



Presentation Basics

The ability to both create and deliver presentations is necessary for academic success, and these skills often transfer beyond academics as well. Many careers will require that you give a presentation, whether it is a project proposal, progress report, or the culmination of your findings in a study delivered at a conference.

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: Structure, Delivery, Handling Q&A. We have a separate handout for Presentation Visuals should you need it.

Structure

Generally, a presentation is designed around one central idea that you are discussing throughout the project. You will include supporting evidence for your main point, references when necessary, and visual aids to guide the audience. The order of these concepts is similar to that of a paper.

- Consider your audience first. Are you presenting to your peers, professionals, or a different group entirely?
- Introduce the focus of your presentation within the first few slides. Give background information as necessary.
- Provide evidence that supports your argument. If this presentation is about how beautiful UMW's campus is, you would need to include some examples that clearly bolster this argument.
- Conclude your presentation with a strong summarization of your findings and why those findings are significant.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: The knowledge that your audience possesses will influence how much background you'll need to provide, as well as the level of explanation necessary for certain terms. If you are presenting to a professional, defining simple concepts is often unnecessary; however, if presenting to peers, perhaps some basic definitions would be prudent.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: This evidence can be visual since this is a presentation. For this example, pictures of UMW's campus could be evidence.

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: This is where you would also include future implications of your findings, if applicable.

Delivery

After the presentation is created, it's time to work on delivery. There are two different aspects of delivery to keep in mind: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication deals with the voice while non-verbal deals with everything else, including body language. While presentation delivery may feel a bit unnatural at first, with consistent practice and some helpful tips, you will feel a lot more comfortable and can become a skilled public speaker.

- Enunciate clearly and project your voice to everyone in the audience.
- Avoid vocal fillers, i.e. "like," "um," or "so." It is better to pause for a moment to gather your thoughts before continuing your presentation.
- Use appropriate linking words to transition from slide to slide or concept to concept.
 - Simply clicking to the next slide of your visual aid (or saying, "on the next slide") is not an effective transition, but practicing will help you figure out which words work best to create a strong connection between what you just explained and what you will be explaining further.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: It can be helpful to visit the room you will be using with a friend in advance to get an idea of how much you'll need to project in order to be heard clearly.

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: This can be best handled during practicing your presentation, as you have more time to experiment on strategies that work better for you. An exercise you can try is every time you feel yourself about to insert a vocal filler, consciously close your mouth. This gives you a moment to think about what you want to say next without a vocal filler slipping out subconsciously.



Delivery Continued

- Make eye contact and scan your audience as this allows you to gauge audience comprehension and investment.
- Use a strong stance, with open body language and good balance, and try to limit nervous movement. You may utilize hand gestures to emphasize certain points, but do not “talk” with your hands.
- Reference your visual aids in an appropriate manner.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: Scanning your audience means making a point to look at almost everyone in the audience instead of focusing on just one person while you're presenting. Making eye contact with multiple people, multiple times throughout the presentation helps everyone in the audience feel acknowledged.

Handling Q&A

There are some ways you can prepare for the Q&A section of your presentation.

- If you know the Q&A is a required part of your presentation, try and think ahead of potential questions your audience might ask you. Think about what your class discussions are about, who is in your audience, if your presentation topic is something they're unfamiliar with, etc. You can also prepare possible questions for yourself to practice giving a prompt response.
- You can take a second to process the question. Repeating the question back to the person who asked it can also give you a chance to pause and think through what your answer might be.
- Treat all questions equally; you want to validate your audience, and people will be more encouraged to ask their question if you respond positively. Asking “Does that answer your question?” or “Am I able to clarify anything?” also helps in validating your audience.
 - If you don't know the answer, it's okay to say that. You can reply, “My research didn't cover that, I can look into that and get back to you.”
- Be concise with your answers. If your Q&A has a set time frame, you want to make sure there's time for multiple people in the audience to have a chance to ask their question. You want to respect the time you're given, and also respect your audience having questions for you.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: Facial expressions and body language impact an audiences' view of the presenter. If you seem confident and collected, they are more likely to have confidence in you and your ideas in turn. Standing confidently includes feet planted firmly in one spot on the ground so you're not catching your balance consistently throughout the presentation; the excessive movement could be translated as nerves or not being prepared. Additionally, having open body language (chest open, arms not crossed in front of your body, shoulders back) allows your audience to feel more of a connection with you as a speaker.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: In this case, an appropriate manner generally means not overly relying on your presentation visuals. Don't just stare at your visual aids during your presentation. Your audience can still see your slides even when you can't! An acceptable time to glance at your visual aids would be when you are connecting the visual aid to the content of your presentation or pointing out a specific idea shown; think a graph, an idea relating to an image, etc.

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: This also helps to validate the contribution even if you're unable to give them a complete answer on the spot.