

Oral Report guidelines

You should have ample time to speak during your oral report. Regardless, I find it a good idea to focus on a couple of your most interesting topics rather than rush through a comprehensive presentation of your entire service project. Do not worry if the focus is not on the final product itself—the main reason for an oral report is not to present your final product, but to obtain practice conveying technical information.

Having said that you should concentrate on only a few topics, take care that you do not spend too much time on these elements. In the past, I have recommended specific elements of their reports for students to discuss. Almost invariably, students go into too much detail on these elements to the detriment of the presentation as a whole.

The mechanical mistakes I commonly observe in a short presentation mostly involve a failure to engage the audience. Students like to address the overhead projector, talk to the screen, stare out into middle distance, stare at a corner of the room—anything but talk to the audience. You can refer to your overheads or note cards as a quick reminder, but be sure to step away from the overhead and talk directly to your classmates. In addition, idiosyncrasies that are acceptable for a long lecture should probably be avoided for a short talk—don't put your hands in your pockets, balance on the outside edges of your shoes, hold your hands behind your back, rock back and forth, etc. In shorter formats, a straightforward presentation style works best. Speaking effectively in short formats can be difficult to learn. If you're not a naturally dynamic speaker, you can improve your oral presentation style by modulating your voice; change the volume and pace of your remarks; emphasize important words over others; attenuate words; pause for effect; etc.

The amount of information on any single overhead should be minimal. Copying an entire page of material directly to an overhead is never effective; pull out the relevant information only and reproduce it using a large font. It is a good idea to have visuals of material as much as possible. Often your talk may introduce unfamiliar material and you will not have to spend nearly as much time explaining it to your audience if you have a photo of the material at hand. I don't require visuals as part of the presentation, but I have noticed that your fellow students judge a presentation much more harshly if no visuals are available. Remember that you use visuals to convey information *visually*; students often make the mistake of over-explaining a figure or graphic, which defeats the purpose of using a visual display in the first place.