







## Top 12 Keys to Winning Oral Presentations

1. *Pick personnel based on audience and presentation skills*
2. *Focus early effort on storyboarding every slide and creating compelling graphics*
3. *Involve presenters in slide creation; they need to “marinate in the sauce”*
4. *Infuse humor and make connections; it is important to be respected and liked*
5. *Minimize executive roles; evaluators want to hear from the delivery team*
6. *Get a coach with domain knowledge who can help with substance, not style*
7. *Develop mock Q&A with tough questions to temper presenters*
8. *Work 1:1 with all presenters; don’t just rehearse as a group*
9. *Rehearse before finalizing slides; revise slides as needed*
10. *Videotape late-stage rehearsals; help presenters improve*
11. *Leave cell phones at home or in your car. No exceptions.*
12. *Be prepared for anything; “Murphy” is king of orals*

## A Valentine’s Day Guide to Better Orals

-  Focus on substance – compelling content is key – and develop in parallel with the proposal. The best orals are not an afterthought
-  Pick presenters based on the audience and ability to inspire confidence and build trust; presentation skills matter (a lot)
-  Engage orals coaches who want to be involved shaping the presentation (not just coach the presenters)
-  Tailor the presentation to both the presenters and the audience; avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to orals
-  Accord the presentation the same degree of review, scrutiny, and iteration you would every other part of a proposal
-  Be prepared for test problems and even government observation of how your team collaborates and develops its response

### Portnoy’s Complaint

Driven by increasing frustration with proposals that bear little resemblance to what bidders ultimately deliver, the government has increasingly turned to orals-only and hybrid written/orals proposals. As a result, companies must sharpen their orals skills, and not treat orals as an afterthought by merely throwing together a PPT deck after they have put a ribbon on the written volumes. Unlike a written proposal, evaluators will size up the team based on their orals “performance” – their impressions of confidence, commitment to partnership, collaboration, leadership skills, and technical competence and understanding. Evaluator perceptions of key people trump corporate qualifications and executive rhetoric.

### Kinsey Reports

The orals coaching cottage industry, with bidders turning to self-styled experts (orals coaches) to prepare their presenters, is ill-suited for this shift in orientation. Like Alfred Kinsey, their methods are vague and results more

anecdotal than scientific. An orals presentation is far more than a high pressure public speaking engagement; consultants who are executive speech coaches are best left to the Toastmasters circuit. We have worked hand-in-hand with dozens of orals coaches over the years and found that most are more concerned with presentation style than substance. Few are able (or willing) to help develop the message and craft the slides; rather, they are content to focus on imparting a one-size-fits-all presentation style, complete with warmed over platitudes, simplistic thinking, and slavish adherence to silly rules like “you shouldn’t have more than 4 bullets on a slide,” or “do not ever use the color red,” and “avoid the fig leaf position.”

### Masters and Johnson

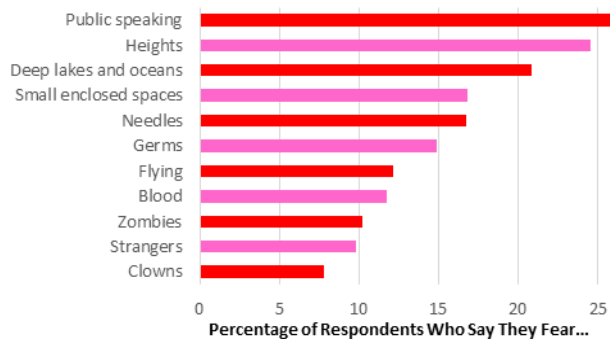
Good orals coaches have the gravitas to effectively speak truth to power and to put winning ahead of presenters’ feelings (especially when a key person should be replaced). The best coaches get involved in early hands-on slide craft, iterate with presenters through desktop walkthroughs and videotaped dry runs, provide tailored and hard-hitting mock Q&A, and plan for everything that can go wrong and all possible contingencies. Developing an orals proposal is every bit as labor intensive and expensive as a written proposal. Less is more, and while the content can be at a higher level, every slide needs to

convey a clear message with the presenter inspiring confidence and bringing the slides to life (not just reading the slides).

### Dr. Ruth

To bring orals into the modern era, Wolf Den’s think → draw → write proposal development paradigm applies, just as it applies to written proposals. The best presentations, like their written counterparts, are graph-

What Are You So Afraid Of?



The federal government’s increasing use of orals is causing many contractors to confront their worst fear – public speaking. Choose your key personnel for orals preparations carefully to avoid potentially crippling performance anxiety. Source: Chapman University Survey on American Fears

ics heavy, with at least ¾ of slides having artwork that helps to tell the story. Graphics illustrate the approach, enabling the presenter to focus on the key takeaways and themes, not rote explanations. This is particularly true for technical approach slides (and no, a 1970s-era flowchart with rectangular boxes and diamond-shaped decision branches is not a good graphic). Beyond the orals deck, selecting key personnel who will “show well” at orals – not always the best leaders or managers (likeability and leadership are not always well aligned) – is the key to a successful orals performance. Repetitive, missionary, monotonous, slide-after-slide delivery of bullets will fail to get reviewers across the finish line even if delivered by the best of performers.