Special Settings

An oral presentation must fit both the purpose and audience.

1. Presenting research on campus.

Ask your research advisor to clarify expectations, which vary by discipline and audience. You may be told to focus most heavily on methods, results, and conclusions when presenting a research project than when providing a general presentation. If you are presenting chemistry research to an audience of six chemistry professors, they will expect technical content. If you are presenting the same research project at a campus showcase to an audience of students who may have no chemistry background, you will need to provide more background and context. Suh an audience needs far less technical content. Know how much time you are allotted. You are likely to have far more content than time, and will need to ma careful choices about what content is most important to include. Research presentations are almost always followed by a question and answer period. Cue your audience by ending your presentation with a statement welcoming questions.

1. Presenting research at a professional meeting

Professional meetings have very specific expectations and standards. Ask your advisor about these. You may also find information on the website for the conference. Your audience will be very knowledgeable about your discipline and will likely expect technical content. You may also need to place your research in context with other current research. Be sure you acknowledge the work of others.

1. Poster sessions

At a poster session, the presenter stands next to a large poster that summarizes the material normally covered in an oral presentation. You should be prepared to deliver a concise one-minute summary of the project focusing on the central question and the conclusion. Many visitors to your poster will stay for just that quick summary. If someone stops at your poster, you might ask, “Would you like me to give you a quick overview?” They may move on after that summary or they may ask more specific questions. Be prepared to provide both general and technical responses. Take cues from the sophistication of the questions to determine the type of response to provide.

1. Group presentations

A group presentation should still feel like one unified presentation. In general, each member of the group should present a discrete section of the material—introduction, theory, methods, data, conclusions, etc. The biggest challenge is to make the entire presentation sound unified. You should have clear expectations about how much time each team member will use. You must outline the material that each person will cover, and then practice as a team. You need to avoid unintended repetition as well as gaps. Practice out loud as a team. If your presentation will be followed by questions, discuss how you will handle those. Is one team member better able to answer certain questions? In general, it is not good to have just one team member handle all the questions since that makes the other team members seem less capable.