

8. Annual Review Presentation

Summary

Outline of the exercise

The aim of this exercise is to develop students' oral communication skills. The scenario used is that of taking part in a company's annual review of its graduate employees for which students are required to give a short presentation to their colleagues. They must choose a topic from current literature relating to a novel area of chemistry with commercial potential and talk for approximately six minutes. In order to increase students' awareness of what constitutes good and poor presentations, they are also required to consider their colleagues' talks and provide them with feedback.

Key aims

- to develop oral presentation skills, including creation of effective visual aids;
- to understand and explain a new piece of chemistry; and
- to carry out and benefit from peer assessment.

Time requirements

- 2.5 hours tutor contact time
- 9.5 hours private study
- 12 hours total student time

Timetable

The following timetable is suggested:

30 mins	Introduction (lecture slot)
9-10 hours	Students prepare their talks (private study, over a period of approximately 1 week)
2 hours	The talks are given in 1 hour workshops; students attend two of these – one as a presenter and one as an assessor

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The annual review procedure that your company carries out of all its employees is fast approaching, and you are hoping for promotion (or at least a salary rise). As part of their policy to identify potential group leaders, and to encourage good communication within sections, all graduate employees are being asked to give a short talk (approximately six minutes in length) on an exciting new piece of chemistry that might be developed by your company to commercial advantage. The Royal Society of Chemistry's magazine, *Chemistry in Britain*, newspaper science pages, and Internet pages should provide potential areas of interest. The presentation will be given to a review panel of chemists who know nothing about the details of this area. Your talk must achieve the following three objectives:

- make your audience interested and enthusiastic in your topic;
- explain the science clearly and accurately; and
- demonstrate the commercial potential.

You must attend two seminars – one as a speaker, and one as a member of the audience providing feedback. Once you have chosen a topic to talk about, write an informative (but catchy) title on the notice-board – make sure that nobody in either of the two seminar groups you will be attending has chosen the same topic. Seminar times will be posted on the notice-board. You may use up to three (but no more) overheads during your presentation. Freehand drawings are fine and are often clearer and more colourful than computer print-outs.

Begin to plan your talk and visual aids as soon as possible – it's often helpful to discuss ideas with colleagues. Most good presentations have a clear introduction, followed by the main content of the talk and a brief conclusion. It is important to keep to time, so check the length carefully. Try not to say too much, and ask a friend to listen to it in advance. Look at the presentation styles of your lecturers (both good and bad!) to pick up hints.

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Exercise format

There are many possible formats for developing oral communication skills, but this works well as an introductory exercise; alternatives are suggested below. If the students have been previously assigned to companies they can give their presentations individually within their company groups; the audience might consist of a second 'company' who would provide feedback for the speakers.

Introduction

The format of the introductory session depends on the students' previous experience of giving oral presentations. For relatively inexperienced students a discussion of what makes an effective presentation can be particularly successful. A simple method for such an introduction would be for the tutor to give a poor presentation lasting approximately five minutes. This might be badly structured, containing too much detail and using cluttered overheads that are changed too quickly, and it will therefore provide material for an open discussion. After this discussion the presentation could be repeated, using different overheads, in order to respond to the points brought up in the discussion.

After this introduction, the student handout should provide all of the information they need for the exercise.

Presentations

It is not practical to run more than about six presentations in one hour; if a large number of students are taking part in the exercise, several tutors are probably needed to cover all of the presentations. The tutor's role is to chair the delivery of the presentations and the feedback session, and provide written feedback for each student. Student assessors should make brief notes on all of the talks, but each one should have a specific talk on which they make more detailed notes and lead the feedback discussion. A handout is provided for this, which identifies criteria against which a talk might be assessed.

- Before starting, a timetable of speakers, titles and an order for the presentations should be prepared, and specific talks assigned to each of the student assessors.
- At the end of the session, the student assessors' feedback for their assigned presentation should be given, followed by a brief discussion (eg do the other students agree or disagree). It is essential to ensure that at least one good point emerges for all students. The tutor may want to summarise the feedback for each speaker, placing emphasis on the good points of their presentation and suggesting areas for improvement.
- If there is time after the presentations have been given, a general summary or discussion of some of the good and bad points that emerged overall could be included.
- Written feedback can be supplied using the tutor assessment form.

Features of the exercise

Most degree courses now require students to give oral presentations at some stage, but there are a number of reasons why this particular format works well:

- a) Setting the talk in a specific context helps all of the students to take it seriously.
- b) The commercial angle of the presentation helps students to see the (industrial) relevance of their chemistry.
- c) Talking to an audience of about a dozen, with peer review, places them under a certain amount of pressure and most are pretty nervous, but even shy students seem to cope.
- d) The peer review feedback has always been constructive and helpful to the speaker, and as assessors, students find out how to learn from what others do, both well and badly.

Adapting the exercise

Adapting the exercise is easy, through changes to the length, level, type of topic, scenario, or assessment, but points a-d above are worth bearing in mind.

Assessment

The tutor's assessment form is self-explanatory. Assessment forms can be filled in roughly during the talks and amended in the light of peer feedback. Individual forms can then be completed later, and an overall grade for the talk can be given, as indicated on the form.

Feedback from tutor

(Incorporating peer feedback)

Name of speaker:

Title of presentation:

Feedback	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Did the presenter speak clearly?					
Was the talk well structured?					
Was your interest maintained?					
Was the science well explained?					
Were the visual aids good, and used to good effect?					

What were the strong points in the presentation?

Where might improvements be made?

Overall mark:

(A – excellent; B – good; C – average; D – poor; E – very poor)