

Oral Presentations

You may be asked to prepare and deliver a presentation as part of the interview process. The employer will want to assess your oral communication skills. How can you present your case in a way that your audience will understand and find interesting?

SETTING THE SCENE

The employer may ask you to prepare your presentation before the day of your interview, or you may be given a limited time for preparation once you have arrived at the interviewer's premises. Sometimes you can choose the subject of your talk, possibly from a list of suggested titles. Otherwise, you will be given the topic. You will normally be told the maximum duration of your presentation, for example three minutes or fifteen minutes. Equipment such as a laptop with PowerPoint, whiteboard, or flipchart may or may not be available. Your audience will consist of your interviewers and possibly the other candidates. The interviewers will usually make notes as they assess your performance.

EXAMPLES OF PRESENTATIONS REQUESTED BY EMPLOYERS

- Tell us about yourself and what you can offer this organisation (5 minutes, a very open subject).
- Why I enjoy Latin-American dancing (10 minutes, chosen by the employer from information given on the application form).
- Choose a science topic, currently in the news, of interest to pupils aged 11 years (15 minutes, interview for teacher training course).

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR PERFORMANCE

- If you have a choice, choose a subject about which you feel confident to speak.
- Who is your audience? Pitch your message to their level of understanding.
- Do not overwhelm with too many details and figures.
- Be explicit about the outline of your content. State what you are going to talk about, outline your main points and summarise your conclusions. This is known as signposting.
- Personal stories, anecdotes and examples are often interesting and memorable. However, telling jokes can be risky. The audience may not share your sense of humour.
- Practise delivering your talk in front of a trusted friend or the mirror.
- Ensure that the audience at the back of the room can see and hear you.
- Remember that the audience wants you to succeed. They also want you to recover from any mistakes.
- Time yourself - it is better to end a little early than to overrun but be aware that you may speak more quickly in front of an audience.

YOUR NOTES

Reading your presentation aloud can sound stilted

and you will not be able to look at your audience. Use brief notes consisting of key words on note cards. Make sure you number the cards and use large writing and a highlighter pen so that you can follow them when under pressure.

YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

Be aware of your body language:

- Smile, show enthusiasm and the audience should respond more enthusiastically.
- Maintain a relaxed but confident posture.
- Make eye contact with individuals in the audience. They will feel more involved.
- Avoid talking too quickly or too slowly and try not to talk in monotone.
- Don't fidget; the audience may find this distracting.

USING VISUAL AIDS

You may be allowed to use visual aids to help the audience to understand the point you wish to make. Visual aids can make your presentation more effective. People retain 10% of what they hear, but retain 50% of what they see.

- Keep it short and simple; use bullet points not sentences. Too many words become a jumble.
- Use large print and bold images.
- If possible, use a variety of colours but keep a consistent 'brand'.
- It can be harder to write neatly when using a flipchart or whiteboard, so check that what you have written is clear and spelled correctly.
- Do not block the audience's view by standing between them and your visual aid.
- Talk to the group rather than to the screen or flipchart.

WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

Many people are afraid of speaking publicly but the more you practise, the more your performance will improve. There is a knack to using PowerPoint or a flipchart confidently so take opportunities to give presentations to your fellow students.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.prospects.ac.uk Assessment Centres - comprehensive guide to what to expect including: presentations, exercises and group activities.
- www.careerstagged.co.uk a unique resource designed by the Careers Group. Search the information you want by typing in tag words like 'Presentations'.

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