1. Planning

A presentation is a means of communicating a message. Thus, the starting point in the planning of a presentation is expressing this message clearly and soundly in a concise, well-defined sentence. The presentation must be planned around the message. Below is a tree representing the general structure of such a plan:

Describe in one sentence the message of your presentation. What is the point that you want to make?

- Briefly describe the supporting argument No. 1 and how it is connected to the message
- Briefly describe the supporting argument No. 2 and how it is connected to the message
- Briefly describe the supporting argument No. K and how it is connected to the message

- Facts behind argument No. 1
- Facts behind argument No. 2
- Facts behind argument No. K

2. Making the presentation

2.1 Choose an appropriated title. Short titles are, in general, more effective. Anyway, a good title must convey in few words the message of the presentation.

2.2 Between the title and the outline, insert a slide with a sentence or two motivating the presentation. Why is the message important? What is the impact of the message in the state-of-the-art of knowledge, technology, education, culture, etc?

2.3 Use your plan (the tree above) as a guide to organize the presentation. Represent such organization in the outline.

2.4 Put on the slides only the essentials of the supporting arguments and facts. Do not overpopulate the slides. Slides are intended to backup, not to replace the presenter.

2.5 The presentation must end with the “conclusions slide”. This slide rounds-up the whole presentation, reinforcing the importance of the message and its impact on what was exposed in the motivation.
2.6 Use follow-up questions to your advantage. The follow-up questions are to be considered an integral part of your presentation, not a side effect. Indeed, you might use your audience questions to reinforce your message.

3. Giving the presentation

3.1 Avoid reading the slides. A good presentation is a communication from the presenter to her or his audience. No slide can replace a well-thought human explanation. Besides, a good presenter must also be sensitive to her or his audience, and adapt her or his speech to the audience’s reactions.

3.2 Be aware of the time. Use your time wisely. Distribute it according to your plan and never go beyond the time limits.

3.3 Avoid interruptions. The flow of a presentation is crucial to keep the audience interested. Avoid any kind of interruptions or diversions, either technical, in your speech, or from the audience. Do not skip slides. Skipping slides is disruptive and reflects poor planning.

3.4 Be clean and convincing. Select carefully the most appropriated words for delivering your message. Compose your speech consistently, go to the point, and avoid diversions. You have only fifteen minutes to convince your audience of the importance of your message.

4. Iterate

Making a presentation is often much more complex that might be initially thought. It is highly unlikely to get a presentation right at the first attempt. You should review more than once, and modify if necessary, your message, plan, slides, and speech before giving a presentation. Exercise critical thinking.