

## **Oral Presentations in Botany 330.**

Because this is a Comm. B course, oral presentations are part of the requirements. Here are some recommendations based on previous Botany 330 class presentations.

**Standing vs sitting presentation position.** In some professional settings it may be appropriate to remain seated during your presentation. One example would be if everyone were sitting around a table; in this case each speaker could be easily seen. However, in our classroom some seated speakers would be hidden from view by others.

In the past, I have noticed that everyone watched speakers who stood at the front of the room, perhaps because we were conscious that the speaker would notice if we didn't seem to be paying attention. In contrast, when speakers remained seated, we didn't all watch the speaker. This could give the speaker the impression that the audience isn't paying attention.

Even in situations where everyone is sitting around a table, you might want to consider standing for a presentation. This gives you more professional authority and may be especially helpful for people who don't have commanding voices. As a listener, when you can't see a speaker, make an effort to shift positions a bit so that you can make eye contact.

**Visual aids.** Presenting technical material in a professional setting often involves using unfamiliar terminology, as is the case for our presentations. If terms are unfamiliar to you, you can assume that at least some of your professional colleagues having similar backgrounds also will be unfamiliar with the terms. For this reason, it is always useful to write key terms or concepts in some way that everyone can see them. Further, some key terms may need to be defined in written form. This will aid listeners who are taking notes from your presentation. Even those who don't take notes will understand and remember what you said better if you write down key terms and ideas. (If you don't know how to pronounce a term or a person's name, find out how ahead of time.)

In our case, the chalkboard, signs, handouts, or overhead projector transparency are useful low-tech visual aid options. These methods have the advantage that they are useful even when high technology presentation is not possible or fails. Though you may use Powerpoint and the digital projector for your final oral presentation, the major advantage of projection is that it allows people sitting far away from a speaker in a large room to see the visual aids. (I use it mainly because the TA usually needs to fill the chalkboard with lab instructions prior to lecture time, and because the powerpoints are useful to students who've had to miss class.)

I usually have backup low-tech visual aids in case of technology failure. At scientific conferences and other settings, I have noticed that engineers and NASA employees tend to favor overhead transparencies (which can be printed in color from powerpoint files). (Do they know more about frequency of technology failure?) Overhead projectors are

low-cost, versatile, and widely available. For these and other reasons, overhead transparencies are my choice of backup visual aid. I once had to give an after-dinner presentation to hundreds of people in a hotel ballroom that turned out to lack facilities for digital projection. Fortunately, I had brought along overhead transparencies of my Powerpoint slides, which saved the day (for me, at least).

**Capturing and keeping listener attention.** People will pay closer attention to your presentation if you make eye contact with your audience and show enthusiasm for your subject. (Humans seem preadapted—maybe from watching for predators—to pay attention to moving objects.) But try not to go overboard with the body motion, unless you have designed a theatrical presentation, our next topic.

Under some professional circumstances, and our class is included, it is appropriate to use skits, songs, comedy or other theatrical means to transmit information in an entertaining way. You can be sure that your audience will remember your message! However, prior to designing a theatrical presentation obtain your supervisor's approval! Inappropriate language or dress will not be welcome in most science professional settings.

**Opening and final words.** I recommend starting your presentations with a powerful opening and/or closing statement. Short, succinct opening and closing statements can really attract listener attention and aid memory.