should ‘dry up’, glance at the key words in your notes to give you a cue to re-start
- remember it’s acceptable to have a few pauses – they punctuate the talk and help the listener ‘digest’ what is being said

Delivering your presentation

Connecting with your audience

You may feel more comfortable if you ‘scan’ the whole audience as you speak – this makes everyone feel included, and develops rapport.

The audience will feel more involved (and interested) if you use a certain amount of movement or gesture, rather than remaining static.

If you are very familiar with your topic you will be able to reduce your reliance on notes, and maintain your focus on the audience.

Adding a touch of humour can be successful, but be cautious. Consider carefully whether this would be a good idea – be sure that no-one could be offended by your humour.

Audience participation

You can add variety and interest by giving the audience something to do (e.g. sampling something; offering responses or opinions).

Make sure that this is relevant and integrates with the rest of the presentation.

Timing needs to be controlled so that you don’t over-run.

Also, consider your audience members – can you rely on them to take part?
**Taking questions**

Decide whether you are going to invite questions and when.

If you have a time limit, decide how much time to allocate to questions. Try and anticipate what might be asked – then you can prepare to a certain extent.

Be honest in your answers – if you don’t know, say so and offer to find out. It may be possible to get the answer from someone else in the room.

For an assessed presentation, find out what marks will be allocated for your handling of questions.

**Dealing with distractions**

Anticipate any distractions (e.g. traffic noise, road works, people congregating outside the room).

Try and remain calm.

It's best to pause, rather than carry on and risk not being heard. Depending on the length of the pause, you might recap after it.

In group presentations the group needs to avoid creating distractions (e.g. members fidgeting or whispering).

**Afterwards**

Allow some time for thinking about how the presentation went, and what could have been done differently. If you were working with a group, talk it over together.

Keep some notes to remind yourself how you can improve next time.

**Planning your visual aids**

Well thought out visual aids will enhance your presentation.

Visual aids help you to:
- explain more complex ideas
- add interest to a presentation
- structure your presentation
- focus the audience’s attention
- make your presentation memorable

**Which visual aids should you choose?**

Make an informed decision, based on:
- your instructions or assessment criteria
- the room/equipment
- length of the presentation
- relevance
- availability of material (e.g. videos from library)
- cost (e.g. of photocopying handouts)
How can they be used successfully?
You need a good balance of visual aids – have sufficient, but not too many. Using a variety of kinds might add interest, but could confuse.

They should be: relevant; legible; error-free.

You will need to make reference to your visuals as you speak, if you don’t they will seem irrelevant.

Check in good time that the equipment you need is available: it may need to be booked.

What are the different kinds?
Here is a list of the different visual aids you are most likely to use. You will find tips about using them in other sheets in this series.

- Digital projector /PowerPoint
- DVD
- Whiteboard/blackboard/flip chart
- Posters
- Handouts
- Demonstrations/objects/samples

PowerPoint
If you have access to a computer with PowerPoint you can make sophisticated sets of slides which you operate electronically.

You can either pre-set the timing for each slide or advance them manually using keyboard or mouse.

You can also have a printed set of slides with your notes added at the bottom. These can be viewed (and printed) on one page.

If you think it’s appropriate you can animate your slides (e.g. reveal bullet points one at a time), or include audio and visual clips.

You could consider making a back-up set of slides on acetates, in case the system fails. Make sure that there’s a projector for these.

Using text in your PowerPoint slides
Simple shaped fonts are clearest (e.g. Arial or Arial Black).

Use a big font size, usually between 28 and 32. Smaller print is hard to see, even when projected.

Don’t put too much information on to one slide – if in doubt, produce several.

Use words and phrases rather than whole sentences – you’ll be explaining more fully in your talk. Use space to help define different sections of information.

Correct any spelling mistakes – on the screen they will be magnified, and extremely noticeable.
Handouts, boards, posters, demonstrations

Handouts
You need to consider why you are using handouts (e.g. to repeat what has been said; to add extra information?)

Decide when, and by whom they will be given out
Issuing handouts before or during the presentation might distract the audience’s attention. On the other hand you might want to use them during the talk (e.g. leave a space on the handout for people to jot down notes; or refer to material in the handout as you speak).

Giving them out at the end implies that they are to be read later. Explain their purpose, referring to specific points in the handout if you like.

Allow adequate time for design, construction and reproduction of handouts.

Whiteboard/blackboard/flip chart
These are useful when you wish to write during the presentation (e.g. result of a show of hands vote, or outcomes of discussion).

For a blackboard or whiteboard take your own writing materials and cleaning cloth. On a whiteboard use dry-wipe pens only.

A flip chart can be prepared beforehand, but is bulky to carry and may be harder to see than an overhead projector image. You will need a flip chart stand, which may need to be booked.

Posters
You can make poster displays about your topic if there is time for the audience to look at them.

They can be put on the wall for inspection before/after the presentation, shown on a flipchart stand or held up during the presentation. Smaller ones can be given cardboard backings and passed around.

Demonstrations/Objects/Samples
Some topics lend themselves to demonstrations (e.g. practical or artistic subjects). This would have to be timed in rehearsal, but need not take extra time if your commentary is part of the presentation.

Passing around an object for the audience to handle is much more effective than showing a picture of it (e.g. geological samples, historical artefacts).

Samples can be used (e.g. if your presentation is comparing different food/drink products you might decide to let the audience do a blind tasting, and ask for reactions).