



Douglas College

Douglas College Learning Centre

## ORGANIZING AN ORAL PRESENTATION

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This handout describes the basic parts of a good oral presentation: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. Your instructor may give you other or more specific instructions for organizing your presentation, but if not, follow these. These parts are very similar to the parts of an academic essay, so if you want more information, consult the Learning Centre handout WR4.30 The Essay.

### 1. The Introduction (about 10-15% of the talk's length)

The purpose of the introduction is to:

- Engage the listeners' interest
- State your point of view and/or the purpose of your presentation
- Explain how your presentation is organized.

a) Begin by greeting your audience.

This establishes contact and good will. Try something like, "Good afternoon, I'm pleased to be here today."

b) Engage your listeners with a startling or engaging idea.

This might be an anecdote, a surprising fact or statistic, a cartoon or a quotation.

c) Make a transition to your purpose and/or point of view.

- Is your purpose to inform, persuade, review literature, explain personal experience, generate discussion, motivate, entertain or something else? You should state this in your introduction.
- Make your point of view as specific as possible.

d) Explain how the presentation is organized.

Showing a PowerPoint slide or overhead identifying the key parts of the presentation can be useful as it makes the organization clear. (For more on this, see Learning Centre handout RS8.30 Using Visuals in Oral Presentations.)

### 2. The Body (about 75-80% of the talk's length)

The purpose of the body is to support your point of view or explain your topic. Normally, you divide the body into a variety of sections. For each section, you need to state a main point and then provide supporting evidence (e.g. facts, explanation, anecdotes, statistics, examples, quotes, description). After providing evidence for a

point, you need to state clearly how the evidence relates to the main idea or the overall point of view of your talk.

When planning an oral presentation, you need to be especially careful about clearly showing the links between ideas. Use transition words and expressions that show the relationships between one idea and the next. If you have a long presentation, you may want to stop occasionally and recap your points so far and introduce what's coming next. You need to do more of this linking of ideas in an oral presentation than in a paper. When someone reads a paper, they can always go back and re-read previous parts if they get lost, but they can't re-listen if they get lost while listening.

Plan to use strategies that keep your listeners engaged. Explain abstract ideas by comparing them to concrete and familiar ideas. For example, "This program will cost over \$35 million dollars, that's about one dollar for every Canadian." Another strategy is to personalize your ideas. If possible include personal experience, stories and examples; they are more engaging than a long list of facts and figures.

Don't plan to talk about too many ideas. It's better to say more things about a few ideas than to say a little about a lot of ideas.

It's important in planning your body not to leave the most important information until the end. If you run out of time, you will have missed your best points.

### **3. The Conclusion** (about 10% of the talk's length)

The purpose of the conclusion is to review the talk's key ideas and to provide closure for the talk. It may also serve as a transition to a question-period or discussion.

Generally, a conclusion should include the following parts:

- a transition indicating that the end is near. Try, "To end, ..." or "In conclusion, ..."
- summary of the talk's main arguments
- restatement of the purpose and/or point of view
- suggested next steps (possible questions for discussion or actions for listeners to take) or implications of the information given (answer the question "So what?").
- Thank the audience for their attention.

#### **Other related Learning Centre handouts:**

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| RS8.10 | Preparing for an Oral Presentation             |
| RS8.30 | Using Visuals in Oral Presentations            |
| RS8.40 | Dealing with Nervousness in Oral Presentations |