Technical English, Lecture 14:

Oral presentations

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When?

We deliver our scientific ideas orally

- in lectures;

- in group meetings with research colleagues;

- at conferences
  - full papers or
  - posters;

- to funding "partners"
  - venture capitalists,
  - company managers, or
  - proposal evaluators;
  or

- to examiners (thesis).

Each type has its appropriate length and level of formality.

Tools

In addition to the tongue, we often use one or more *aids*:

- a black or green board with chalk,

- a white board with marker pens,

- a flip chart,

- transparencies,

- handout materials,

- photos,

- an audio or video recording, or

- a computer program.

Good to remember

- The presentation is the content of what you deliver not the aid that you are using.

- With all of these aids remember to use your own *body language* according to the prevalent customs.

- Be prepared for different cases (some aids may not be available).

- Unite with the audience.

Preparation

It takes time to prepare a good presentation.

- Consider your audience.
  - How do they relate to you: students, colleagues, examiners, ...?
  - How much do they know about the subject?

- Think about the general framework: introduce, explain, and conclude.

- Get the abstract ideas down to earth. Use real examples and even stories if this is possible.

- Prepare the visual aids.

- Practice! Get help from friends. Record yourself and review.

Time management

Watch the time. It is great if your presentation takes the exact time neither longer nor shorter. However, flexibility is a virtue.

- Allow several minutes per slide and measure your pace during practice.

- Switching activities (to and from videos or live simulations) takes time. Plan for that time and do not leave your audience waiting.

- Plan for a slightly shorter presentation than the time allotted.

- While speaking, if you have extra time compensate by expanding the discussion of some issues.

Visual aids

An image is worth a 1000 words but poor quality renders it almost useless!

Each "slide" in a computer presentation should be connected to the previous and following slides. It resembles a paragraph in an article.

Use artistic effects wisely, you should present scientific materials not prove that you are a great film director!

- Use flying objects and sounds when appropriate.

- Avoid extra colors and fonts.

Watch your language

It helps to understand your vocal capabilities.

- Attempt to change your tone. Provide a *live* presentation.

- Use the appropriate vocabulary for the occasion.

- Pronunciation is usually an issue for non-native speakers.

- Do you mumble?

- Do you drop the last part of your speech?

Practice before the presentation and just be yourself while delivering.

Delivery

After a good preparation

be confident: the audience knows less than you do about your own work,

deliver directly and avoid reading from your aids,

maintain eye contact: shying away from the audience is not helpful (but remember cultural norms),

involve the audience as much as possible considering the number of people, and

don't "preach" but rather convince the audience.

Anything else?

Once the presentation ends, the real work begins!

- Answer questions.

- Gather feedback.

- Provide your contact information.

- Initiate conversations after the session.

- Note all the important ideas to implement them once you are back in your office.

In short, think of ways to improve your work given the feedback and to integrate it with other people's work.