Giving an Oral Presentation

Hans Malmström
Associate Professor, Division for Language and Communication, Chalmers
mahans@chalmers.se
What does it feel like?

vs.

THE MIND IS A WONDERFUL THING. IT STARTS WORKING THE MINUTE YOU'RE BORN, AND NEVER STOPS UNTIL YOU GET UP TO SPEAK!
Sth to consider

• Polls have shown that people fear speaking in public more than…

• Why is this? (Discuss for one minute)
Mini exercise

• (30 seconds) List three things you can do to battle fear/anxiety related to speaking in public

• (1 minute) Discuss with your neighbour and agree on the most important thing

• When I point at you, stand up and, in a clear and steady voice, share your thoughts with all of us!
Learning outcomes (sort of) today

• After this lecture, students should be able to:
  – prepare and deliver an academic oral presentation
  – structure the presentation on the basis of a general and conventional pattern
  – give the presentation the right kind of focus in terms of purpose and contents
  – show some awareness in terms of linguistic choices
Overview

• Preparation
  – Context
  – Visual aids and technology
  – Length and timing
  – Audience
  – Rehearsal

• Delivery
  – Nervousness
  – Creating “rapport”
  – Using a script
  – Body language
  – Vocal resources
  – Slides
  – Opening
  – Closing

• Choice making
  – Purpose
  – Focus
  – Language
  – Transitions between sub-topics

..prepare ...

..and deliver...

..structure the presentation...give the right kind of focus...show awareness

..give awareness
Preparation – what to consider

PREPARE TO STOP

TALK
The **context** for your presentation

- Different kinds of presentations
- Professional or academic?
  - Scripted
  - “Key worded”
  - Impromptu presentation

Which type are you?
Visual aids; technology (1/2)

• Your own computer? Will your computer like the projector?
• USB? Will the presentation computer like the memory stick?
• Mail to yourself?
• Overhead transparancies – is the machine working?
• Be prepared for "everything"
• Test all technology ahead of time
Visual aids; technology (2/2)

- Computer projection (e.g. PP or Prezi)?
- OH
- Black(White) board
- Handouts
  - Who will make photocopies/distribute?
- All types of aids have (dis)advantages
Length and timing

• No limit?

• Conference setting?
  – 20/10
  – 40/20

• Live = slower (Hincks, 2010)

• Estimate 1-2 minutes/slide

• Time yourself!
Audience

- Level of background knowledge
  - Intercultural communication

- Level of language ability
  - Simplicity?
  - Handouts as support?

- Are you going for simplicity and clarity (reaching the audience) or complexity (showing off)?
Audience background creates expectations

- **Directness**
  - Asian cultures – indirect approach
  - American (and partly EU) culture – more direct

- **Tone**
  - Carté & Fox (2004)
    - GB perspective: US presentations are ”overly optimistic, boastful and superficial”
    - US perspective: GB presentations are ”gloomy, pessimistic, preoccupied with problems, no solutions”

- **Eye contact** may be perceived as aggressive in certain cultures (NB: NOT in Sweden)

- **Gestures** are not universal
Rehearsal

- Practice
- Practice
- Practice
- …makes perfect!

- "Dry runs"
  - Particularly difficult or important parts?
  - Use fellow students, friends, family…
  - Time yourself
Delivery
Nerves (1/2)

- Everyone is nervous
- Adrenalin can help you do a better job
- Audience most often doesn’t notice
Nerves (2/2)

• What can you do?
  – People are on your side
  – Deep breaths and a place to rest your hands can help
  – Come early
  – Relax before (no last minute rehearsal)
  – Chat with sb in the audience
  – Start at an easy pace – get off to a good start
Rapport with audience

• Eye contact
• Personal pronouns
• Reference to shared experience
• Face the audience, not the screen
• If you are short, don’t stand behind the computer
• Smile!
• Check audience reactions
Anecdote

• American study (Beebe, 1974)
  – Group A speakers + Group B speakers
  – Different groups of audience
  – 7 minute presentations
  – Group A speakers were instructed to ”look at the audience a lot”; group B speakers instructed to ”look seldom at the audience”
  – Result: Speakers who look at the audience a lot are perceived as more knowledgable, more experienced, more honest and more likable than the other speakers
Audience reaction

• “Read” your audience!
• Adapt your talk
• Flexibility
• A break?
• An ace up your sleeve?…”Did you know that…””Let me show you these interesting statistics to support what I am saying…”
To use or not to use script...

- Your own choice, but limit yourself
  - First/last minute
  - Try not to memorise
- Key words are usually very good
- Noisy papers
- Note cards
Body language

• Be aware of what you do

• Lose all mannerisms
Vocal resources

• Avoid flat tones
  – Be guided by the “coffee machine policy”
• Stress important words
• Pauses are effective—don’t rush
• Speak to the back of the room
• Don’t rush – most common error
Slides

• Give time on visuals
• Maintain eye contact – let PP do the pointing
  • Use a large font
• Avoid (technical terms) or difficult foreign words
• 6X6 rule
• Conservative design
• Prof read
• Bullets rather than sentences
• Meaningful headings
• Calm background
Slides

• Give time on visuals
• Maintain eye contact – let PP do the pointing
  • Use a large font
• Avoid (technical terms) or difficult foreign words
• 6X6 rule
• Conservative design
• Prof read
• Bullets rather than sentences
• Meaningful headings
• Calm background
Choice making
Purpose

• What do you want to achieve?
  – Persuading?
  – Argue for or against sth?
  – Present a solution?
  – Present new research/innovation?
  – Criticize?

• Your audience
  – How do you want to affect them?
  – Their expectations?

State your purpose early on!
Contents

• Purpose clear $\rightarrow$ find material matching the purpose (not the other way round)

• Go for little rather than much
  – "When you ask somebody the time, you don’t expect a lecture on how wrist watches are constructed"

• Evaluate your sources
Focus

• Golden rule: three things you want to communicate
• Remember: what do you want to achieve?
• Main points…supported by SOME supporting points
• Avoid ALL unnecessary details
• Do not become too technical
Structure

• All good presentations have these three parts:
  – **Introduction**
    • Opening; very short background, contextualisation; purpose, overview (last)
  
  – **Main part**
    • Remember not to have too many points
  
  – **Conclusion**
    • A sense of closure; summing up the main points; answer any RQs; hypotheses
Bring home point(s)

• Tell the audience what you will do…
• …do it…
• …tell them what you just did
Content and structure

• ...go hand in hand

• Make sure you ”KNOW” your talk (all the ”ins”, ”outs” and ”escape routes”)

\[
\text{H} - \text{C} - \text{C} - \text{O} - \text{H}
\]
Opening…

• Introduction
  – (Welcome your audience)
  – (Give some idea of how long you will be talking)
  – Introduce (yourself and) your topic
  – (Outline the structure of your presentation)
  – Give instructions about questions

• Get off to a good start →
Opening…

• should grab the attention of the audience
• create expectations that will be fulfilled

• Consider these openings:
  – Use an interesting fact, statistic etc,    Formal; safe
  – Appeal to common ground with listener    Rapport
  – **Tell a narrative** or story    Daring!
  – Give an overview of your presentation    Formal; safe
...and closing

- Conclusion or summary?
  - Sum up
    - Identify the most important point(s) for the audience
    - Connect with the context you used in the introduction
    - Emphasize the connection between the audience and the material
  - Thank your audience
  - Invite questions
Language matters (Oh, and this is a statement…) 

• “Kill your darlings”

• Simplicity and clarity

• Check pronunciation

• Explain unfamiliar terms
Language matters

• Spoken language – NOT spoken written language
  – Presentations more “informal” than most students think
  – Active clauses rather than passive clauses
    “The sample was then examined by the group in a controlled environment” vs. “We then looked at the sample in a controlled environment”.
  – Personal pronouns
  – Shorter sentences
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."
Bridging the gap…with signposts

- Signal linguistically as you move from point to point
- Help the audience see how the talk constitutes a coherent whole…
  - …where you are…
  - …and how it makes sense!
Common linking phrases

Let me begin by saying...

Now, let’s turn to my next point, which is...

Turning now to....

Well, that brings me to the end of my talk...
Three main points 😊

- **Preparations** are essential

- The **delivery** need not be fraught with anxiety – learn to battle nervousness and look forward to giving oral presentations

- **KISS-principle**
  - Clarity will "win" the audience
Slides available through Dr Claes Andersson (claen@chalmers.se)