

How to Prepare Students for Oral Assignments:

Three Action Items to have Successful Oral Presentations:

- 1) Provide support for students so that they understand how much *time* is involved in Oral Presentations. People generally underestimate the amount of time oral projects involve.
- 2) Provide avenues in the process of oral projects to encourage and teach students how to *learn from each other*. The purpose of oral exercises is communication of ideas and learning. Reflection exercises help with this as does opportunities to exchange viewpoints and engage in questions and discussions.
- 3) The class itself is providing training in the discipline and topic. Giving the students some training in *rhetorical thinking* will also help them succeed in oral projects. Not assuming that they know how to develop a presentation will benefit them and the class.

Scaffold Oral Exercises into the Class: Public Speaking is still often cited as people's biggest fear. Have students do small assignments early in semester and build to larger opportunities. Start them in teams or pairs. Allow speaking from the seat at first and gradually get them on their feet. Be sensitive to individual students if needed. If a student freezes, pair the student up with someone to support and help.

Help student identify with the audience: The more verbal you can make the class, the easier it will be for the student to move into that oral space on his/her own two feet. Help the student understand the needs of the audience. In other words, be very clear in the purpose of the assignment and parameters. Using examples and experiences from the speaker's knowledge-base will help ease speakers into the space and help with identification with audience. Helping students with organizational strategies will gain audience connection, as will using effective volume, eye contact, and visual aids.

Communicate clear grading criteria: Sample of criteria you might use: choice of topic (timely, appropriate to course), organization of material, effective use of visual aids, presentation skills, facility with answering questions, research. Distribute the rubric or grid to them in advance of preparation.

Help Students understand how words translate to time: A double-spaced, typed sheet of paper roughly corresponds to 2-2 ½ minutes of speaking time. Help them realize that it is possible to spend too much time amassing content and not enough time considering how to present the material. Encourage them to practice outside of class (maybe with assigned group?).

Feedback immediately after speech: Provide written feedback to each student as well, but allowing for teacher and class response right after speech is a way to train whole class and do development in a positive environment.

Record the presentation: Another and beneficial way to provide feedback. Also, a student who views the video and provides to the teacher a written reflection and goals for improvement is a way to put some of the effort to learn back on the student.

Post-Speech Q&A: An important tool to further enhance your students' transformation from novice to emerging expert. Helpful suggestions for helping students handle questions:

http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Preparing_talks/180.html

Modeling: Never doubt the power of a faculty model (or fellow student or former student model). Consider participating in a round of the debate or prepare a presentation about your own research with Q&A; then ask for feedback on your presentation. Empower students to think through what they have seen and heard.

The Rhetorical Situation:

- What **message** or **purpose** about the topic will the student want to convey (in other words, why is the audience listening? What is s/he trying to persuade the listener to consider?)
- What facts, experiences, data, narratives, examples, quotations, reasoning, pictures, documents will help **develop** the presentation?
- Have students think of the presentation as a narrative, a story of their research, a story of their thinking. Another way to think of it is as a set up with background and definitions, etc., then a move from the least important to the most important part of their findings. And the conclusion is just tying it together and identifying the significance of the presentation.
- If there is a call to action or some future research that needs to happen, they should mention that as well.
- Consider having students to pre-write about the presentation. What is my purpose? What are the constraints? Who is my audience? What kind of genre am I working within (is a personal narrative appropriate or not? Am I going to be talking about a topic with exigencies or a set of problems I ought to know about?)

The Look of the Presentation: (adapted from <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Classroom-Workshops/Undergraduate/Oral-Presentations>)

- **Font size and style**—Choose a font that is readable and simple. The size of the room and the screen will determine the font size.
- **Color**—Text should be in bold, easy-to-read colors. Essentially, the font color should provide a good contrast with the background.
- **Layout** – Avoid have so much information on a slide that it looks like a wall of text. The key to a good layout is finding a good balance between text and white space.
- **Content** –The slides are not the presentation; they supplement it. Slides are a great way to convey key concepts and information that may be difficult to understand. For example, most people need to see statistical information in order to process it. Occasionally, dense content might be better on a handout.
- **Themes** – Make sure the theme of the slide matches the content of the presentation. For example, a presentation about cancer should not have beach themed slides. Simple background themes highlight the material instead of interfering with the presentation.
- **Effects** –Effects should enhance the argument you are making, not interfere with it. If used at all, use with a light hand.

- **Citations and Attribution**—Be aware that citations are essential on visual presentations (substitutes for doing so verbally). However, if you draw upon a major source, it is good to reference that source when you first introduce material from it. Research citations should appear on a final slide(s) at the end of the presentation.
- **Visuals**--This is where purpose and audience awareness are especially important. For example, a scientific presentation to experts may require more graphical data representation, whereas a general speech about a famous figure could perhaps rely more on public photos. Insist that students use Creative Commons (<https://creativecommons.org/>), other copyright free sites, or their own pictures for visuals, double-checking that its use is allowed. Even then just below the visual or on it in contrast type, acknowledge the name of the designer and the web link. Whatever visual or graphic is used, encourage them to remember that it should fit the theme and present data or information in a way that is quickly comprehended. And it should project well enough to be read from the audience's seats. Otherwise, put it in a handout.
- **The text of the Speech:** Many recommend outlines, but academic type speeches are usually dense with data and need to be typed out. Even the best speakers I have seen often type out their final remarks and read them to make sure they cover the most important part of their talk. Written out speeches can still feel natural if they are practiced some, and if the speaker feels free to (within limits) do some off paper talking to the audience.

How to use Slides: Despite the advantages of slides, there are also many common pitfalls. : (adapted from <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Classroom-Workshops/Undergraduate/Oral-Presentations>)

- Slides should not distract the audience with too much sound, animation, or imagery for the audience to concentrate on the speaker. Remember that the speaker is the presentation!
- Slides should not tempt the speaker to read from them. A good presenter knows the material and does not rely on the slides to convey it. In case something goes wrong with the slides, have a printed copy so you can still deliver your talk.
- Slides should not limit your ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. If you rely too heavily on your pre-made presentation, you may not be prepared to skip forward or back in your lecture, or you may get too flustered when something comes up (a computer issue, an audience question, an interruption in your speech, etc).
- Slides should not take all your time in prepping for your talk. As much as possible, focus on perfecting the verbal part of your presentation.

Preparing and Speaking the Presentation:

- **Voice:** Speak naturally and allow for emphasizing words that are important. One way to do this is practice, noticing what words are important. Underlining those words on your notes or speech will allow the speaker to control how the audience hears the word. Many speakers print out their speech in a larger font with breaks in the text to indicate slide changes and to facilitate seeing it well. Typing the word SLIDE where a slide change occurs is another good way to remember.
- **Breath:** Don't rush, remember to breathe. The breath will support your volume and your packing. Have some water nearby in case nerves causes your mouth to dry out.

- **Volume:** The size of the room and type of furnishing (hard or soft surface) will determine how loud you need to talk. Think about projecting your voice in an arc from you to the ceiling to the back row. Be careful that you don't drop off volume at the end of sentences—this is an indication of bad breath support. Often audience will lose the last part of sentences because of falling off of volume.
- **Voice inflection:** Avoid a monotone presentation. Show your interest by changing the inflection of your voice. Emphasize important questions or statements.
- **Timing:** Speak at a steady rate. If the audience taking notes, slow down a bit. If the content is dense or difficult, watch them for their needs—maybe a question or more explanation?
- **Pauses:** Pauses can be a very effective tool. Remember they seem much longer for the speaker than they do for the audience. It gives you time to regroup and them to think. You might even have time for a drink of water!

Physical Performance:

- **Gestures:** Relax, use your hands in a normal way. Make the audience feel comfortable as if in a conversation with the speaker. Eye contact and smiling when possible is important. They are trying to gain the confidence of their audience. Hands should be used in conversation, but try to avoid putting them in pockets for long periods of time.
- **Stance:** feet shoulder width apart with both feet flat on the floor. Avoid swaying, bouncing or slouching. Try not to lean on the podium.
- **Podium:** Provide a podium or lectern for the students—it will help the shy students and also free up the hands for more natural gestures. Encourage them to use the lecterns for their notes. Be careful of tapping or noise on the podium; it could be amplified.
- **Clothing:** encourage students to dress appropriately for their talk. If it is just to their classmates, then casual is fine. If you want them to be preparing for a more formal talk which might fit into their professional life (or if it is to be recording), then ask them to up their game.
- **The Space:** Whatever space will be used for the presentation, ask your students to think about it. Where will they stand? Will there be questions? How will they interact with the audience? How should it be configured? Where will they want their podium to be? If it is not in the classroom, take a little trip with the class to see the space. It will quell fears.