Further readings and templates

# Chapter 10: Presentation skills

## Group presentations

There are a number of key issues to consider when preparing for and delivering a group presentation.

Preparing assessed group presentations is in many ways the same as preparing a group-based essay. The figure shows that the issues with a splitting up a group presentation in its preparation can be very evident in the final presentation.

**Figure: Stages in the Typical Development of a Group Presentation.**

1. Get the title from the tutor

2. Allocate parts of the presentation according to the number of group members

3. Meet to discuss (repeated as needed)

4. Compile visual aids and develop presentation tools and techniques

5. Rehearse to ensure consistency of style and get feedback from other group members

6. Perform as a group

As was noted in chapter 8, this is not the ideal when it comes to developing an essay, and is certainly not the ideal when it comes to preparing a group presentation. The problem is that it 1) tends to limit creativity within the group, 2) tends to enhance the impact of differences between presenters, 3) tends to lead to issues of co-ordination, and 4) increases the likelihood of errors in any visual aids used. Let’s look at each in turn.

*1) Limiting Creativity:*

In many cases, team presentations will take the following structure:

 Presenter one will introduce the overall topic, the group members and the topics each will be presenting;

 Presenter two will present their topic

 Presenter three will present a second topic

 Presenter four will give their third topic

 Presenter one will re-appear and give a conclusion.

The slides that each will use will probably be similar in format and one or two of the presenters might include a video or some audience interaction, but on the whole, each will do their piece and then hopefully introduce the next presenter who will give their part.

Contrast this with something where each part is presented by two people who interact and have a rehearsed discussion with each other and make the presentation far more engaging, or a presentation where at each presenter chooses to use a different form of visual aids and is able to comprehensively demonstrate how their topic links with those given by other presenters. Or finally, a presentation where the group works together to use song or some form of drama to answer the question. In the minds of most lecturers, these forms of presentation are far more interesting and are more likely to get higher marks for creativity than the more traditional (& probably less exciting) ‘typical’ presentation outlined above.

2) Enhances Differences between Presenters

A presentation outlined in the traditional way will tend to enable an assessor to identify differences between presenters very easily since every presenter will be doing almost the same things. That can be unhelpful because a poor presenter can come across as very poor because of the contrast between others who might be better. If the group has prepared the presentation in a very different way, then the comparisons between different presenters become irrelevant.

3) Produces Problems of Co-ordination

The key issue that those working to prepare group presentations need to be aware of is consistency. Assuming that the standard is good, the more consistent the presentation – in terms of the formatting of visual aids and delivery style – the higher the grade will probably be. The presentation will look professional and coordinated. However, where individuals are preparing their own part of the presentation, there is a likelihood that the final rehearsal may not occur until very close to the date of delivery. It is much more effective to develop a presentation together and then develop the materials around the structure, before delegating each part to different members for delivery. In that way, the group has prepared the presentation together and is likely to be working as a team.

4) Increases Likelihood of Errors in Visual Aids

It is fairly obvious that if people present a section of the presentation *and if* there is little time for rehearsal then formatting errors (e.g. use of different fonts, different sized lettering) and spelling errors and the likelihood of incorrect information will increase. Spelling mistakes are one of the most damaging aspects of assessed presentations, especially where they feature in the title of a slide.

The best way to avoid such issues is to ensure that all are involved in preparing the entire presentation together.

There are probably two key advantages in preparing a presentation as part of a group: namely, 1) that you can encourage each other in working together to produce something that can make individuals quite nervous, and 2) that as a group, you can give each other feedback in advance of the presentation. That feedback can help you as a group improve your content and delivery in a way that would not be possible if you were doing the presentation as an individual.

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| **Box: IF OTHERS ARE PRESENTING AND I’M GETTING NERVOUS, WHAT SHOULD I DO?**Group presentations can be well delivered, consistent in their visual aids, and group members can be smartly dressed, but they fail to impact on the audience because of the behaviour of those who are not presenting – or are waiting to present.It is common for group members to be lined up, either on the left or the right in the order in which they are presenting. The first presenter will stand at the front, and then will hand over to the group member standing next to them. So, there shouldn’t be any issues in behaviour, right?Wrong, actually. It is sadly very common (and very human) to see tensions arise amongst group members who are already very nervous and have no control over what is going on when someone else is speaking. That nervousness becomes even worse if they develop (or already have) a negative view of the person presenting and/or time is disappearing very quickly. Typically, it will show itself through… |
|  Constant moving of the head or legs Comments whispered to other group members Desperate attempts to make eye contact with the presenter |  Fixed eye contact towards either the presenter, the group leader or the ground Rustling of notes that the group member has brought. |
| This nervousness becomes dramatic when a group member has been speaking for much too long and is affecting the ability of the rest of the group to actually deliver their own content and the conclusion of the presentation. So, what should group members do?There are a number of things. Firstly, the group needs to **prepare itself for such situations** by developing a way for the group leader to communicate when individuals are speaking for too long. It is true that in the midst of a stressful presentation, such processes can be forgotten but if there is nothing at all, then the behaviour of some or all of the group can detract completely from the desired impact.Secondly, the **group needs to rehearse**. One of the benefits of rehearsing is that it can give a clear indication of where time needs to be cut back – if the presentation is done according to a strict time limit. If a group member comes along at the actual presentation without being involved in the rehearsal or previous preparation, then that needs to be made very clear to the assessors beforehand. Most lecturers will take a dim view of any such behaviour by an individual, but will gather details afterwards whilst allowing the presentation without the full list of group members.Thirdly, **be professional at all costs**: monitor your behaviour closely. Smile and act as if there are no problems: difficult to do but usually important. If there is a group leader, then it should be their responsibility to act and ensure that others do get some time to present: your role is to act as if there are no issues. If you have less time than you should have to present your content, then cut down what you need to present and DO NOT PRESENT EVERYTHING JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE PREPARED IT. One of the major mistakes groups make when presenting with very little time remaining is that they change nothing. As a result, they simply find that they run out of time. |

Group presentations can be great to do, but can be difficult to be a part of. They can provide mutual support and feedback for the group, but when things go wrong, can be stressful for group members who are unable to adapt what they have already prepared.