



How to prepare an oral communication (1/2)

By Alexandra Giraud and Eva Roy



The goal of an oral scientific presentation is to present research in a clear, concise and accessible way. A presentation provides an opportunity to share one's work, receive constructive feedback and develop skills in communicating science to a non-expert audience. It is an opportunity to make one's research more visible, to exchange ideas with other researchers and to refine one's thinking through discussion.

Organising the presentation

An oral presentation generally follows a four-part structure:

1. **Introduction and theoretical background:**

Introduce the theoretical framework of your research, define the concepts used and highlight the significance of your research. State the aim and hypotheses.

2. **Methodology:**

Briefly outline your methodology (sample, tools used, procedure). Mention the methods used to analyse your data (if relevant).

3. **Results / Expected results:**

Refer back to your hypotheses and address them by presenting your results.

4. **Discussion, implications and conclusion:**

Briefly discuss the results of your study in relation to the literature and summarise the theoretical and practical contributions. Begin your discussion by outlining the limitations of your study and suggesting opportunities for future research.

Before the presentation

- **Clarify your main message:** Ask yourself what the key idea that you want to share is.
- **Time yourself:** Practise to ensure you do not go over the allotted time. Sticking to the time limit shows respect for your audience and the other speakers.
- **Use accessible language:** Even with a specialised audience, it is best to avoid excessive jargon or acronyms.
- **Anticipate questions:** Think about the points that might raise interrogations and prepare clear answers.
- **Pay attention to your slideshow:** Limit the amount of text on your slides and opt for illustrations, graphs and diagrams instead. Make sure that the document is easy to read.



Rehearse in front of colleagues or friends to fine-tune your speech.



Refer to the signature and visual identity guidelines of your laboratory and institution.



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During the presentation

- **Take a deep breath:** Breathing properly helps to ease stress and steady your voice.
- **Make eye contact:** This makes your speech more lively and captivates the audience.
- **Speak slowly and clearly:** When we're stressed, we tend to speak more quickly.
- **Don't read your slides:** They are there to support you, not to be recited.
- **Be kind to yourself:** It's not a big deal if you make a mistake or hesitate – it happens to everyone.
- **Enjoy yourself:** Take the time to savour the moment and remember that you're the expert on your subject – the audience is there to learn from you, not to judge you.

Questions

- **Take note of the questions that are asked of you:** They can help you better understand what is expected of you regarding your topic.
- **Be prepared to answer questions with an open mind:** They are not an evaluation, but an opportunity for constructive discussion.
- **View criticism as a learning opportunity:** Even if it is delivered awkwardly, criticism can enrich your thoughts on the subject.
- **If you don't know, be honest about it:** It is better to admit that you don't know rather than to try to fill a gap with a half-baked answer. You can always say that you'll look into it and get back to the person.

After the presentation

- **Don't compare yourself to others:** Everyone has their own style, pace and topic. Your topic is unique, and so is the way that you share it.
- **Reflect on your presentation:** Keep a record of your experience. What went well? What could you improve next time?
- **Celebrate your presentation:** Presenting at a conference is an important milestone in your PhD journey; every presentation deserves to be celebrated.
- **Network with kindness:** Make the most of the event to chat with other researchers and build connections.

A presentation isn't an exam; it's a conversation with the scientific community. The aim isn't to be perfect, it's to share your ideas and exchange views with peers. The most important thing is to be yourself and have fun!