Common problems with oral presentations:

1. Many speakers get to the end of a seminar, and no-one is sure whether they are finished or not. To avoid this, begin your last sentence by saying something like “Finally, I wish to say. . . .” or “In conclusion. . . .“, and then thank your audience for their attention. Do not ask the audience for questions. It is the chairperson's responsibility to thank you for your presentation. Then it is the chairperson who takes control of the question time and asks the audience for a question (NOT the speaker!).

2. Rehearse your presentation. It prepares you for the following issues:
   - check that writing is legible from the back of the room
   - smooth transition between topics and slides
   - sequence of points is logical
   - get feedback from a classmate
   - become familiar with the audio-visual aids
   - you shouldn't use a number of media (i.e. overhead projector and slides and blackboard) until you are quite confident and experienced. If you are going to use mixed media, it is even more important that you rehearse, to get an indication of how long it will take to turn off one projector, start the other etc.
   - timing of your presentation
   - get used to public speaking and reduce your nervousness
   - identify any mannerisms that may be inappropriate or annoying during public speaking. For example, these may include a tendency to finish sentences with the word “like” or "y'know" or perhaps you begin every sentence with an 'erm', or 'ahhhm' or 'So. . .', or maybe you begin every new slide by saying “Where are we now?” or “Well, . . .”. Once you have identified them, and with a little practice, you will be able to better control your use of these mannerisms. Don’t worry too much about having a few of them in your seminars- you are not a robot! In addition, people generally have a very good ability to filter the occasional ‘erm’ or ‘ahhhm’ out of your main points. It is the overuse of such mannerisms that is problematic.

Remember: it is far better to discover your mistakes and deficiencies in front of one or two classmates, rather than in front of a room that is full of students and staff.

3. Being over-enthusiastic- keep your enthusiasm professional and objective. Convince your audience that your subject is interesting, has important applications or is of great educational value.

4. If you are using overhead transparencies, use colour, clipart, pictures etc. to present (where relevant) maps, pictures of an organism, and pictures of a location.

5. Other people will probably not be as informed as you on the topic of your presentation, so be sure to provide a quick and simple introduction. Your introduction should satisfy some of the following questions: Why should we be interested in what
you are saying? Why is it important? Why is it useful? How does your review or research contribute to this topic in a meaningful way?

References and web sites

Booth, V.  Communicating in science. Cambridge University Press. This is a classic text for anyone that conducts scientific writing or makes scientific presentations.

Barnard, C., Gilbert, F. and McGregor, P. 2001. Asking questions in biology. Prentice Hall. 2nd ed. See Chapter 4, ('Presenting information') for an excellent treatment of how to present information with the use of tables and figures.


Effective Presentations
Compiled by Jeff Radel at Kansas University Medical Center.

Presentation Skills
By Ming T. Tham of Chemical and Process Engineering, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne. Includes useful hyperlinks to related websites on presentations (posters and oral), public speaking etc.