Oral Communication Toolkit

Developed by members of the Griffith Graduate Project
Griffith Institute for Higher Education
http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe/griffith_graduate/
Purpose of this Toolkit

The Toolkits developed by members of the Griffith Graduate Project are intended primarily for academic staff. They offer an overview of some of the main issues related to developing students’ graduate skills during their degree studies.

They draw extensively on existing literature and current practice in universities around the world and include numerous references and links to useful web resources.

They are not comprehensive ‘guides’ or ‘how to’ booklets. Rather, they incorporate the perspectives of academic staff, students, graduates and employers on the graduate skills adopted by Griffith University in its Strategic Plan, 2003-2007 in the *Griffith Graduate Statement:*

This Toolkit, *Oral Communication Skills,* focuses on how you can help students with their speaking and presentation skills while studying at university.

This toolkit, together with others in the series including:

- Critical Evaluation;
- Information Literacy;
- Professional Skills;
- Problem-Solving;
- Teamwork; and
- Written Communication;

can also be accessed on the Web at:
http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe/griffith_graduate/home.html
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Why your students need effective oral communication skills

Definition

Communication skills include the mix of verbal, interpersonal and physical strategies needed to interact confidently and effectively with a range of audiences. A skilful communicator draws on a number of different means (e.g., graphical, visual, statistical, audio-visual and technological) to get the point across.

Effective oral communication skills help students to:

- improve their own academic performance;
- increase their employment options;
- enhance their subsequent professional competence; and
- improve their own personal effectiveness.

Employers value good oral communication skills because:

- staff need to interact effectively and productively in, and on behalf of, the organisation;
- listening to and conveying information accurately is crucial;
- giving instructions and explanations clearly is essential; and
- engaging in constructive debate and contributing to meetings and committees is fundamental to the success of the organisation.

Australian research has found that the important elements of communication identified by small, medium and large enterprises are:

- listening and understanding;
- speaking clearly and directly;
- writing to the needs of the audience;
- negotiating responsively;
- reading independently;
- empathising;
- using numeracy effectively;
- understanding the needs of internal and external customers;
- persuading effectively;
- establishing and using networks;
- being assertive;
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- sharing information; and
- speaking and writing in languages other than English.


At the same time, this research found that graduates showed the greatest performance shortfall in:

- Creativity and flair;
- Oral business communications; and
- Problem solving.


“Employers see communication skills as critical to customer service and workplace harmony, effective operations and productivity.”


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What employers, graduates and students say about oral communication skills

Employers’ comments

“We actually give a test. I say to them ‘[Imagine that] I know nothing at all about risk. Here is a scenario. Explain to me firstly the process that you would use to analyse the risks in this situation and how you would communicate those risks to me.’ That is certainly daunting and it is not something that a lot of people working in our industry could do easily, but it sorts the wheat from the chaff very quickly… I look for the people who will lead up to the whiteboard, because the easiest way to explain is to draw it out.” (Employer of Griffith Criminology and Criminal Justice Graduates, 2001)

“[During the interview] I get them to describe their thesis project. I say to them, ‘Here is a whiteboard; here is a pen. Tell me what you did.’ I then ask them some hard questions to see how they go with a bit of stress.” (Employer of Griffith Microelectronic Engineering Graduates, 2001)

Graduates’ comments

“Too much focus [at university] was placed on formal presentations, whereas the majority of oral communication used in employment is round-table discussion.” (Environmental Engineering Graduate, 2002)

“My oral communication skills needed development [when I started work], as I found that even though I was highly skilled or suited for promotion, I needed to promote myself at interviews to gain the positions. It is usually the person best able to promote themselves at interviews who gets the job.” (Marketing Graduate, 2003)

“In our Industrial Affiliates Program we had to give two short talks about our thesis project and I found that they were excellent for improving oral communication - just the way you present yourself and your topic. Like, the first one for me was a disaster, but the second one was fine. More of those would be good.” (Griffith Graduate, 2001)

“[We did] ‘walk throughs’ - that was where you got up in front of your class each week in groups of two or three and you would have to communicate what you were doing and how far you’d got with your project, what problems you had encountered, whether you would survive and even hopefully help somebody else. So at the same time as we were reporting on our prac work, we were also developing our presentation skills.” (Griffith Graduate 2003)

“Although I hate public speaking, the only way to get over the fear is to do it often. I don’t think we were required to do enough oral presentations.” (Griffith Graduate, 2002)

“We needed more practice in different modes of communication.” (Griffith Graduate, 2002)
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Students’ comments

“In four out of my five courses this semester I have to do a formal oral presentation, so I certainly have the opportunity to develop my oral presentation skills, which is great, because I’ve never found that sort of thing easy.” (Griffith student, 2004)

“Gaining good oral communication skills as a student allows me to enjoy activities both inside and outside my academic work.” (Griffith student, 2004)

“Good oral communication skills aid students in finding new information sources, and expressing ideas and opinions for feedback and clarification.” (Griffith student, 2004)

Research shows

“In study after study, communication skills emerge as one of the most important, if not the most important quality that employers require of graduates. Possessing good communication skills is often seen by employers as an indicator of potential success.”

Teaching tips - How to develop your students’ oral communication skills

Opportunities to use oral communication skills

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<td><strong>Seminar presentation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poster presentation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The viva</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conference presentation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Meeting scenarios</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some relevant material can be found on the following web sites:

**Tutorial presentations**

Virtual Presentation Assistant:  
http://www.ku.edu/~coms/virtual_assistant/vpa/vpa.htm

PowerPoint Tutorials:  
http://www.electricteacher.com/tutorial3.htm

**Seminar presentations**

Seminar Presentations:  
http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/tutsem.html

Seminar Presentations: Guidance Notes:  
http://www.mantex.co.uk/ou/a811/a811-01.htm

**Poster presentations**

Designing Effective Posters:  
http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEEd/jradel/Poster_Presentations/PstrStart.html

Poster Presentation of Research Work:  
http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/Dept/Tips/present/posters.htm
Developing an oral presentation

Help students to confront fears

“Fear of public speaking consistently tops every list of human fears. In an often-cited 1993 study done by the polling firm Bruskin-Goldring, forty five percent of those surveyed said they feared public speaking. Thirty percent said they feared death. In a study of 3,000 Americans published in the Book of Lists (David Wallechinsky, Little, Brown, 1995), the number one fear cited by forty one percent of those studied was speaking to an audience.”


According to Wilder (1999) this fear can be attributed to, or caused by the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilder’s Five Fears of Public Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career terror</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perfectionism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trauma</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Managing student presentation anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convincing students of need</th>
<th>When students understand the importance of oral communication in their studies and future professional role, they will actively participate in class activities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model behaviour from week one</td>
<td>Establish a routine of dialogue in the first class session to set the pattern for subsequent weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icebreakers</td>
<td>Involve whole class in speaking in safe, interesting, fun ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be forthcoming</td>
<td>Provide information about yourself, your interests and background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First meeting tasks</td>
<td>Try to include some two-person tasks in first class. Then pyramid into a four-person group, which pools ideas and reports outcomes to class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities</td>
<td>Include regular opportunities in class for oral expression, building from small tasks to larger tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide feedback</td>
<td>Use peers to provide feedback – this allows for both sides to benefit from the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>For formative and summative assessment – ask students to evaluate their own oral performance on pre-set criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom arrangement</td>
<td>Use seating patterns which allow eye contact between students, not just between students and teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modular furniture</td>
<td>Use tables and chairs that aren’t fixed, if possible, as this allows moving from large group to sub-groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Identifying the audience is an important first step

Students need to understand the importance of ‘audience’

Identifying the audience and speaking ‘for’ them, not just ‘to’ or ‘at’ them, is essential for effective oral communication. For example, an employer interviewed as part of Harvey’s study (1999) said:

In relation to their organisation, communicating effectively requires the ability to deal with different members of the team. When producing a brochure, for example, this will mean working with people internally as well as externally with suppliers, photographers and printers. Effective communication involves all levels, from the chairman down, and is therefore an absolutely key element.

Why not:
Ask students to identify their audience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist: Identifying the audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will be in the audience? (e.g., lecturer, peers, colleagues, potential employers, practising professionals, general public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will the audience already know about the subject? (lots, a bit, not much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will they be interested in it? Why should they be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will they expect from the presentation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much background should I present so that they will understand the current situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone else talked to them about this subject, and if so, what did they say? Can I build on what has gone before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will they be receptive or hostile towards the subject? How will I deal with this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will they know anything about me? What will they need to know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should my presentation be formal or informal?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategies for analysing the audience

When preparing the presentation, it is useful for students to anticipate how their audience may respond. Analysis of likely audience composition will help achieve this.

Why not:
Ask students to consider the following:

**Audience demographics**

- What cultural factors will influence how the audience receives the message?
- What is the average age of the audience?
- What gender is the audience?
- What are the educational and intellectual levels of the audience?
- What are the occupations, incomes, and status of the audience?
- What are the religious affiliations of the audience?
- What are the political affiliations of the audience?

**Physical analysis**

- What is the size of the audience? A larger audience suggests a more formal presentation, while a smaller audience allows speakers to be less formal.
Teaching tips

- Where will the presentation be delivered? Know if you will be speaking indoors or outdoors and whether you will be able to utilise technology if your presentation calls for it.
- What is the occasion of this presentation? Are you an invited guest or someone the audience has to listen to?
- What time of the day will the presentation be given? Obviously, it is important to consider this, as speakers will have different expectations of a morning audience and an afternoon audience. Be sure to tailor the message to the time of day.
- What is the sequence of events? Will the presentation be first, in the middle, or last? This is important to know so that you will be able to adapt to other messages and plan your time accordingly.

Psychological analysis

- How willing is the audience to listen to the message? If they are compelled to be there, be sure to give them specific reasons to listen.
- How favourable is the audience towards you and the topic? If you think that your audience will be unfavourable, stress commonalities of interest.
- How knowledgeable is the audience? Don’t talk down to your audience or talk over their heads so that no one understands what you are saying.
- How homogenous is your audience? If the audience is made up of people with similar backgrounds and interests, it is easier to conduct an audience analysis. If your audience is made up of individuals who have different attitudes, values, and beliefs, it is more difficult to determine how you can persuade everyone.

http://ustudies.semo.edu/oralcom/str_anal_audience.htm

Structuring the information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas to structure a presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A summary statement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An ordering principle</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **A logical structure using sections** | Introduction  
Body  
Conclusion |
| **Linking ideas and transitions** | Link ideas in the various sections together with connecting or transitional words such as:  
- First, I’d like to deal with…  
- My second point is…  
- When I’ve dealt with these points I will…  
- And finally… |

Some relevant material can be found at:
Outlining your Points:
http://www.ku.edu/~coms/virtual_assistant/vpa/vpa.htm
Checklist for preparing an oral presentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is my introduction:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Short?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attention-getting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduce the topic thoroughly?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flag the direction of the presentation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish my own credibility?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the body of my presentation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stick to the basic theme?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Present relevant evidence?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flow logically?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does my conclusion:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summarise the main points?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Draw all my arguments and evidence together?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Point forwards or suggest work still to be done?</td>
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Delivery

Mastering the art of delivery

Consider each of the following delivery methods

<table>
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<td>Memorising</td>
<td>Avoid trying to memorise an entire speech. You’re likely to forget your lines and the speech can sound stiff and stilted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>However, memorising a quotation, an opening paragraph, or a few concluding remarks can bolster your confidence and strengthen your delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>You may wish to read technical information, policy statements or items where the wording must be accurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you choose to read your speech, practise so that you can still maintain eye contact with the audience. Use double- or triple-spaced copy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wide margins and large type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking from notes</td>
<td>Use an outline, note cards, or visual aids. This is probably the most effective and the easiest delivery mode. It gives you something to refer to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and still allows for eye contact and interaction with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impromptu speaking</td>
<td>Avoid speaking unprepared unless you’ve spoken many times on the same topic, or are an extremely good public speaker. If you have to speak off the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cuff, take a few minutes to think through what you’re going to say.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Choice of words

Use words that are appropriate to the audience – what’s right for a seminar presentation to fellow students may not be right for a conference presentation. Pronounce each word clearly and slowly. Most people talk too fast for their audience. Suggest students vary their expression – use the volume, pitch, tone and pace of their voice to interest the audience and to indicate emphasis.
Suggest students practise until they can speak from notes (in some disciplines and some contexts, reading from paper is acceptable). Some people like to use cue cards – it’s a good idea to number them in case they fall on the floor.

Why not:

Ask your students to consider how they would:

**Nail the first three minutes to avoid going down in flames**

The first three minutes of any presentation are the most important. Consider beginning with a startling fact, joke, question, quotation or story.

**Question:** Asking a challenging question is one of the most basic ways of getting an audience’s attention.

**Tell a good joke or anecdote:** Ensure the joke or anecdote is appropriate to the audience, and the subject of the presentation.

**Tell a story:** Use a story that is related the presentation. Use your own experience. Use an experience the audience can relate to.

**Facts and quotations:** Use facts or quotations that relate to the topic and to the audience.

**Memorise the opening:** If you have the first three minutes of your presentation word-, intonation- and gesture-perfect, you can be more informal with the remainder of the presentation.

Adapted from: Hall, J. *Nail your first three minutes to avoid going down in flames.* 3M Meeting Network Articles & Advice. (Retrieved from Web 16 September 2004) [http://www.mmm.com/meetingnetwork/presentations/pmag_three_minutes.html](http://www.mmm.com/meetingnetwork/presentations/pmag_three_minutes.html)

**Establish a dialogue with their audience**

- **Ask a direct question** to one member of the audience – it’s better than just making a statement to begin with and puts the focus on the audience – not you.
- **Make a startling statement** or ask a provocative question – then lead into your main points.
- **Describe a shared experience** – one that connects the speaker and the audience, e.g., “Where were you when you heard about JFK’s assassination?”
- **Give the latest news** - something that will get the audience into a good mood, wanting to listen to you.
- **Ask your audience to do something** – take a show of hands, stand and stretch, tell one another’s names, imagine something vivid, and relate it to the talk which is going to follow.
- **Relate an anecdote or tell a joke** – if they are funny and appropriate to audience and topic. Be careful.
- **Give a demonstration** – use props.
- **Ask a barrage of questions** (perhaps using visuals) – lots of questions about the same thing.

Plan the non-verbal elements of delivery:
- Words are 7% effective in getting the message across;
- Tone of voice is 38% effective; and
- Non-verbal clues are 55% effective.

Non-verbal clues include:
- Body language (e.g., arms crossed, standing, sitting, relaxed, tense),
- Emotion of the sender and receiver (e.g., yelling, speaking provocatively or enthusiastically)
- Other connections between people such as relationships (e.g. being friends or enemies); professional and personal similarities or differences that may be influenced by age, philosophies, attitudes and expectations.

Adapted from: Improving Verbal Skills. (Retrieved from World Wide Web 16 September 2004)
http://www.itstime.com/aug97.htm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emblems</td>
<td>Emblems are nonverbal acts learnt through imitation.</td>
<td>To reinforce or replace the words.</td>
<td>The nonverbal signal for ‘okay’ is a nod or a smile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrators</td>
<td>Illustrators are nonverbal acts that relate to, and illustrate, the spoken word.</td>
<td>To accentuate or emphasise a word or phrase.</td>
<td>A nod of the head and wave of the arm in a certain direction, accompanying the words “over there”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective (or feeling) displays</td>
<td>Affective displays are changes in facial expression that display emotion.</td>
<td>Unconscious displays reflect feelings, whereas intentional expressions can disguise or hide feelings.</td>
<td>Facial muscles may ‘drop’ with surprise or shock; a smile may be used to deceive or disarm the listener.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulators</td>
<td>Nods and other head movements are nonverbal acts that regulate communication between people.</td>
<td>To maintain and control the flow of speaking and listening. Regulators indicate whether to continue, repeat, elaborate or change from speaker to listener.</td>
<td>A nod to encourage another person to continue speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptors</td>
<td>Nonverbal acts performed unconsciously in response to some inner desire.</td>
<td>To display instinctive responses.</td>
<td>Scratching an itchy ear; raising the arms in shock or horror.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going live

Here are some suggestions that may assist your students in their actual delivery

Helpful hints

- You have about 30 seconds to make a good impression and establish your credibility as a speaker;
- Unless you can engage your audience quickly, you’ll lose them;
- You need to tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you have told them;
- Try explaining the topic of your presentation, before the presentation, to someone who doesn’t know anything about it, and see if they get the message;
- Use a mental picture of your presentation to help establish the ‘flow;’
- Keep checking your presentation to see which section contains what information;
- Use transitions as ‘signposts’ to show the audience where you’ve come from, where you are now, and where you are going next;
- Look directly out into the audience, and focus on one or two faces to begin with;
- Raise your head so your voice projects into the audience;
- Ask questions immediately and listen to the answers;
- Use hand and eye gestures when appropriate, usually for emphasis;
- Use your whole body to express enthusiasm and energy; and
- Try smiling!

Why not:

Suggest that your students:

- Ask a searching question;
- Make a challenging statement;
- Relate a story or anecdote for illustration
- Stress your main points repeatedly;
- Use simple language; and
- To conclude, ask a rhetorical question, if you know the answer!
Handling questions

Give students plenty of opportunities to practise handling questions from the audience:

**Practice makes perfect**
- Advise students to rehearse in advance, with friends or colleagues, some of the kinds of questions that they think the audience might ask, so they can prepare answers;
- Questions can be unnerving if they are unexpected. However, students can always admit that while they don’t know the answer right now, they can follow it up;
- Ask the questioner to restate the question if it’s not clear;
- Thank them for the question;
- Repeat it back to them (this clarifies it and allows the student time to think), and then give an answer; and
- Don’t overwhelm the questioner with information in response.

Remind students to:

**Be prepared**
- React to the question – look at the person asking the question – nod your head – acknowledge the question;
- Let the questioner finish – resist the temptation to jump in;
- Rephrase the question – gives the audience the chance to hear the question, helps you clarify and gives you time to respond;
- Respond to everyone – start with eye contact with the questioner then address your answer to the whole audience;
- Refer to the central theme of the speech – reinforce your key points;
- Respect the questioner – say it’s a good question. Disagree (if necessary) without being disagreeable;
- Feel free to postpone an answer – don’t feel obliged to know the answer. Be honest;
- Throw the question back to the group – either for an answer you don’t know – or to continue engaging the audience;
- Pause strategically – gives you and the audience time to think. Allow time for questions to be raised; and
- Be a sleuth. Watch and listen to your audience – are they getting it? Watch body language. Respond accordingly.

Visual aids

Use of visual aids

Some tips for students when using visual aids:

- Have everything you will need arranged in front of you;
- Check the technology beforehand;
- If using PowerPoint, make sure you have the slides on a duplicate disk and as OHTs – it’s amazing how often technology doesn’t work;
- Only include five or six bulleted lines per slide;
- Use each slide to demonstrate one idea;
- Allow about two minutes per slide to explain the main points (longer, if statistics need to be explained);
- Provide hard copy handouts so that the audience has a record of the presentation afterwards.
- Check that the audience can read the slide or OHT;

- Use a large font size, e.g., 24 or 28 or 36.

Some relevant material is available at:

Designing Effective Visuals:
http://www.kume.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Effective_visuals/VisStrt.html

Making Overhead Transparencies:
http://www.le.unsw.edu.au/onlib/tutsem4.html
How to assess your student’s oral communication skills

What are you going to assess – content, delivery, or both?

Content is important, but so is delivery. Without effective delivery, the content gets lost, the audience loses attention, and the message is not heard.

By focusing only on assessing content, you could be doing your students a disservice. Will their future employers bother to listen if the message gets lost through poor delivery?

Both content and delivery need to be assessed.

Assessment in practice

Students value what their teachers assess. If you assess students’ oral communication skills, then they need plenty of practice in class. Some suggestions for assessing oral communication skills:

- Negotiate the assessment criteria with students – ask them what makes an effective oral presentation; what they look for themselves in a presentation; ask them to nominate an effective speaker with whom they are familiar (e.g., from politics, the media) and then analyse what it is that they do so well; choose some of these features to build into the assessment criteria;
- Specify particular weightings for the various criteria if appropriate; make sure students know that their delivery style will be assessed as well as their material and ideas;
- Give students opportunities to have their practice presentations critiqued within the class; use videos for constructive criticism, from the group, you as teacher, and the individual presenter; the practice presentations need only be a few minutes long;
- Use peer assessment – ask students to use the negotiated criteria to evaluate the presentations on a number of different dimensions; as teacher, reserve the right to moderate the student’s final grade;
- Include the question and answer section of the oral presentation in the assessment;
- Break large classes into smaller groups, each running peer assessment sessions concurrently; enlist tutors or sessional staff to supervise each session; and
- Don’t overdo the number of oral presentations students give – one or two at the most during the course is fine, if the feedback is constructive.

Some relevant material can be found at:

Name of site:
http://www.artsnet.soton.ac.uk/learning_teaching/assessment/assessing_oralp.htm

Assessment Criteria Checklist – Oral Presentations:
http://www.city.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations/seda-pubs/Donaldson.html
Using criteria sheets to assess oral presentations

The following table illustrates the incremental progression of students’ oral presentation skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A criteria sheet for assessing students’ oral presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication aids</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student uses superfluous aids or no aids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student occasionally uses aids that rarely support text and presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ aids relate to text and presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ aids explain and reinforce screen text and presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ presentation has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eye contact</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student reads all of report with no eye contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral delivery</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal appearance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appearance is inappropriate for the occasion and intended audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some aspects of appearance reflect a lack of sensitivity to nuances of the occasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appearance is generally appropriate for the occasion and audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appearance is completely appropriate for the occasion and the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to questions inadequately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misses some opportunities for interaction and does not always comfortably handle questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally responds to audience comments, questions and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently clarifies, restates, and responds to questions. Summarises when needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessing presentations

Being able to speak convincingly and authoritatively is a useful career skill for students. One of the best ways to help them develop such skills is to involve them in giving assessed presentations. The following suggestions may help your students get the most from such activities:

- **Be clear about the purposes of student presentations.** For example, the main purpose could be to develop students' skills at giving presentations, or it could be to cause them to do research and reading to improve their subject knowledge. Usually, several such factors are involved together.

- **Make the criteria for assessment of presentations clear from the outset.** Students will not then be working in a vacuum and will know what is expected of them.

- **Get students involved in the assessment criteria.** This can be done by allowing them to negotiate the criteria themselves, or by giving them plenty of opportunities to interrogate criteria you share with them.

- **Ensure that students understand the weighting of the criteria.** Help them to know whether the most important aspects of their presentations are to do with the way they deliver their contributions (voice, clarity of expression, articulation, body language, use of audio-visual aids and so on), or the content of their presentations (evidence of research, originality of ideas, effectiveness of argument, ability to answer questions, etc.).

- **Give students some prior practice at assessing presentations.** It is useful, for example, to give students a dry run at applying the assessment criteria they have devised in one or two presentations on video. The discussion that this produces usually helps to clarify or improve the assessment criteria.

- **Involve students in the assessment of their presentations.** When given the chance to assess one another’s presentations, students take them more seriously and will learn from the experience. Students merely watching one another’s presentations can get bored and switch off mentally. If they are evaluating each presentation using an agreed set of criteria, they tend to engage themselves more fully in the process, and in doing so, learn more from the content of each presentation.

- **Ensure that assessment criteria span presentation processes and the content of the presentations sensibly.** It can be worth reserving some marks for students’ abilities to handle questions after their presentations.

- **Make up grids using criteria that have been agreed.** Allocate each criterion a weighting, and try getting all members of the group to fill in the grids for each presentation. The average peer-assessment mark is likely to be at least as good an estimate of the relative worth of each presentation as would be the view of a single tutor doing the assessment.

- **Be realistic about what can be achieved.** It is not possible to get 12 five-minute presentations into an hour, and presentations always tend to over-run. It is also difficult to get students to concentrate for more than an hour or two on others’ presentations. Where classes are large, consider breaking the audience into groups, for example dividing a class of 100 into four groups, with students presenting concurrently in different rooms, or at different timetabled slots.

- **Think about the venue.** Students do not always give of their best in large, echoing, tiered lecture theatres. A more intimate, flat classroom is less threatening particularly for inexperienced presenters.
Consider using videotapes. This can allow the presenters themselves the opportunity to review their performances, and can allow you to assess presentations at a time most suitable to you. Viewing a selection of recorded presentations from earlier rounds can be useful for establishing assessment criteria with students. This evidence of teaching and learning is also useful to show external examiners and external reviewers.

Start small. Mini-presentations of a few minutes can be almost as valuable as 20-minute presentations for learning the ropes, especially as introductions to the task of standing up and addressing the peer-group.

Check what other presentations students may be doing. Sometimes it can seem that everyone is including presentations in their courses. If students find themselves giving three or four within a month or two, it can be very demanding on their time, and repetitious regarding the processes.

Assessing Oral Presentations and Group Work.
http://www.artsnet.soton.ac.uk/learning_teaching/assessment/assessing_oralp.htm
Principles of effective oral communication

Prepare

Leave plenty of time for researching the topic;
Take time to draft, and redraft;
Develop slides, or OHTs that support, rather than summarise the presentation; and
Narrow the topic so it is manageable in the given time.

Identify the audience

Find out who they will be;
Find out about their level of knowledge or experience in the topic area; and
Decide what you will have to do to convince or persuade them.

Structure the presentation so it

Flows logically;
Proceeds through an introduction, body and conclusion;
Hangs together, with transitions between ideas and sections;
Builds to a strong conclusion; and
Stays within the time limit.

Practise

In front of a mirror;
Into a tape recorder or onto a video; or
Before a group of family or friends.

Engage with the audience by

Using eye contact;
Establishing credibility;
Using simple words;
Emphasising and repeating the main points;
Using ‘signposts’;
Varying tone and pace; and
Smiling.
Enhance your presentation with

Well chosen and relevant slides or OHTs that are clear, easy to read and attractive to look at; and
Simple, uncluttered graphics.

Try to stay calm by

Rehearsing the presentation in advance;
Taking some deep breaths; and
Remembering that EVERYONE feels nervous in front of an audience.
Where to go for help

Contact

The Griffith Graduate Project (Stage 6)

Dr Gay Crebert
Griffith Institute for Higher Education
Griffith University
Ph. (07) 3875 5981
Email: G.Crebert@griffith.edu.au

Ms Carol-joy Patrick
School of Microelectronic Engineering
Griffith University
Ph. (07) 3875 5007
Email: CJ.Patrick@griffith.edu.au

Learning Services

Support is available - You are not alone!

Oral Communication is an area where the University has recognised that support is crucial. Learning Services has teams of learning advisers here to work with you. They can:

- advise you on teaching, learning and assessment strategies; and
- team teach with you in your lectures and tutorials.

There are also services to which you can refer your students so that they can independently develop their oral communication skills. These include:

- individual or small group consultations with a learning adviser;
- workshops;
- self-help resources.

For more information on these services, visit:
http://www.griffith.edu.au/ins/training/

Library

Faculty Librarian Team Leaders

Arts and Education
Di Selzer
D.Selzer@griffith.edu.au
338 21217 (Logan)
55528278 (Gold Coast)
Business and Law
Colette Smith-Strong
C.Strong@griffith.edu.au
387.57245 (Nathan)

Health and Science
Veronica Dawson
V.Dawson@griffith.edu.au
387.57256 (Nathan)
This toolkit draws on various print and web resources, which are acknowledged in text. Other useful resources are included in the following list.

**Print resources**


**Web resources**

Could oral communication skills become a casualty of online learning?: A future scenario that could prevent this:

Flexible delivery of communication skills to science students: A faculty wide project (University of Tasmania):

Packing your essentials: Skills that will see you through your career:
http://www.careerpathsonline.com/skills/article.html#developingskills
A collection of ready-to-use resources associated with various aspects of facilitating, teaching and assessing oral communication.

1. Principles of effective oral communication
2. What employers, graduates and students say about oral communication skills
3. Checklists for students
4. Making a good impression on the audience
5. Delivering an oral presentation
6. Dealing with questions
7. Visual aids
8. Using criteria sheets for assessing oral presentations
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Simple, uncluttered graphics.

Try to stay calm by

Rehearsing the presentation in advance;
Taking some deep breaths;
Remembering that EVERYONE feels nervous in front of an audience.
What employers, graduates and students say about oral communication skills

Employers’ comments

“We actually give a test. I say to them ‘[Imagine that] I know nothing at all about risk. Here is a scenario. Explain to me firstly the process that you would use to analyse the risks in this situation and how you would communicate those risks to me.’ That is certainly daunting and it is not something that a lot of people working in our industry could do easily, but it sorts the wheat from the chaff very quickly… I look for the people who will lead up to the whiteboard, because the easiest way to explain is to draw it out.” (Employer of Griffith Criminology and Criminal Justice Graduates, 2001)

“[During the interview] I get them to describe their thesis project. I say to them, ‘Here is a whiteboard; here is a pen. Tell me what you did.’ I then ask them some hard questions to see how they go with a bit of stress.” (Employer of Griffith Microelectronic Engineering Graduates, 2001)

Graduates’ comments

“Our oral communication skills needed development [when I started work], as I found that even though I was highly skilled or suited for promotion, I needed to promote myself at interviews to gain the positions. It is usually the person best able to promote themselves at interviews who gets the job.” (Marketing Graduate, 2003)

“In our Industrial Affiliates Program we had to give two short talks about our thesis project and I found that they were excellent for improving oral communication - just the way you present yourself and your topic. Like, the first one for me was a disaster, but the second one was fine. More of those would be good.” (Griffith Graduate, 2003)

“We needed more practice in different modes of communication.” (Griffith Graduate, 2002)

Students’ comments

“In four out of my five courses this semester I have to do a formal oral presentation, so I certainly have the opportunity to develop my oral presentation skills, which is great, because I’ve never found that sort of thing easy.” (Griffith student, 2004)

“Gaining good oral communication skills as a student allows me to enjoy activities both inside and outside my academic work.” (Griffith student, 2004)

“Good oral communication skills aid students in finding new information sources, and expressing ideas and opinions for feedback and clarification.” (Griffith student, 2004)
Checklists for students

Identifying the audience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist: Identifying the audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will be in the audience? (e.g., lecturer, peers, colleagues, potential employers, practising professionals, general public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will the audience already know about the subject? (lots, a bit, not much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will they be interested in it? Why should they be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will they expect from the presentation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much background should I present so that they will understand the current situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone else talked to them about this subject, and if so, what did they say? Can I build on what has gone before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will they be receptive or hostile towards the subject? How will I deal with this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will they know anything about me? What will they need to know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should my presentation be formal or informal?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Structuring the information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas to structure a presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A summary statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ordering principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A logical structure using sections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking ideas and transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparing an oral presentation

Checklist for preparing an oral presentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is my introduction:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Short?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attention-getting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduce the topic thoroughly?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flag the direction of the presentation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish my own credibility?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the body of my presentation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stick to the basic theme?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Present relevant evidence?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flow logically?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does my conclusion:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summarise the main points?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Draw all my arguments and evidence together?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Point forwards or suggest work still to be done?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before delivering the presentation...

Consider each of the following delivery methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memorising</td>
<td>Avoid trying to memorise an entire speech. You’re likely to forget your lines and the speech can sound stiff and stilted. However, memorising a quotation, an opening paragraph, or a few concluding remarks can bolster your confidence and strengthen your delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>You may wish to read technical information, policy statements or items where the wording must be accurate. If you choose to read your speech, practise so that you can still maintain eye contact with the audience. Use double- or triple-spaced copy, wide margins and large type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking from notes</td>
<td>Use an outline, note cards, or visual aids. This is probably the most effective and the easiest delivery mode. It gives you something to refer to and still allows for eye contact and interaction with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impromptu speaking</td>
<td>Avoid speaking unprepared unless you’ve spoken many times on the same topic, or are an extremely good public speaker. If you have to speak ‘off the cuff,’ take a few minutes to think through what you’re going to say.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Making a good impression on the audience

Nail your first three minutes to avoid going down in flames

The first three minutes of any presentation are the most important. Consider beginning with a startling fact, joke, question, quotation or story.

**Question:** Asking a challenging question is one of the most basic ways of getting an audience’s attention.

**Tell a good joke or anecdote:** Ensure the joke or anecdote is appropriate to the audience, and the subject of the presentation.

**Tell a story:** Use a story that is related to the presentation. Use your own experience. Use an experience the audience can relate to.

**Facts and quotations:** Use facts or quotations that relate to the topic and to the audience.

**Memorise the opening:** If you have the first three minutes of your presentation word-, intonation- and gesture-perfect, you can be more informal with the remainder of the presentation.


Establish a dialogue with your audience

- **Ask a direct question** to one member of the audience – it’s better than just making a statement to begin with and puts the focus on the audience – not you.
- **Make a startling statement** or ask a provocative question – then lead into your main points.
- **Describe a shared experience** – one that connects the speaker and the audience, e.g., “Where were you when you heard about JFK’s assassination?”
- **Give the latest news** - something that will get the audience into a good mood, wanting to listen to you.
- **Ask your audience to do something** – take a show of hands, stand and stretch, tell one another’s names, imagine something vivid, and relate it to the talk which is going to follow.
- **Relate an anecdote or tell a joke** – if they are funny and appropriate to audience and topic. Be careful.
- **Give a demonstration** – use props.
- **Ask a barrage of questions** (perhaps using visuals) – lots of questions about the same thing.

ORAL COMMUNICATION

Delivering an oral presentation

Going live

Here are some suggestions that may assist your students in their actual delivery.

Helpful hints

- You have about 30 seconds to make a good impression and establish your credibility as a speaker;
- Unless you can engage your audience quickly, you’ll lose them;
- You need to tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you have told them;
- Try explaining the topic of your presentation, before the presentation, to someone who doesn’t know anything about it, and see if they get the message;
- Use a mental picture of your presentation to help establish the ‘flow’;
- Keep checking your presentation to see which section contains what information;
- Use transitions as ‘signposts’ to show the audience where you’ve come from, where you are now, and where you are going next;
- Look directly out into the audience, and focus on one or two faces to begin with;
- Raise your head so your voice projects into the audience;
- Ask questions immediately and listen to the answers;
- Use hand and eye gestures when appropriate, usually for emphasis;
- Use your whole body to express enthusiasm and energy; and
- Try smiling!

Why not:

- Ask a searching question;
- Make a challenging statement;
- Relate a story or anecdote for illustration
- Stress your main points repeatedly;
- Use simple language; and
- To conclude, ask a rhetorical question, if you know the answer!
Dealing with questions

Handling questions

**Practice makes perfect**
- Rehearse in advance, with friends or colleagues, some of the kinds of questions that you think the audience might ask, so you can prepare answers;
- Questions can be unnerving if they are unexpected. However, you can always admit that while you don’t know the answer right now, you can follow it up later;
- Ask the questioner to restate the question if it’s not clear;
- Thank them for the question;
- Repeat it back to them (this clarifies it and allows you time to think), and then give an answer; and
- Don’t overwhelm the questioner with information in response.

**Be prepared**
- React to the question – look at the person asking the question – nod your head – acknowledge the question;
- Let the questioner finish – resist the temptation to jump in;
- Rephrase the question – gives audience the chance to hear question, helps you clarify and gives you time to respond;
- Respond to everyone – start with eye contact with the questioner then address your answer to the whole audience;
- Refer to the central theme of the speech – reinforce your key points;
- Respect the questioner – say it’s a good question. Disagree (if necessary) without being disagreeable;
- Feel free to postpone an answer – don’t feel obliged to know the answer. Be honest;
- Throw the question back to the group – either for an answer you don’t know – or to continue engaging the audience;
- Pause strategically – gives you and the audience time to think. Allow time for questions to be raised; and
- Be a sleuth. Watch and listen to your audience – are they getting it? Watch body language. Respond accordingly.

Richardson, D. *Don’t take Q&A sessions for granted: Be prepared.* 3M Meeting Network. Articles& Advice. (Retrieved from the Web 16 September 2004)

http://www.mmm.com/meetingnetwork/presentations/pmag_qa_session.html
Visual aids

Use of visual aids

Some tips for using visual aids:

- Have everything you will need arranged in front of you;
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Making Overhead Transparencies:
# Using criteria sheets for assessing oral presentations

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>Subject knowledge</td>
<td>Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.</td>
<td>Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.</td>
<td>Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication aids</td>
<td>Student uses superfluous aids or no aids.</td>
<td>Student occasionally uses aids that rarely support text and presentation.</td>
<td>Student’s aids relate to text and presentation.</td>
<td>Student’s aids explain and reinforce screen text and presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>Student’s presentation has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact</td>
<td>Student reads all of report with no eye contact.</td>
<td>Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.</td>
<td>Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.</td>
<td>Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral delivery</td>
<td>Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.</td>
<td>Student’s voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.</td>
<td>Student’s voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.</td>
<td>Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appearance</td>
<td>Personal appearance is inappropriate for the occasion and intended audience.</td>
<td>Some aspects of appearance reflect a lack of sensitivity to nuances of the occasion.</td>
<td>Personal appearance is generally appropriate for the occasion and audience.</td>
<td>Personal appearance is completely appropriate for the occasion and the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Responds to questions inadequately.</td>
<td>Misses some opportunities for interaction and does not always comfortably handle questions.</td>
<td>Generally responds to audience comments, questions and needs.</td>
<td>Consistently clarifies, restates, and responds to questions. Summarises when needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>