Practice and Delivery

Delivery: Your best possible delivery starts by preparing the best possible presentation and practicing. See other sections for tips on preparation. Delivery is a performance, and includes both verbal and non-verbal components.

* Stand in the most relaxed and natural way possible.
* It is fine to move around a bit if that feels natural, but don’t pace.
* If you are using PowerPoint, be sure that you don’t obscure the audience’s view of the slides. Do position yourself so that you can quickly glance at the slides periodically.
* Do not read your slides. See section on Visual Aids.
* Your hands should be at your side or gesturing in the ways you would naturally while speaking in a conversation.
* Don’t hold your keys, phone, or other unnecessary items. If you absolutely must hold something other than your note cards, choose a pencil or pen without a cap or retractable tip—nothing to fiddle with.
* If you are using note cards, do not read from cards. They are memory aids, not a script. Glance down periodically, but your eyes should be on your audience most of the time.
* Act calm even if you don’t feel calm. Fake it ‘til you make it.
* Smile. Project a positive feeling.
* Speak loud enough to be heard in the back of the room.
* Speak a bit more slowly than you normally would. Listen to yourself and pronounce words clearly. If you get flustered, pause for a moment. It happens to everyone. Get your thoughts back on track and continue.
* Vary your tone. Use both voice tone and body language signal your audience.
* Make eye contact with your audience throughout your talk. Scan around the room. Don’t focus on any one person, even the instructor.
* If your mouth gets dry in presentations, take some water with you. It is fine to pause for a sip but do not drink throughout your presentation.
* If you think you have been unclear on an important point, say something like “let me clarify what I meant there,” and re-phrase. Don’t fixate on every word. The natural conversational tone you want often includes small glitches. The more practiced you are, the more relaxed you will be, and the fewer glitches you’ll have.
* If you have a handout, distribute it before the start of your talk, not in the middle.
* Do not pass anything around the room. As tempting as this may be, your audience becomes distracted in the process and will miss content from your presentation. Visual props should be large enough to be seen without passing them around. You can also refer to an object in your talk and then invite audience members to view it later.

Memory Aids, Notecards, or an Outline: Make sure that you know that you know what sort of memory aids your instructor allows or requires.

* Reading from a full script is almost never allowed for a classroom presentation. Students are almost always expected to deliver a well-practiced presentation in a conversational tone. Such presentations are far more audience-friendly. A nervous novice reading a script often results in a monotone, unnatural presentation that loses the audience attention. Some disciplines expect fully scripted papers to be read out loud at professional meetings, but this requires great practice.
* Note cards are the most common memory aid. Place one main item per card. Print the text large so that you see reminders easily. A few words in a bulleted list should be enough to keep you on track. A quotation can be written in more detail. Number the cards in order. Do not read from cards.
* If your instructor requires you to submit an outline of your presentation, you may find that is also useful as your memory aid while speaking. Increase the font size so that you will be able to make out key words at a glance. Do not read from the outline.

Practice: To deliver a strong oral presentation, you must practice it.

* Complete your draft presentation two days before you are scheduled to deliver, and then practice.
* Script your introduction and conclusion more carefully than the rest of the presentation. Don’t memorize them, but the more clearly you have outlined and practiced these sections, the better your presentation will be.
* If you are going to use notecards or another memory aid, prepare them and practice with them.
* If you are going to use PowerPoint, prepare a draft of that file and practice with it. (See section on PowerPoint)
* Say your words out loud. It is okay to practice silently a few times, but you must hear yourself say the words out loud several times.
* If your presentation includes technical terms, foreign words, or any vocabulary that you would not normally use, ask your instructor for the correct pronunciation. Practice saying the terms out loud until it becomes natural.
* Stand while you speak.
* Run through your presentation start to finish without stopping several times. It is fine to stop and start in early practice attempts, but you must go through the entire presentation without stopping at least a couple of times.
* Time yourself to be sure you are within the assignment requirements. Most people speak faster when their nerves kick in, so assume your actual presentation will be a bit shorter than what you time in practice.
* If you are using PowerPoint, practice with your slides. Don’t look at the slides. Stand, face the audience, and periodically glance at the slides.
* If you will present in a classroom, practice in a classroom at least once. If you are using PowerPoint, practice with it in the classroom.
* Get a friend to sit in the back of the room while you do a practice without stopping. Practice eye contact. Have your friend time you. Get honest feedback on your voice’s volume, clarity, and pace.
* If you feel nervous, practice calming techniques. (See Nerves section)
* Consider taking your draft to the Writing Center. A tutor can provide suggestions on the outline or listen to you practice. Writing Center tutors are trained to give feedback on presentations.