Tips to Follow When Giving an Academic Presentation

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Let’s assume you will soon give a presentation. Ask yourself:

✓ Will the audience will be composed of university students and faculty members?
✓ Will audience members vary in terms of familiarity with your presentation topic?
✓ Is the occasion an academic one (e.g., an oral report in class)?

If you answered “Yes” to any of those questions, follow the tips below:

1. Remember that basic protocols and rules of public speaking apply in your situation. These include:

   • **Know your purpose for giving the presentation!** What specifically do you want the audience to know or do as a result of listening to you? What does the audience already know about your topic? What don’t they know? How will you get and keep their attention and interest?
   • **Make sincere and regular eye contact** with your audience. Scan the audience in a relaxed manner as you speak. Don’t look at one person all the time—give equal visual attention to all.
   • **Vary the speed at which you talk, the volume you use, and the pitch of your voice.** Aim for making your voice pleasant and interesting to hear. Speak with energy and enthusiasm.
   • **Use physical movement** as much as you can: move, instead of standing rooted in one place; gesture, instead of stowing your hands in your pockets or inside your sleeves; favor variety in facial expression, instead of wearing a glazed look.
   • **As much as possible, chisel and simplify the comments** you wish to make. Remember: a listener can’t “reread” what you said, so you must say it clearly and cogently if you say it.
   • **All visual aids must be clear, simple, and free of clutter.** Practice operating any equipment (e.g., overhead projector, video- or audio-playback devices, etc.) you wish to use.

2. Favor only the most important information. Choose **(no more than about) five points** to make. Listeners won’t digest more than about three, especially if you’re one of several presenters that day.

3. Express those five points to five concise **keyword notes.** Write the notes on a 3x5 notecard. Below each note, write one or two brief lines of extra information. **Rehearse your speech using only that notecard, not pages of detailed script.** You will soon train yourself to deliver the five points fluently and naturally.

4. **Choose simple language that appeals to the senses.** Favor short, clear, complete sentences.

5. When reporting statistics, frame them with **analogies** that will make the numbers understandable to listeners untrained in or uncomfortable with statistical analysis.

6. Include **stories to support your comments.** Construct each story so that it has a beginning, middle, and end, and a clear application and focus.

7. State **no more than three or four conclusions** or implications for your research. Frame each conclusion clearly and simply, and as often as possible in positive, declarative language.

8. Rehearse, then revise; rehearse, then revise; rehearse, then revise; rehearse, then revise . . .

Remember: If you read your report aloud, listeners will dislike you and think you’re boring.